
ace book
SCIENCE FICTION
NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY #2 edited by Terry Carr
41-572-075
ace book 57271 75¢
NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY
edited by Terry Carr
#2
Never before in paperback:
new tales of strange
and awesome worlds, by
ROBERT SHECKLEY • HARRY HARRISON
ROGER ZELAZNY • ROBERT BLOCH
and many more.

ROBERT BLOCH:

A story of Hollywood
and a strange kind of immortality.

ROBERT SHECKLEY:

A world where everything is always changing,
constantly, forever. . . .

JORGE LUIS BORGES:

The Library that was infinite,
and infinitely mysterious.

KEITH ROBERTS:

The tale of a car that had a soul
—an evil and vicious one.

JOANNA RUSS:

What are window mannekins *really* like?

Here is a book of strange tales, intriguing creatures and surprising worlds, told by the most imaginative writers of modern fantasy. Eighteen dreams and nightmares . . . but never a dull moment.

TERRY CARR was born in Grants Pass, Oregon in 1937, but moved with his family to San Francisco before he was five. After studying at City College of San Francisco and the University of California at Berkeley, he moved to New York and began writing professionally; his short stories and articles have appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction, Esquire, The Realist, Galaxy Magazine, The Saint Mystery Magazine* and others.

NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY #2 is his tenth anthology, including the WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION annual series coedited with Donald A. Wollheim for Ace Books. He and his wife Carol, a writer, live in Brooklyn Heights with two cats, Gilgamesh and George.

NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY

edited by Terry Carr

#2

AN ACE BOOK

Ace Publishing Corporation
1120 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N. Y. 10036

NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY #2

Cover and interior art by Kelly Freas.

Printed in U.S.A.

CREDITS:

The Petrified World by Robert Sheckley. Copyright © 1967 by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of Harold Matson Co., Inc.

The Scarlet Lady by Keith Roberts. Copyright © 1966 by sf Impulse. Reprinted by permission of the author. Originally appeared under the penname "Alistair Bevan."

They Loved Me in Utica by Avram Davidson. Copyright © 1970 by Avram Davidson. Published by arrangement with the author and his agent, Virginia Kidd.

The Library of Babel by Jorge Luis Borges. From Jorge Luis Borges, LABYRINTHS, SELECTED STORIES & OTHER WRITINGS. James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates translators. Copyright © by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

The Ship of Disaster by B. J. Bayley. Copyright © 1965 by **New Worlds SF.** Reprinted by permission of the author.

Window Dressing by Joanna Russ. Copyright © 1970 by Joanna Russ. Published by arrangement with the author and her agent, Virginia Kidd.

By the Falls by Harry Harrison. Copyright © 1969 by Universal Publishing & Distributing Corp. Reprinted by permission of the author and his agent, Robert P. Mills Ltd.

The Night of the Nickel Beer by Kris Neville. Copyright © 1967 by Avant Publishing, Inc. Originally appeared in **Escapade.** Reprinted by permission of the author.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

FOR A LONG TIME people have assumed that fantasy is "escape literature," stories about impossible things that have no relevance to real life and are appealing for that very reason. Fantasy would be something to read to get away from the humdrum world, the hard-work world, the world of ideals abandoned and almost forgotten. In fantasy those ideals could become believable and exhilarating again; in fantasy the world is never humdrum, always beautiful or exciting; in fantasy things could be accomplished not by hard work but by magic or just wishing.

All this may be true, but I think it's an unnecessarily narrow view to conclude that therefore fantasy is *only* escape literature. Not all fantasy, after all, represents wish-fulfillment: along with nymphs we have succubi; besides magic kits we have Pandora's boxes; in addition to fairy tale endings we have Kafkaesque nightmares.

Fantasy actually serves not the superficial role of daydreams, but the far more crucial one of real dreams. It seems from our present knowledge of dream processes that people *need* to deam, that dreams serve as a way of incorporating our waking experiences into our psyches. As we sleep we mull over our lives and come to terms with them; it's a process of psychological digestion.

Experiments have been conducted in which volunteers were allowed to sleep but not to dream—whenever a subject's brainwaves showed he was starting to dream a light shock would be given, just enough to interrupt the dreaming but not enough to wake the person—and the results have been dramatic. In their waking hours these people experienced tension, shortened attention spans, confusion of the ability to think, hallucinations, and if they stayed with the experiment for enough days they went right to the edge of insanity. Not because they hadn't slept enough, for they had, but because they hadn't dreamed and therefore their

day experiences were still jumbled up in their heads and getting in the way of normal thought processes. Call it psychological indigestion, perhaps; that's a very light term for something so close to insanity, but it does identify the process.

Fiction, when it's serving the functions of art, strikes chords deep within us. Stories about day-to-day life—"mainstream" fiction—actually work on a more shallow level than do fantasy stories, because fantasy springs from and operates on a basis of emotional symbolism, just as dreams do. Fantasy is, in fact, the literary equivalent of dreams.

The most prevalent form of fantasy today is the subgenre of science fiction, which presents us with dreams which seem more believable and acceptable because a scientific rationale for each imagining is either given or assumed. In a world where the scientific method is considered the only rational approach to understanding things, it follows that science fiction will be the preferred approach to our fantasies. But science fiction in its very nature is limited: that which seems impossible or irrational is excluded from science fiction, and the full scope of our imagination can't be explored. Extrapolation is accepted, but outright dreaming isn't.

After the industrial revolution we tried to replace romantic fiction with the fiction of realism, but it didn't work; we need to dream, and the further we progress into our science-shaped culture and allow ourselves to be convinced that fantasies are idle and useless, the more deep that need to dream. It's almost as though we were all subjects in those dream experiments and every time we start to fantasize, to think with our emotions rather than pure logic, our cultural conditioning gives us a little shock—not enough to wake us up, just enough to keep us from dreaming.

Nevertheless we do dream, we do fantasize, because we have to. But we call it by other names in order to make it all right. What we call the mainstream of literature is increasingly permeated with myth, surrealism and fantasy. *Catch-22* is a fantasy, no question about it; so is *V.*, so was *Dr. Strangelove*, and *The Prisoner*, and *Giles Goat-Boy* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* and so many others.

If it's happening there, how can science fiction continue to limit its dreams? The answer is that it can't; science fiction

as it evolved has had to expand its frontiers to include the broader spectrum of fantasy. We started by accepting things like time travel and alternate time-tracks as "scientific extrapolation," which they aren't; by now we've moved on to a period in which most of the important "science fiction" authors are really writing fantasy with scientific trappings. Roger Zelazny. J. G. Ballard. Philip K. Dick. R. A. Lafferty. Brian W. Aldiss. Samuel R. Delany. Joanna Russ. Thomas M. Disch. Harlan Ellison. Etc.

We continue to call these people science fiction writers, just as we call Donald Barthelme, Terry Southern, Bruce Jay Friedman and James Purdy mainstream writers. Labels are what we make of them, and these labels are excuses. We want to read fantasy but we feel it's silly, so we call it something else, anything else.

I don't think excuses are necessary, so this book and its predecessor bear the title NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY. A book of fantasy for those who prefer to face facts.

None of the preceding, by the way, is meant to suggest that this is a book full of weighty or pretentious stories. Not all of them are even serious—you've sometimes laughed during dreams, haven't you? We have here parables of reality, wish fantasies, psychological allegories, good-natured satires and a story or two that may disturb the really deep waters. I like them all; I hope you will too.

—Terry Carr

Robert Sheckley likes to tell about strange worlds, and he is a clever man, so that his visions are usually good-humored ones. The world he describes here is very odd indeed: a steamboat drifts by in the sky, a fruit tree grows in the middle of a rug, a bank turns into an airplane. A world to challenge anyone's sense of security—and Sheckley's hero is very upset indeed.

THE PETRIFIED WORLD

Robert Sheckley

Lanigan dreamed the dream again and managed to wake himself with a hoarse cry. He sat upright in bed and glared around him into the violet darkness. His teeth clenched and his lips were pulled back into a spastic grin. Beside him he felt his wife, Estelle, stir and sit up. Lanigan didn't look at her. Still caught in his dream, he waited for tangible proofs of the world.

A chair slowly drifted across his field of vision and fetched up against the wall with a quiet thump. Lanigan's face relaxed slightly. Then Estelle's hand was on his arm—a touch meant to be soothing, but which burned like lye.

"Here," she said. "Drink this."

"No," Lanigan said. "I'm all right now."

"Drink it anyhow."

"No, really. I really am all right."

For now he was completely out of the grip of the night-

mare. He was himself again, and the world was its habitual self. That was very precious to Lanigan; he didn't want to let go of it just now, not even for the soothing release of a sedative. "Was it the same dream?" Estelle asked him.

"Yes, just the same. . . . I don't want to talk about it."

"All right," Estelle said. (She is humoring me, Lanigan thought. I frighten her. I frighten myself.)

She asked, "Hon, what time is it?"

Lanigan looked at his watch. "Six fifteen." But as he said it, the hour hand jumped convulsively forward. "No, it's five to seven."

"Can you get back to sleep?"

"I don't think so," Lanigan said. "I think I'll stay up."

"Fine, dear," Estelle said. She yawned, closed her eyes, opened them again and asked, "Hon, don't you think it might be a good idea if you called—"

"I have an appointment with him for twelve ten," Lanigan said.

"That's fine," Estelle said. She closed her eyes again. Sleep came over her while Lanigan watched. Her auburn hair turned a faint blue, and she sighed once, heavily.

Lanigan got out of bed and dressed. He was, for the most part, a large man, unusually easy to recognize. His features were curiously distinct. He had a rash on his neck. He was in no other way outstanding, except that he had a recurring dream which was driving him insane.

He spent the next few hours on his front porch watching stars go nova in the dawn sky.

Later, he went out for a stroll. As luck would have it, he ran into George Torstein just two blocks from his house. Several months ago, in an incautious moment, he had told Torstein about his dream. Torstein was a bluff, hearty fellow, a great believer in self-help, discipline, practicality, common sense and other dull virtues. His hard-headed, no-nonsense attitude had come as a momentary relief to Lanigan. But now it acted as an abrasive. Men like Torstein were undoubtedly the salt of the earth and the backbone of the country; but for Lanigan, wrestling with the impalpable and losing, Torstein had grown from a nuisance into a horror.

"Well, Tom, how's the boy?" Torstein greeted him.

"Fine," Lanigan said, "just fine." He nodded pleasantly

and began to walk away under a melting green sky. But one did not escape from Torstein so easily.

"Tom, boy, I've been thinking about your problem," Torstein said. "I've been quite disturbed about you."

"Well, that's very nice of you," Lanigan said. "But really, you shouldn't concern yourself—"

"I do it because I want to," Torstein said, speaking the simple, deplorable truth. "I take an interest in people, Tom. Always have, ever since I was a kid. And you and I've been friends and neighbors for a long time."

"That's true enough," Lanigan said numbly. (The worst thing about needing help was having to accept it.)

"Well, Tom, I think what would really help you would be a little vacation."

Torstein had a simple prescription for everything. Since he practiced soul-doctoring without a license, he was always careful to prescribe a drug you could buy over the counter.

"I really can't afford a vacation this month," Lanigan said. (The sky was ochre and pink now; three pines had withered; an aged oak had turned into a youthful cactus.)

Torstein laughed heartily. "Boy, you can't afford *not* to take a vacation just now! Did you ever consider that?"

"No, I guess not."

"Well, *consider* it! You're tired, tense, all keyed-up. You've been working too hard."

"I've been on leave of absence all week," Lanigan said. He glanced at his watch. The gold case had turned to lead, but the time seemed accurate enough. Nearly two hours had passed since he had begun this conversation.

"It isn't good enough," Torstein was saying. "You've stayed right here in town, right close to your work. You need to get in touch with nature. Tom, when was the last time you went camping?"

"Camping? I don't think I've ever gone camping."

"There, you see! Boy, you've got to put yourself back in touch with real things. Not streets and buildings, but mountains and rivers."

Lanigan looked at his watch again and was relieved to see it turn back to gold. He was glad; he had paid sixty dollars for that case.

"Trees and lakes," Torstein was rhapsodizing. "The feel

of grass growing under your feet, the sight of tall black mountains marching across a golden sky—"

Lanigan shook his head. "I've been in the country, George. It doesn't do anything for me."

Torstein was obstinate. "You must get away from artificialities."

"It all seems equally artificial," Lanigan said. "Trees or buildings—what's the difference?"

"Men make buildings," Torstein intoned rather piously, "but God makes trees."

Lanigan had his doubts about both propositions, but he wasn't going to tell them to Torstein. "You might have something there," he said. "I'll think about it."

"You do that," Torstein said. "It happens I know the perfect place. It's in Maine, Tom, and it's right near this little lake—"

Torstein was a master of the interminable description. Luckily for Lanigan, there was a diversion. Across the street, a house burst into flames.

"Hey, whose house is that?" Lanigan asked.

"Makelby's," Torstein said. "That's his third fire this month."

"Maybe we ought to give the alarm."

"You're right, I'll do it myself," Torstein said. "Remember what I told you about that place in Maine, Tom."

Torstein turned to go, and something rather humorous happened. As he stepped over the pavement, the concrete liquefied under his left foot. Caught unawares, Torstein went in ankle-deep. His forward motion pitched him head-first into the street.

Tom hurried to help him out before the concrete hardened again. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Twisted my damned ankle," Torstein muttered. "It's okay, I can walk."

He limped off to report the fire. Lanigan stayed and watched. He judged the fire had been caused by spontaneous combustion. In a few minutes, as he had expected, it put itself out by spontaneous decombustion.

One shouldn't be pleased by another man's misfortunes; but Lanigan couldn't help chuckling about Torstein's twisted ankle. Not even the sudden appearance of flood waters on Main Street could mar his good spirits. He beamed at

something like a steamboat with yellow stacks that went by in the sky.

Then he remembered his dream, and the panic began again. He walked quickly to the doctor's office.

Dr. Sampson's office was small and dark this week. The old gray sofa was gone; in its place were two Louis Quinze chairs and a hammock. The worn carpet had finally rewoven itself, and there was a cigarette burn on the puce ceiling. But the portrait of Andretti was in its usual place on the wall, and the big free-form ashtray was scrupulously clean.

The inner door opened, and Dr. Sampson's head popped out. "Hi," he said. "Won't be a minute." His head popped back in again.

Sampson was as good as his word. It took him exactly three seconds by Lanigan's watch to do whatever he had to do. One second later Lanigan was stretched out on the leather couch with a fresh paper doily under his head. And Dr. Sampson was saying, "Well, Tom, how have things been going?"

"The same," Lanigan said. "Worse."

"The dream?"

Lanigan nodded.

"Let's just run through it again."

"I'd rather not," Lanigan said.

"Afraid?"

"More afraid than ever."

"Even now?"

"Yes. Especially now."

There was a moment of therapeutic silence. Then Dr. Sampson said, "You've spoken before of your fear of this dream; but you've never told me *why* you fear it so."

"Well . . . It sounds so silly."

Sampson's face was serious, quiet, composed: the face of a man who found nothing silly, who was constitutionally incapable of finding anything silly. It was a pose, perhaps, but one which Lanigan found reassuring.

"All right, I'll tell you," Lanigan said abruptly. Then he stopped.

"Go on," Dr. Sampson said.

"Well, it's because I believe that somehow, in some way I don't understand. . . ."

"Yes, go on," Sampson said.

"Well, that somehow the world of my dream is becoming the real world." He stopped again, then went on with a rush. "And that some day I am going to wake up and find myself *in* that world. And then that world will have become the real one and this world will be the dream."

He turned to see how this mad revelation had affected Sampson. If the doctor was disturbed, he didn't show it. He was quietly lighting his pipe with the smoldering tip of his left forefinger. He blew out his forefinger and said, "Yes, please go on."

"Go on? But that's it, that's the whole thing!"

A spot the size of a quarter appeared on Sampson's mauve carpet. It darkened, thickened, grew into a small fruit tree. Sampson picked one of the purple pods, sniffed it, then set it down on his desk. He looked at Lanigan sternly, sadly.

"You've told me about your dream-world before, Tom."

Lanigan nodded.

"We have discussed it, traced its origins, analyzed its meaning for you. In past months we have learned, I believe, why you *need* to cripple yourself with this nightmare fear."

Lanigan nodded unhappily.

"Yet you refuse the insights," Sampson said. "You forget each time that your dream-world is a *dream*, nothing but a dream, operated by arbitrary dream-laws which you have invented to satisfy your psychic needs."

"I wish I could believe that," Lanigan said. "The trouble is my dream-world is so damnably reasonable."

"Not at all," Sampson said. "It is just that your delusion is hermetic, self-enclosed and self-sustaining. A man's actions are based upon certain assumptions about the nature of the world. Grant his assumptions, and his behavior is entirely reasonable. But to change those assumptions, those fundamental axioms, is nearly impossible. For example, how do you prove to a man that he is not being controlled by a secret radio which only he can hear?"

"I see the problem," Lanigan muttered. "And that's me?"

"Yes, Tom. That, in effect, is you. You want me to prove to you that this world is real, and that the world of your dream is false. You propose to give up your fantasy if I supply you with the necessary proofs."

"Yes, exactly!" Lanigan cried.

"But you see, I can't supply them," Sampson said. "The nature of the world is apparent, but unprovable."

Lanigan thought for a while. Then he said, "Look, Doc, I'm not as sick as the guy with the secret radio, am I?"

"No, you're not. You're more reasonable, more rational. You have doubts about the reality of the world; but luckily, you also have doubts about the validity of your delusion."

"Then give it a try," Lanigan said. "I understand your problem; but I swear to you, I'll accept anything I can possibly bring myself to accept."

"It's not my field, really," Sampson said. "This sort of thing calls for a metaphysician. I don't think I'd be very skilled at it. . . ."

"Give it a try," Lanigan pleaded.

"All right, here goes." Sampson's forehead wrinkled and shed as he concentrated. Then he said, "It seems to me that we inspect the world through our senses, and therefore we must in the final analysis accept the testimony of those senses."

Lanigan nodded, and the doctor went on.

"So, we know that a thing exists because our senses tell us it exists. How do we check the accuracy of our observations? By comparing them with the sensory impressions of other men. We know that our senses don't lie when other men's senses agree upon the existence of the thing in question."

Lanigan thought about this, then said, "Therefore, the real world is simply what most men think it is."

Sampson twisted his mouth and said, "I told you that metaphysics was not my forte. Still, I think it is an acceptable demonstration."

"Yes. . . . But Doc, suppose *all* of those observers are wrong? For example, suppose there are many worlds and many realities, not just one? Suppose this is simply one arbitary existence out of an infinity of existences? Or suppose that the nature of reality itself is capable of change, and that somehow I am able to perceive that change?"

Sampson sighed, found a little green bat fluttering inside his jacket and absentmindedly crushed it with a ruler.

"There you are," he said. "I can't disprove a single one of your suppositions. I think, Tom, that we had better run through the entire dream."

Lanigan grimaced. "I really would rather not. I have a feeling. . . ."

"I know you do," Sampson said, smiling faintly. "But this will prove or disprove it once and for all, won't it?"

"I guess so," Lanigan said. He took courage—unwisely—and said, "Well, the way it begins, the way my dream starts—"

Even as he spoke the horror came over him. He felt dizzy, sick, terrified. He tried to rise from the couch. The doctor's face ballooned over him. He saw a glint of metal, heard Sampson saying," Just try to relax . . . brief seizure . . . try to think of something pleasant."

Then either Lanigan or the world or both passed out.

Lanigan and/or the world came back to consciousness. Time may or may not have passed. Anything might or might not have happened. Lanigan sat up and looked at Sampson.

"How do you feel now?" Sampson asked.

"I'm all right," Lanigan said. "What happened?"

"You had a bad moment. Take it easy for a bit."

Lanigan leaned back and tried to calm himself. The doctor was sitting at his desk, writing notes. Lanigan counted to twenty with his eyes closed, then opened them cautiously. Sampson was still writing notes.

Lanigan looked around the room, counted the five pictures on the wall, re-counted them, looked at the green carpet, frowned at it, closed his eyes again. This time he counted to fifty.

"Well, care to talk about it now?" Sampson asked, shutting a notebook.

"No, not just now," Lanigan said. (Five paintings, green carpet.)

"Just as you please," the doctor said. "I think that our time is just about up. But if you'd care to lie down in the anteroom—"

"No, thanks, I'll go home," Lanigan said.

He stood up, walked across the green carpet to the door, looked back at the five paintings and at the doctor, who smiled at him encouragingly. Then Lanigan went through the door and into the anteroom, through the anteroom to the outer door and through that and down the corridor to the stairs and down the stairs to the street.

He walked and looked at the trees, on which green leaves moved faintly and predictably in a faint breeze. There was traffic, which moved soberly down one side of the street and up the other. The sky was an unchanging blue, and had obviously been so for quite some time.

Dream? He pinched himself. A dream pinch? He did not awaken. He shouted. An imaginary shout? He did not waken.

He was in the street of the world of his nightmare.

The street at first seemed like any normal city street. There were paving stones, cars, people, buildings, a sky overhead, a sun in the sky. All perfectly normal. Except that *nothing was happening.*

The pavement never once yielded beneath his feet. Over there was the First National City Bank; it had been here yesterday, which was bad enough; but worse it would be there without fail tomorrow, and the day after that, and the year after that. The First National City Bank (Founded 1892) was grotesquely devoid of possibilities. It would never become a tomb, an airplane, the bones of a prehistoric monster. Sullenly it would remain a building of concrete and steel, madly persisting in its fixity until men with tools came and tediously tore it down.

Lanigan walked through this petrified world, under a blue sky that oozed a sly white around the edges, teasingly promising something that was never delivered. Traffic moved implacably to the right, people crossed at crossings, clocks were within minutes of agreement.

Somewhere between the town lay countryside; but Lanigan knew that the grass did not grow under one's feet; it simply lay still, growing no doubt, but imperceptibly, unusable to the senses. And the mountains were still tall and black, but they were giants stopped in mid-stride. They would never march against a golden (or purple or green) sky.

The essence of life, Dr. Sampson had once said, is change. The essence of death is immobility. Even a corpse has a vestige of life about it as long as its flesh rots, as long as maggots still feast on it blind eyes and blowflies suck the juice from the burst intestines.

Lanigan looked around at the corpse of the world and perceived that it was dead.

He screamed. He screamed while people gathered around and looked at him (but didn't do anything or become anything), and then a policeman came as he was supposed to (but the sun didn't change shape once), and then an ambulance came down the invariant street (but without trumpets, minus strumpets, on four wheels instead of a pleasing three or twenty-five) and the ambulance men brought him to a building which was exactly where they expected to find it, and there was a great deal of talk by people who stood untransformed, asking questions in a room with relentlessly white walls.

And there was evening and there was morning, and it was the first day.

Keith Roberts, who wrote *Pavane*, here offers a novelette about a devil car, an automobile with evil sentience. Roberts knows cars, and he can be disturbingly convincing about this sort of thing. . . .

THE SCARLET LADY Keith Roberts

I'm not essentially a violent man, but I did once commit a murder. I was never tried for it. You see I killed a car. I don't know what the legal term for that would be. Autocide perhaps. Some people claim that machines can't die. I'm not prepared to argue the point too closely. You must judge for yourself.

My victim carried a famous mark. To quote it would not be fair to her makers. They built her with care and love and skill but they built into her something that could not be set with a feeler gauge. It wasn't their fault.

My name's Bill Fredericks. I run a garage near King's Warrington. That's a quiet market town in the Midlands. I inherited the business when Pop died. I don't make a fortune but the income is comfortable. I'm still a young man. I'm married and I've got a house. I suppose all things considered I haven't done too badly. I have one brother, Jackie. He's a couple of years younger than I am. He could have come into the business when Pop died but he preferred to stay on his own. He's an accountant. The brainy one of the family. Or at least I used to think so.

I learned engineering the hard way. Pop saw to it that I did. I was apprenticed to an old boy called Charlie Elliott who runs a biggish garage a few miles off in Bracewell. I did five years with Charlie before Pop would consider letting me work for him. He reckoned father and son partnerships were no good. Perhaps if Charlie hadn't trained me our relationship would have gone sour. As it was it worked fine. It just didn't go on long enough, that was all.

I'd been running Turnpike Garage about five years when Jackie bought the car that started all the trouble. I remember the first time he drove up. It was a bright morning in early December and I was sitting in my office doing some booking. I saw the car stop on the forecourt. I knew it of course though I'd never had anything to do with it. It was a special, a one-off motor. When you're in the trade you hear about these things. I didn't pay too much attention until Jackie got out. Then I put my pen down and stared. I was still sitting like that when he breezed in. He was a grin with legs. We both spoke together. I said, "Jackie, you haven't—" He said, "Bill, I've—"

He stopped and laughed. He said, "I've brought a car, Bill."

"So I see."

He said, "Come and have a look." I followed him outside and across the apron.

My brother had always had a weakness for exotic cars. Each had turned out more expensive and unreliable than the last. This though was the biggest thing he'd ever bought. She was a saloon that had been built to a special order in nineteen-thirty-eight. Her lines were so good that at first glance her size was not apparent, but up close I saw she was huge. The cab was roomy enough but the body dwarfed it. The tail was long and low, with a boot that would have held a cabin trunk. She had a narrow, chrome-framed windscreen and she carried a spare wheel holstered in each front wing. Her bonnet curved low, ending in a squat grille that looked like a mouth with bared teeth. The illusion of a face was completed by two long airscoops in front of the scuttle. They looked like the cheekbones of a skull. Her coachwork was perfect. It was a brilliant vermilion red that shone in the sunlight. She was powerful and fast, and she also looked about the nastiest thing I'd ever seen on wheels.

I walked around her. I said, "Twenty-one inch rims. That's nice. And one tire's nearly bald."

Jackie said indignantly, "She's passed her M.O.T."

I said, "Twenty-one inch rims. That's nice. And one tire's nearly bald." I opened the driving door and leaned inside to be met by a rich smell of leather. The upholstery was in as good a condition as the coachwork. I straightened up and shoved the door. It closed with a soft whoosh, denying me even the pleasure of slamming it. I stood back and lit a cigarette. I said, "Jackie, you are the world's prize idiot. How much did you give for this heap?"

He named a figure that made me feel faint. I leaned on the wing and played with one of the polished leather bonnet straps. I said, "Why don't you come and see me before you do these things? If you'd only asked I could have fixed you up with a nice little motor. I had an Anglia in the other day that was going for half that price. I had a Morris Thousand the week before last that would have suited you down to the ground. Right now I could put my finger on a dozen cars that would be more reliable than this. You'll be lucky to get more than ten to the gallon with a following gale. She'd break a millionaire. Look at those tires for a start. And the block. Everything's obsolete. Spares'll cost the earth even if you can still get them. And Heaven help you if anything serious goes wrong. It'd cost you about seventy quid to put a set of pistons in the brute."

I wasn't annoyed solely on his account. Whatever anyone claims, these days garages don't repair cars any more. They replace parts. Most garagemen admire old motors, they like to see them around; but they won't have them on their own forecourt for all the tea in China. You just can't spend hours fiddling around, adapting parts to fit, repairing worn-out units that should have been thrown away years ago, when everybody else is just taking parts off a shelf and smacking them in. Trends are there to be followed and in business you have to go along with them whether you approve of them or not. It's the only way to stay solvent. In this case I was in a bad position because I was morally bound to help out my own brother. I reckoned he'd chosen the fastest way to bankrupt the pair of us, and told him so. He looked so woebegone I felt really sorry for him. After all to a certain extent you have to respect a man in love, even when you

know he's making a fool of himself. I agreed to go out for a run with him that evening and to have the motor in later in the week and check her over. He brightened at once. He touched the long coaming affectionately. He said, "Thank's a lot, Bill. I really appreciate that. I knew you wouldn't let me down." I said, "See you tonight, Jackie. Take it steady. Remember those glass con-rods." I walked toward the garage. Halfway to the door I turned back. I said, "Have you christened her yet?" Jackie always gave names to his cars. We'd had Rhoda and Florrie and even Clytemnestra. She was a vintage Austin Seven by the way. When you were talking to Jackie about his ex-motors you had to remember who was who. Like reminiscing with a man who'd had too many girl friends.

He looked rapturous. He said, "She hasn't got a name really. She's just the Scarlet Lady." I walked into the garage before I threw something.

That evening I told Sheila about the car. I said, "Jackie's bought another one, love." She poured me a cup of tea. She said, "That's nice. Did you get it for him?"

I said, "No." She raised her eyebrows. "What's the matter, Bill? You look madder than you did when he had the Lagonda."

I said, "I am madder than when he had the Lagonda. I've got to go over tonight and have a run in the thing. Are you coming? I think you'd better see it for yourself. . . ."

He was working on the car when we arrived. He had her backed into the garage beside his house. She was about six feet overlong. A service lamp was clipped to the block and he was fiddling about inside the bonnet. He came over as we drew up. He was black to the elbows and he had a plug in his hand. He said, "Look at this, Bill. There's a gap you could throw your hat through. And it's badly coked up. Do you think if we fined the mixture a bit—?"

I said, "Stow it Jackie, I'm off duty."

He said, "Oh, hello Sheila, nice to see you. But Bill, I'm sure she's too rich. Now if you checked the mixture first—"

I said, "And found an odd minute to retune triple carbs—"

"The distributor wants looking at too. There's a terrific amount of play in the shaft. She's not ticking over right. I'm sure that's a lot to do with it."

I said, "Jackie, it's nine o'clock and I've been talking cars

all day. I'm going in to see Moira, and you can badger about there till morning."

He said, "Be right with you, Bill. Must just slip these plugs back, then we can go out for a run. We can go over to the Horseshoes. She's a beauty, Bill. You'll love her."

I said, "Well for Pete's sake get a move on or we won't be there before chuckout time." I walked toward the house.

At the door I missed Sheila. I turned back and she was still staring at the car's awesome front. The Scarlet Lady glared back malevolently. I said, "Come on love, you're as bad as he is." She turned away and gave a brisk little shudder. She said, "Oof, Bill, what a horrible car. I don't like it at all."

Moira had the look of a practiced motor-widow. When she saw me she laughed. We both said together, "Yes, another one." She said, "I suppose I ought to be getting used to it. Take your coat off, Sheila. Here, let me have it. Go on through, there's a fire in the lounge." I said, "We're not supposed to get settled. We're going out." She called derisively from the hall. "When he can tear himself away. He hasn't had his dinner yet. Do you want some coffee? He'll be there all night."

For once she was wrong. Within minutes we heard the big motor start up and move out into the drive. He came in a quarter of an hour later looking almost respectable. He said, "All right then, are we ready?"

The car went well. The power there was immense, and she rode like silk. I had to admit she was all motor. I guessed her top speed to be well over the ton. The tachometer chattered to itself as the big, lazy engine took us along at a shade under seventy. There was one little thing I didn't like but I chose not to mention it. Jackie drove up to the pub door, switched off and sat fondling the wheel. He said, "There'll be no trouble with this one, Bill." I hoped he was right.

He rang me two mornings later. He said, "It's the car, Bill. Can you come over to her?"

I smiled a saccharine smile at the wall. I said, "Your head gasket has gone. She's missing and there are clouds of white smoke."

He said, "Well, yes. How did you know, Bill?"

"We've got a new crystal ball." I heard something that

first night that had sounded like a blowing gasket. I said, "Where are you now?"

"At the office. I had to come in on the bus. I had to leave her!" The way he said it, it was a tragedy. I said, "All right brother mine, don't panic. I fix."

He said, "Is it going to be a big job, Bill? When can I have her back?"

"That depends. Normally there'd be nothing to it; just a decoke, top overhaul . . . but you haven't got an easy sort of motor. I told you that. I don't even know that I can get a gasket."

He said, "You've got to get her back on the road, Bill. I need her."

I said, "I'll do what I can, Jackie. I'll get her in today sometime. Ring you back." I put the phone down and swore. I'd had a busy day ahead of me. Now it was going to be busier. I drove the couple of miles to his place, had a cup of coffee with Moira then went to have a look at the car. She wouldn't start. I took the plugs out and turned her over by hand. I didn't need any proof of what was wrong but number five bore spat Bluecol so I had my proof anyway. I left the car and had the boys fetch her in the afternoon.

I was lucky with the gasket. A pal of mine who runs an auto spares place took a decoke set straight off the shelf. He must have had it in stock for twenty years. I didn't get on so well with the repair. It should have been a straightforward job but on that car nothing was easy. We found the cylinder head was warped and I had to send it out for planing. We decoked it, and fitted new valves. I left the reassembly to Don Cook, my trainee. As he was pulling the head down he broke a stud. I told him briefly what I thought about that and went onto the job with him. We had to drill out, tap the block and fit an oversize stud. That's an amusing business when you know urgent work is piling up. When it came to pulling the head down again I told Don to stand back and keep his ham fists out of the way while I did it myself. The outcome of that, of course, was that I broke another stud and we had the whole job to do again. It was a week before Jackie got the Scarlet Lady. He came around fretting and fuming every other night. My temper got thin and I told him in the end he'd get the car when I was ready and not before. He didn't say much when

he collected her, just got in and drove off. That wasn't like him. Normally he doesn't sulk.

He rang me up the next day. He was very apologetic. Could I possibly fix the top hose for him, it had split in the night.

I counted to ten. Then I said, "I can, Jackie, but not before tomorrow. I just can't get out to you before then."

"Well, send one of the boys. I need that motor, Bill. I've got to have it."

"I can't send anybody before tomorrow. We've got six jobs coming in this morning. I've been putting them off all week as it is. I'm sorry, Jackie, I just can't do it."

He was silent. I got the idea he was counting as well. Then he said, "Right, Bill. Sorry I was awkward. Do it when you can though; make it fast, you know how I'm fixed." The line went dead.

I put the handset down and scratched my head. I didn't "know how he was fixed" at all. He had a perfectly good bus service that dropped him right outside his office and in any case he'd just done without a car for six months. I just didn't get the problem.

The thing stayed on my mind. After lunch I chucked some lengths of hose and some clips in the Vauxhall and drove up to his house. Moira opened the door. "Thank Heaven you've come, Bill. Can you fix it for him?"

I said, "What's the matter, love? Sounds as if I'm saving his life or something."

She grinned a bit lopsidedly. She said, "I don't know about his life but you'll certainly save mine. I've never known him to be like this."

I said, "Like what?" Jackie was the most easy-going character. He just didn't let things throw him.

She shrugged. "I don't know. He's . . . well, he's been really odd, Bill. He was bad enough all the week when he didn't have the motor, but this morning . . . oh, dear." She stopped abruptly. "Family gossip, Bill. Dirty linen. That isn't like me, is it? I think it's got me down as well. Just fix it anyway. Then we might get some peace."

I went round to the garage. He'd started work on the extension. I saw a pile of breeze blocks and some concrete posts. He was certainly going to do a job and a half on that shed. The Scarlet Lady was inside, standing in a techni-

colored puddle. I got the top hose off and fitted a new length. Just to be on the safe side I started checking the rest. An hour and a half later I was fed to the back teeth after having renewed nearly every hose on the block. I started the engine and revved to check for leaks. She seemed tight. I left a message with Moira for him to call round for some more antifreeze then went back to the garage and started trying to catch up on the day's work. I got home at half-past nine. Sheila gave me the witty treatment, "Jackie's car, I suppose?"

I looked at my grimy hands. "No, as a matter of fact it was a fancy woman. You know how it goes sometimes."

She shook her head. "I think about that motor and I wish I could believe you." She really had built up a hatred for the Scarlet Lady.

Things went along fairly quietly for a week or so. Jackie brought the motor in to have the head pulled down and I tightened the studs with a feeling in my throat as if my heart had got out of place but there were no more accidents. He was back next day and I damn near got under the desk, but he only wanted a sidelight bulb. The next morning the phone was ringing when I got to the garage. It was the police. They had a smash; could I come out to it? I hedged. I had enough to do without going out looking for work. The phone said, "I think you'd better come, Bill. It's your brother."

I tried not to climb the wall. "Jackie? Is he hurt? How bad is it? What ha—?"

"He's all right, Bill. But you'd better come out. His steering went. He finished up in a field. Smashed a cow up too, just to complicate things. He's all right though. Shocked, that's all."

I found out where the place was and got the breakdown truck out. I left a note for Don and drove to the smash. I saw the Scarlet Lady half a mile before I reached her. She was well off the road, and twenty yards of hedge wasn't there to show how fast she'd gone in. There was a patrol car by her, a couple of policemen and some farming types. Jackie was sitting in the police car. His complexion would have made a good ad for the newest soap powder. I had a word with him but like they said he wasn't hurt. I got through the hedge to have a look at what had happened.

I had a shock myself. The cow went on for yards. It had been pretty thoroughly killed. Disemboweled would be the polite term. The carcass was still fixed on the dumb-irons. The Scarlet Lady grinned at me, her maw as red as her coachwork. I shook my head. I'd seen one or two pile-ups but this was something new.

I went round and tried the steering. The wheel spun freely. I opened the bonnet. The steering arm was off the bishop box. Now that can't happen because there's a castellated nut and a split pin to prevent it. Still, there was the link hanging loose. I shook my head again and set about getting the car clear.

Shifting the cow wasn't the pleasantest part. In the end we hobbled its legs, hooked it onto the breakdown and winched it free. I got the Lady out at the cost of another ten feet of herbal border. The farmer was looking grim. I could just imagine the adding machine under his trilby ticking away. Jackie got continually in the way, dancing with apprehension every time a branch scraped the car. When she wallowed up onto the road he tore round to inspect the damage. I slacked off the tow, got out of the truck and went back to him. He started on me. "The wing, Bill, look at the wing. How long to repair it, I've got to have her on the road. . . . Look at it, look at the state of it!" He got down on his hands and knees, drooling over his busted coachwork.

I said, "For God's sake, Jackie, we've got more trouble than a dented wing. Go and sit in the breakdown; smoke a packet of fags or something. We'll sort it all out later."

We exchanged all the particulars we could think of, then I washed the car down and got her on the front-end lift. I started back to the garage. The tow was far from easy. She was a devil of a weight of course. We arrived without any more mishaps and I got Don to take Jackie over to his office, pushed the car in the corner of the workshop and started trying to catch up on my other jobs again. Halfway through the morning I remembered I'd planned to ring Charlie Elliott about a spare I needed. I went into the office, lit a cigarette and called him up. In a few moments I heard his perpetual cough on the other end of the line. He said, "Hello, young Bill, wish I could say it was nice hearing from you. What are you on the scrounge for this time?"

I told him, and we arranged for him to put the unit on a bus later in the day. Then I said, "Had a bit of a nasty job this morning, Charlie. Don't want too many of those."

He was quiet for a bit. Then he said, "You've got the right motor for nasty jobs, Bill. She'll bring you plenty."

I said, "What do you mean, Charlie?" I had a nasty feeling I already knew.

He said, "The big special. The red one. BD something or other. What's she done?"

The news had certainly traveled fast. I said, "Who told you, Charlie?" He laughed. "Don't know a thing. Just guessing."

"Well you're too damned accurate. I still think you've been told something. She did have a smack this morning. I've got her up here now."

"What did she do?"

I said, "Went through a hedge. Killed a cow in a field."

He whistled. Then he said, "Yes, she likes cows. That's a favorite one."

I thought I must have shaken a bolt. "What did you say, Charlie?"

He said, "Cow-killing. I just pointed out it was a sport of hers."

I felt faint. "You mean this has happened before?"

"Oh yes," said Charlie blithely. "Twice."

I was still not sure I was hearing right. "You'd better explain this, Charlie. It's too deep for me."

He said, "I serviced that car for two years after she was built. She was laid up in nineteen-forty. Didn't come on the road again till forty-seven. Pity she ever did. Do you know anything about her?"

"Barely a thing."

"She was made for an old boy who lived over at Bracewell. Old Army chap, plenty of money. Now, he hit a cow in the New Forest, somewhere just topside of Ringwood. Nasty mess that was. Shook him up too. It was dark, look, and the cow was settled down in the road for warmth. You know they do that down there. Well anyway he had the car towed up and I knocked the dents out and back she went on the road. Next thing was she killed a man. Didn't know about that I suppose?"

I was getting sicker. I said, "No, I didn't know. How did it happen, Charlie?"

He said, "Funny affair that was, look. Never sorted it out. It was over in Bampton." He hacked. "You know the hill that runs down from the Town Hall to the Church?"

"Vaguely."

He said, "Well it happened on that. She was parked, look, and she ran away. Never found out how. It was a market day an' everything was pretty crowded. Well, she went down the hill veerin' and swervin', look, and this chap was at the bottom by the church wall. She pinned him against it and that was that."

I said, "But I can't see how that could happen, Charlie. Couldn't he get out of the way?"

Charlie said, "I can't remember exactly. I think he tripped. Anyway she got him. You could look it up, it was all in the papers. The old boy claimed to his dying day he left the brake on and the gearstick in reverse. He couldn't have done of course. The doors were still locked when they pulled her away from the wall, and she was in neutral with the handbrake off. They threw the book at him for it. He never got over it. Been driving since cars had tillers, and never any trouble. Reckon it was the end of him. He died himself a few months afterward. Nice old chap, he was. Remember him well."

I said, "What about that other cow, Charlie?"

"That wasn't very long afterward. She was sold to a lawyer. Came down from London to fetch her. Well, the day he took her back she went off the road. Tore up a hedge and there was a cow grazing close on the other side, look. 'Ell of a mess again. I had to go out to it. Shook him up so bad he never drove her again. Left her with me to sell. She went down to the west country after that. I lost track of her but I reckon there was some trouble down there. She changed hands half a dozen times, then she came back here. Old Doctor Simms bought her. Now when the war broke out he laid her up—"

I said, "Charlie, how did she come to be off the road that last time? When she killed the cow?"

He said, "Mysteries all the way round with the car, Bill. The steering arm was off the box. Never worked out how it happened."

I felt it was time I sat down. I said, "She killed a cow this morning, Charlie. Disemboweled it. The steering arm is off the box."

There was silence for a long time. Then he said, "Who owns her?"

"My brother."

He said, "Oh Gawd. Look, Bill, make him get rid of her. There's something wrong. I've been in the trade all my life and I haven't come across another like her. You get unlucky motors, I know that; some are just bad 'uns, nobody can say why. But that one . . . well, it's evil, Bill, and I mean that. Ditch it before anything else happens. You tell him from me."

I tried to get Jackie to part with the Scarlet Lady, but he wouldn't listen to reason. She had to go back on the road, the faster the better. I sent her up the hill to the place that does my bodywork and the dents were transferred to Jackie's bank balance. A week later he rang me up and I got pains in the chest again.

But the Scarlet Lady hadn't killed. She'd merely dropped a cylinder liner into her sump. . . .

I spread the pieces along the bench. I said, "Here's your liner, or what's left of it. Number three four and five big ends. You can take it from me the crankshaft's beaten up. As far as I can see it only adds up one way. Scrap her, Jack. Write her off. You've spent too much as it is."

He looked at me as if I'd hit him. "Write her off? You don't know what you're saying. You must be mad, Bill. I can't do a thing like that."

I said, "But it'll cost you fifty quid at least to sort this lot out. Could be a hell of a sight more. See reason, Jackie, the motor just isn't worth it. And take my word, if you grind that crankshaft you're going to have trouble and trouble and trouble. You get through the skin, you get into soft metal—"

He said, "All right, Bill, so you're against her. You always were. So forget it. If you won't do it I'll find someone who will. There are other garages." He turned on his heel and walked off.

I caught him at the door and grabbed his arm. "Come on, Jackie, we're big boys now."

He knocked me off. He had a queer look in his eyes. He said, "Don't push me, Bill; I might push back."

I stood there feeling lost. We'd always got on pretty well. I couldn't remember there ever being a row like this. I said, "For heaven's sake, Jackie, let's go in the office and have a talk. We can sort this thing out."

He agreed to that, surprisingly. We went in and I shut the door. I hooked the chair out with my foot and sat down on the bench. I said, "There's some cigarettes there. Have one and chuck one to me. Then calm down and tell me what's eating you. This just isn't like you, Jackie. You know that."

He said, "Thanks." He fumbled to open the packet, lit up and passed it to me. He blew a cloud of smoke and sat quiet for a minute. Then he said, "Sorry about that, Bill. Don't know what came over me. I'm jumpy these days. Must have been overdoing things."

I said, "You've got something on your mind about that blasted car, and it's rapidly turning into an obsession. Watch it, Jackie; that's the way these things grow." For a moment I saw that funny light in his eyes again. I said, "No use fooling, brother, I've known you too long."

He laughed at that. He said, "All right Bill, I'll be straight with you. You're right in a way. It's queer. In a way I suppose I'd be glad to see the back of her but it's just that . . . well, I've got this drive to keep her running. When she's off the road, even temporarily, it's a real pain to me. I can't explain it but that's how it is. As for scrapping her, well, it's unthinkable. I don't think I could do it. She'd . . . well, I don't know. I couldn't do that."

I said, "I'm beginning to wonder who owns who. You haven't bought a car, you've taken a bloody mistress."

He jumped as if I'd stuck a needle in him. Then he shook his head. "I'd hardly put it as strong as that, Bill. But I don't want to scrap her. Not at this state. I've got too much money tied up in her. She's carrying a lot of rubber. If I pack in now, I lose what I've already spent. Better to increase the investment and get another couple of years' use from her. I wouldn't get a penny for her as she is."

That's the old argument of the car-lover of course. It doesn't really hold water. I still had the idea he was hedging but there wasn't much I could do. I shrugged. "Well, if

that's the way you want it Jackie, I shall have to straighten her out for you. I can't let you go anywhere else; they'd either refuse to touch the car or take it in, do a bitch job and charge you the earth to make sure you didn't go back. Either way I should have to do it eventually. Leave it with me. But just one thing. Don't pester me for it under two weeks at the earliest. Preferably three. I lost a customer the other day through that bloody thing. I can't afford to turn trade away while I'm tinkering with that monster, Jackie; you must see that. I'm not in business for kicks."

He agreed and we left it at that. I hadn't given him the full story of course. I could only charge him cost, and while we were on the job we were losing profit on everything else. Still that was the sort of situation it was. Jackie kept himself happy building the garage that would house the Scarlet Lady when I'd finished with her.

Things were quiet for a while but my brother's obsession built up steadily. I began to see a pattern in the wilderness. The car had to be complete in every detail down to the last warning light on the dash, the last stud in the carpet. For instance, the day after Jackie got the car back he had a puncture. He brought the wheel in and I naturally expected him to leave it and pick it up later. After all, he had a second spare. He wouldn't hear of it; the job had to be done on the spot. He made such a noise I went and repaired the wheel for the sake of peace. A week later a semaphore arm packed up. I didn't argue that time, just got a replacement unit and put it straight in. There was another shindy when he came to have the head pulled down again. Young Tim did or said something that upset him and he called the lad every name he could think of. I never did find out what started the row.

To make things worse, the Scarlet Lady didn't stop killing. It was all small game; three or four cats, then the neighbors' dog. The dog just bolted under the wheels. No reason for it. Then of all things Jackie killed a fox, got home with the remains jammed in the stoneguard. I saw Moira in town and she told me about that. She was beginning to look as strained as Jackie. She said, "I'm just wondering how long it's going to be before . . . well, before it's a person. . . . Honestly Bill, every day's alike. I keep thinking, 'What's he going to hit? What's going to run underneath

today?' Do cars get bloodlusts, Bill? I'm beginning to wonder. . . ."

I said, "Moira, for heaven's sake. The motor has some bad luck, I admit that, but it's just one of those things. Let's keep a sense of proportion."

She shook her head violently. "It isn't a sense of proportion that's wanted, Bill. And there's no luck involved. The car has to have regular doses of blood, that's all. It's like a vampire."

"Moira. . . ."

She said, "Listen to me. And I used to be so level-headed, you know that, Bill. But I'm afraid of that car, I'm afraid of what it might do. I go to the gate at night when he drives up. Just to find out what's happened. I remember the fox. . . . He said, 'No trouble today, love.' Just like that. And there was this thing, and the tail hanging, as if the car was eating it. . . . I couldn't say anything, only point. He said he hadn't felt it . . . you couldn't hit a thing as hard as that and not feel it, could you, Bill?"

I frowned. "I don't know. You can never tell. Queer things happen."

She said, "I don't like seeing things all mangled up. I'm not squeamish but I keep thinking next time it might be a person. . . . The dog, Bill, the Greenaways' dog. It wasn't killed straight away, you know. It lay there in the road, trying to bite its back. . . . I see the car in the mornings sometimes, before he gets it out of the garage. Just sitting there, glaring. I've tried to be logical and all that but it isn't any good, Bill. I'm scared of that motor, I always was. And a sense of proportion isn't going to help. Bill. . . ."

"What?"

"Has it ever killed anyone?"

That took me aback. I didn't say anything coherent for a minute and she nodded briskly, as if I'd just confirmed something she'd known all along. "Thanks, Bill. I thought so. Now at least I know what to expect."

I said, "Moira, there's no reason to—"

She cut me off. "Well, I mustn't keep you, I suppose you're busy. Goodbye Bill, see you sometime." She weaved away down the street and left me staring.

Despite Moira's fears the Scarlet Lady got through the winter without any major tragedies. I saw her a couple of

times in King's Warrington, parked at the curb or pushing her long skull face around a corner. She always managed to give me a shock. Maybe it was association but I was beginning to hate the great rod myself. I got behind her on the road once but she walked away from the Velox and I wasn't standing still. Jackie was driving her like a bat out of hell. It was obvious there was going to be trouble sooner or later.

She killed in the spring.

It wasn't my brother's fault. He'd taken Moira out for a drive round Bracewell. She used to go with him for the sake of peace, though I knew she hated every minute of it. They were on their way back, cruising at sixty on a straight bit of road, when a lad came out of a gateway on a push-bike. Jackie did everything possible, the skidmarks proved that. He virtually missed the boy; they reckoned a wing mirror touched the bike, that was all. Jackie spun off and went through a hedge on the opposite side of the road. The boy was thrown in the ditch. Normally he'd have got away with concussion or a broken arm or something like that, but this was the Scarlet Lady's handiwork. He was thrown off head first just where a culvert emptied into a ditch. There was new concrete, and the shuttering had left sharp edges....

I went out to fetch the car. I had to go to the inquest. When I saw Moira there I thought she'd aged twenty years in as many days. She trembled, she was crying and she was that pale she looked transparent. Jackie had brought her down in the car but she wouldn't go back in it. I took her home in the Vauxhall. I didn't have much to say to my brother. I was hoping he'd trade the motor in now, if only because his wife was headed for a nervous breakdown. He did no such thing of course.

I didn't hear anything of either Jackie or Moira for some weeks. We'd been in the habit of going over to their place pretty frequently but he didn't phone and I wasn't going to take the first step. The inquest had strained the old family relations more than a little, and basically I hate trouble. I'd caught the look he'd given me when Moira had asked me to take her home, and believe me it hadn't been nice. I figured he'd be in touch when he cooled down. I suppose it was weak of me but I was busy anyway; I had my hands

full at the garage. There was so much work I was thinking about taking on another mechanic.

Sheila asked me once or twice what was happening about the car but I put her off or made negative noises. I'd been in enough scenes already over the damned thing. I always did have two left feet when it came to handling people. I think I'm better with motors; well, normal ones at least. Not . . . whatever the Scarlet Lady was. She was not normal . . . demon or spirit, I don't know. I'm just giving the facts here.

Moira telephoned my house one evening in early June. I'd got in late from work and I was just sitting down to tea when the phone went. I started to swear and Sheila shushed me. "I'll see to it, you have your meal." She went into the hall and I heard her speaking. She was back in a moment, frowning. "Sorry love, it's Moira. She wants you, wouldn't say why . . . Bill, are things all right over there? She sounded queer."

I got up with my mouth full. "Mmm . . . don't know. Should be all right. Come 'n' listen." She followed me out and I picked up the handset. "Hello, Moira, Bill here. Something wrong?"

She said, "Bill, are you alone?" She sounded short of breath, as if she was panting or crying. I beckoned Sheila and she came and put her ear close to the phone. I said " 'Course I'm alone; what's the matter?"

She said, "I've only got a minute. I wouldn't want anybody else to hear. . . ."

"Moira, what is it? Is it Jackie?"

She was crying openly now. "Bill, you've got to help. I can't stand it any more. I wanted to ring you but he wouldn't let—oh God. . . ."

"Moira?"

Gulp. She said, "It's all right, I thought that was him. I thought he'd followed me."

I said, "Followed you? What the hell—"

She said, "I'm in a phone box. He thinks I've come out for cigarettes. I don't know how to tell . . . I'm frightened of him now. It's the car, Bill. He hasn't spoken to me for days. He spends all his time out there with it; I don't think he even knows I'm here. Except when I try to ring. . . ."

Sheila looked at me wide-eyed. I felt her hand tighten on

my arm. The phone said scratchily, "I shouldn't have called but I had to talk to someone. Go and see him at the office, Bill, I think he's . . . oh God, isn't this terrible . . . there's something wrong about the car. He talks to it. He stays out there for hours, cleaning it and polishing . . . he keeps muttering all the time. I don't know what he's saying but I know he's talking to it."

I said, "Moira, you've not making sense. . . . I'd better come over."

"Oh God no . . . promise you won't, Bill. He'd know it was me. . . ."

Either Moira was screwy or it was my brother. Either way it wasn't nice. But something had to be done. I tried to calm her. "Look, he was always fond of the motor. You know he was. He goes potty about his cars. He used to before you knew him, years back."

Her voice altered. "Yes, all right, Bill. Just forget I called will you? It was a mistake. Try and forget about it. . . ."

Sheila started shaking her head violently. I said, "Moira, I'll go see him at the office. I'll make a point of it, tomorrow. He might need a break or something. . . ."

Whatever it was that was wrong, it had scared the pride out of her. She started to snuffle again. "Would you, Bill, I wish you would . . . please be careful, don't say I rang you. I don't know what he'd do. . . ."

I said firmly, "It'll be all right, love. Thanks for calling. I'll have a chat with him. I can cope."

She said, "Please be careful . . . do you know he sleepwalks?"

"What?"

She said, "Night after night. He gets up, puts his things on, goes downstairs. . . . I know he isn't awake. If you saw his face . . . he isn't awake when he does it."

This was worse than I'd thought. "Where the hell does he go?"

She laughed. It wasn't a nice sound. "Can't you guess? To the garage, to that . . . thing. He just stands there, stands for an hour or more with his . . . hand on the wing. I watch him, I know. . . ."

"Have you been down to him? I don't know much about this sort of thing . . . you could get him back, you're sup-

posed to be able to lead a sleepwalker back . . . do you go down?"

She said, "What, touch him? When he's touching the car?"

Sheila put a hand to her throat.

I said, "Look, Moira, I think I'd better come round straight away."

"No, for God's sake. . . ." She panicked suddenly. "I've got to go, he'll know I've telephoned. . . . I'll be all right, goodbye. . . ." The phone clicked and went dead. It left us just staring at each other.

I rang Doc Evans after surgery hours. He'd known us both since we were kids but it still wasn't an easy call to make. I just told him what Moira had said, underlining it with what I knew myself. He hummed and hawed. He said he was sure it was nothing serious, just nerves or overwork or something like that. He reckoned a few days' rest would work wonders. He asked me to get Jackie to call in for a checkup. I thanked him and told him I'd do what I could.

I couldn't settle that night. When we turned in I couldn't sleep. About two in the morning I gave up trying. I got up and started to dress.

Sheila spoke from the darkness. "Bill, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, love. You get some rest."

"Where are you going?"

I said, "I'm taking a run over to Jackie's place. Just to make sure everything's all right."

She snapped the light on and sat up looking startled. "Is that wise?"

"It'll be all right. I won't knock 'em up or anything. I just want to see this thing myself. If there's something phony going on I want to know."

"Bill, be careful."

"Don't worry. You go to sleep. I shan't be long."

There was a good moon. I sidled the Vauxhall out of the drive and away. The night was so bright I didn't need headlights. About a quarter of a mile from Jackie's house I stopped the engine. There was a slight gradient and I coasted the rest of the way. I felt spooky; the hedge shadows were ink-black and everything was very quiet. No noise except the tires whispering on the road. I slowed

down outside the house and let the car roll till I could see his drive through a gap in the hedge.

I had a shock. I was already being watched. The car was nosed out of the garage, for all the world as if she was taking the air. The moonlight robbed her of color, made the skull effect stronger than ever. The windshield glared darkly. Nothing was moving anywhere.

I settled down to wait. Somewhere an owl was hunting and I saw a bat across the moon. I wanted a smoke but I daren't risk the flare of the match. I got comfortable in the seat. If necessary I was going to watch all night.

I suppose half an hour went by, maybe more. I dozed off. When I woke the moon was lower. I sat up with a jump wondering where the hell I was. I looked across at the house. Nothing had changed.

Or had it? I stared at the car, trying to decide whether or not it was nearer to me. After a time I was sure of it. Now it was ten feet or more clear of the garage. The moon was touching the saloon roof; before, it had been in shadow.

My back crept. I don't know why, but the altered position of the motor upset me. Why should a parked car move on a moonlit night? Who would move it? I learned back, then sat upright again sharply. I'd seen something in the shadows by the house, I was sure of it. I strained my eyes but there was nothing there now. I nearly got out of the Vauxhall and went across, but it wasn't worth the risk. I didn't want Jackie to catch me prowling about there; it would give the whole game away. I stayed where I was watching, with the car watching back. I saw nothing else, and when the first birds started to chirp I gave up. If there had been a floorshow I'd missed it. I let the brake off, glided a couple of hundred yards from the house, then started on the clutch and circled back home.

I went to see Jackie as promised. I was shocked by the change in him. I reckon he'd lost the best part of a stone in weight, his cheeks were hollowed and he didn't have a spark of color. I came straight to the point. I told him he looked lousy, why didn't he go for a checkup?

That did it. He raved, he swore; told me to mind my own business, get out and run my affairs and let him run his. Then he turned really mean. Asked me if "that bitch of a wife of his" had been getting round me. That needled me.

We had some more crosstalk and it ended with Jackie using a word that between brothers is just plain thoughtless. After I'd picked him up he just sat and rubbed his jaw. He said, "Why d'you do that, Bill? Why d'you do that?"

I had to sit down myself. I just don't lose my temper and slug people. Least of all my brother. I sketched in what he'd said and he looked dazed. "I couldn't have talked to you like that, Bill; it just isn't possible." He looked like a man who'd just been told he'd kicked a pet dog to bits.

I didn't ask him to go and see Doc Evans, I told him that was where he was headed. He didn't argue. He went the same evening.

I don't know what the doc said to him or what he prescribed but it certainly worked. Or seemed to at the time.

A short while later Jackie rang me and asked if I'd like to take Sheila round for a couple of hours that evening. He said he was nearly back to normal and that he was taking a rest for a week or so. His nerves had been on edge; he'd hardly known what he was doing.

He looked a lot fitter, and Moira was back on form too. Jackie apologized for the worry he'd given us all. We brushed it off. It was a case of least said, soonest mended. He hadn't parted with the car but I reckoned we could get him round to that later. No point in rushing things.

Life went smoothly for a time. Even the Scarlet Lady behaved herself. Oh, she broke a spring in a pothole and I had to get a smith to make up a new one because there were no spares to be had, but after what had been happening I classed that as a minor repair. We were still on the best of terms when September came round and Jackie raised the question of holidays.

For some years we'd been in the habit of going off together, the four of us in one car with a trailer for tents and luggage. Usually we toured the west country. We used to have a lot of fun. Jackie wanted to do the same thing again and I'd got no objections. We had the maps out when I said something about having to fit in a service on the Vauxhall. There was some clutch-slip there and she was due for a grease-up. Jackie sat up sharply. Why was I bothering with the Velox when we were going in the Scarlet Lady?

There was a sort of silence that can best be described as maternal. Jackie looked round our faces anxiously. "What's

the matter? There's nothing wrong with the car. That's all over, isn't it?"

He'd got us of course. Nobody wanted to argue with him for fear of starting him ticking again. We had to give in. He was playing it clever.

When we got home Sheila had the look on her face that you'd expect to see if you told someone they'd got a month to live. Sort of stricken. I couldn't think of anything to say; we both knew we were caught. I brooded over the thing for a bit. A few days later I rang Charlie Elliott. I hadn't seen him for over six months; I said it was high time I had a beer with him. We arranged to meet the same evening in the White Swan at Bampton.

I took Sheila over. Charlie was in the saloon bar when we arrived. It's a nice, atmospheric sort of pub, an old low place with heavy beams and white walls golden-glazed with nicotine. Charlie made a fuss of Sheila and she purred a bit; she always had liked him. He's a funny old boy; he's one of those people who never look completely at home in anything except a boiler suit. He has big nobbly hands, a wild thatch of gray hair that never will lay flat; but he has a sort of way with him. It makes you wonder why he never got married.

He set up the first round and we started yarning. Charlie breathes motors, lives for them; he's a real old-time mechanic. I always enjoy talking to him. Maybe it's because he puts me in mind of Dad. It wasn't long before the discussion got round to the Scarlet Lady. Charlie shook his head and ruffled his hair up even worse. Sheila stroked the ash from her cigarette, frowning. "Charlie, what's wrong with that car? There's something, I know there is. Something horrible about it."

Charlie said, "It's mixed up with probabilities, look. It can all be explained. It's like people getting sweaty hands. They have accidents."

"Er . . . sorry, Charlie, what did you say?"

I said, "Don't worry Sheila, he's always like this. He gets to the point eventually."

Charlie glared at me. "I knew a chap that had sweaty hands. Carpenter. Had to give it up." He groped in his pocket and found a coin. He laid it on the table. He said,

"I've just tossed this penny and it's come down heads. What were the odds on that?"

I said, "Fifty-fifty." It seemed reasonable.

Charlie nodded. "Now I say I've tossed it ninety-nine times, look. And it's been heads every time. And I toss it again. What are the odds on tails?"

Sheila and I both started to say "A hundred to one." Then we stopped and looked at each other. Charlie smiled angelically. "Fifty-fifty, my children. Can't be any other. There are still two sides."

I said, "Any moment now we're going to hear about monkeys chained to grand pianos."

Charlie looked disturbed. "Has it run over a monkey?"

"There aren't any available. Otherwise it would have."

Sheila said, "What you're both getting at is that the whole thing's a matter of luck."

Charlie said, "Probabilities. People don't understand 'em. Like the penny coming down heads. People think if it happens a hundred times straight off there's something queer about it. It's improbable but there's nothing in the book to say it can't happen. In a way it's an expression of normality. Like winning the pools."

I said, "So a car that runs over everybody and everything, busts itself up three or four times a year and drives my brother half round the bend, that's normal."

Charlie shook his head. "No, just the opposite. It's a dangerous thing. Haunted or possessed or something."

"But you just said—"

He said, "Don't forget people get sweaty hands."

"Oh yes, sweaty hands. Of course."

Charlie said, "One in every ten thousand dogs is going to get run over every day. And one in every hundred thousand people. So you go out and plow something up. The next day you do it again. The odds haven't altered."

"But Charlie, that's ten thousand to one against. The penny was only fifty-fifty."

Charlie said patiently, "I'm not trying to prove it's necessary to have smashes. Only that it isn't supernatural. Now, I know a chap who was a carpenter. One day his saw skidded, look, went through his hand. He was off work for weeks. He got a thing about it happening again. He got

nervous. The first day he was back on the job he took the top of a finger off."

Sheila shuddered. "Is there any point in that, Charlie, or is it just a horrible bedtime story?" She looked with distaste at her Bloody Mary.

I said, "It's all right, love; he means the car can't get accident prone but the driver can. And then the odds come down."

Charlie looked pleased. "You'll make an engineer yet, young Bill. Have another beer."

I said, "No, it's my round." I went to order. When I got back Sheila said, "It's all very well philosophizing, Charlie, but we've got to go on holiday in the thing."

Charlie acted startled. "Why didn't you say. . . . Let's think a minute now." He put his head in his hands, then looked up and grinned. "Right, I've got it. Time for the irrational. Very comforting. What's the basis of your fear of that motor?"

Sheila said, "I don't know. I think because it kills things. It seems to want to kill things."

Charlie said, "Which implies sentience. Do you think its sentient, Bill?"

I said, "Hell, Charlie, it's just a heap of iron. You know it can't be sentient."

He shook his head. "But see the way it glares, Bill. Got a frown, look. Nasty thing, that car is. You know it thinks as well as I do."

I said, "All right, so it thinks. It's a . . . devil with wheels. How that suit you?"

He said, "Pretty good for a learner, Bill. That'll do. Yes, I like that. Devil with wheels. Very theatrical. Just what we needed. . . . Well, assuming that it's sentient, where's the safest place to be if it isn't inside it? It won't let itself get destroyed, will it?" He saw the look on my face and drank his pint at one go. He always was an exhibitionist. He said, "Drop of good beer tonight. Tip up, young Bill, you're getting behind."

I spent a week wondering whether he'd helped us or not. I've never made up my mind whether Charlie should have been a head shrinker or a crossword puzzle inventor. Somehow he seemed wasted as a mechanic.

We went away in the car. She ran like a dream. I think

she was just showing us what she could do. There was something about that motor all right. She was a car that wanted to get up and run, jump a few folds of downland before breakfast. We never had her flat out, but her top speed was well over the ton and she'd cruise at ninety as sweet as at forty-five. On the sort of road she was built for there was nothing to touch her. I got a double kick out of her because it was my engine that was ramming us about and I knew I'd done a good job. I remember thinking how lucky it was Jackie hadn't let me scrap her back in the winter. I was almost beginning to see his point of view. I suppose we were all hoping she'd come through her run of bad luck at last, though nobody mentioned it. We were wrong of course. She was just playing with us.

We clipped down through Hampshire, turned west to Poole and worked our way through Wareham to the Dorset coast. That area always gets me; the slashes and bites in the land where the sea's been mumbling for centuries, the ragged, mournful hills, the bleak indifference of the whole lee shore. We went down as far as Weymouth then cut back northeast again to the valley of the Cerne. There's a God up there and he's always at home. You can see his outline cut in the chalk like an X-ray picture hundreds of yards long. From Cerne Abbas to Sherborne, dreaming on its hill, and from there west again through the Blackmoor Vale, through Somerset and Devon into Cornwall. There the land is different again, even the names change. Tintagel, Restormel; they sound like old armor ringing. At the end of the second week we were right down in the toe of England and we'd run out of time. We turned the car for home.

I still hate the memory of that damned motor. I've tried to rationalize it away but it isn't any good. I must just tell this the way it occurred to me. She was the Enemy all right. I don't know how or why but she was the Enemy. . . .

The holiday was ten miles from finished. We were about three miles from Jackie's place, on a long straight with a down gradient. Jackie was driving, taking things steady. It was dusk and I think the girls were asleep in the back. I saw something on the road ahead of us. A cyclist, freewheeling down the slope at a good pace. As we got closer I saw he was carrying a kiddie on his handlebars. I don't like to see people do that, it isn't safe. . . .

Jackie slowed as we came up behind and the rider spared one hand from steering and waved us through. Jackie pulled out wide and moved alongside. But he didn't pass. We stayed abreast of the cyclist, pacing him. I said, "Go on, Jackie, it's clear."

He didn't answer and I looked across at him. His face was drawn. The old strained expression. I said sharply, "What's the matter?"

I heard Sheila come alive with a bump. She grabbed my shoulder. I had the same presentiment in the same moment but there was nothing I could do.

We were held there, in the ringside seats. We couldn't miss the details. The kid looked across at us. She was pretty. She smiled slowly, as if we were old friends she hadn't seen for years.

And pushed her legs down into the spokes of the wheel. . . .

It was all ruined of course. The good the holiday had done us was just washed out. All we could think about was the smash. What had happened to the kid and her father. Sheila lay awake most of the night sweating and swearing. No accident is pleasant but there had been an extra quality about this one, a sort of slow-motion underwater sensation like you get in a nightmare. It was the way we'd been held there close up, so we could see it and hear it. . . . Sheila said there was a thick chunk-chunk when the spokes bit in. I don't know, I can't remember. I kept seeing the victims cartwheeling, the pair of them going over and over for yards and yards and yards, splashing the car with blood. I don't think I'll ever get it right out of my mind.

Jackie was round to see me two days later. All the nervousness was back. He hopped across the forecourt like a sparrow. Even while he was talking to me he couldn't keep still. I had to help him out again. Moira wouldn't ride in the car any more, not ever. So he wanted the rod resprayed to look different. That would put everything right. He'd got it all worked out for me, would I get it done?

So the luck was in the paint. Very logical. I rubbed my face and sat for a minute. Then I said, "All right, Jackie, let's have a look at what you want."

He'd even done a drawing, in color. He'd never showed any leanings in that direction before but the sketch was

pretty good. I stared at it. He didn't want a dual tone, he wanted a triple. Dark gray wings, medium gray on the sides, white for the roof and bonnet top. I couldn't see the job being done for less than fifty or sixty quid. And he'd told me in Cornwall they were thinking about starting a family. So it was a good time to start throwing money round giving his mechanical mistress a facial. I said, "Jackie, is it really worth it?"

He was all set to jump down my throat. "If you won't do it—"

I said, "Yes, I know, someone else will." I could just imagine what Moira would think. I could still remember her face after the crash. I said, "All right, Jackie, bring it in. Give me a fortnight; they're pretty busy up the road. And don't tell Moira I talked you into it. Just say I think you need a jacket with extra-long sleeves."

He didn't answer that, just went across to the car and started up. A few moments later the Scarlet Lady came leering into my workshop again.

I took her up the hill to the coachbuilders and briefed the foreman on what wanted doing. He nodded, raised his eyebrows and wrote the numbers down off the paint card. I said, "Don't ask me to explain it, Frank; I'm just the middleman." I walked out feeling mad that there was nothing to get mad at.

The crazy triple scheme worked. I had to admit it. They brought the motor round ten days later. They'd done up the wheels and accessories as well and she looked a dream. You could see people turning their heads to stare at her as she sat on the forecourt. I put off delivering her for a couple of hours but I badly wanted her out of the way. In the end I called Don and told him to chase me in the Velox. I drove the car into Jackie's garage and went to the house with the keys. Moira opened the door before I reached it. She didn't speak. Her expression was enough. I said, "Look, Moira, I couldn't help doing the job. If I'd have refused he'd just have gone to someone else. As it is he's getting it at cost. I couldn't do any more. . . ."

She snapped her fingers for the keys. "All right, Bill, forget it. Just gimme-gimme. I've got to call him as soon as the car gets back." She smiled brightly. "Standing orders. Most important."

I opened my mouth then shut it again. The Vauxhall drew up in the road and tooted. She said, "There's your boy, Bill. Off you go. Thanks for bringing the car."

I walked away. Halfway to the gate she called me. I turned back. She said, "By the way, just for the record; the car isn't the Scarlet Lady any more. She's Nadia. It suits the color scheme, you see. A cool name, like rocks and snow." She closed the door.

"Nadia" repaid Jackie the very next morning.

No one ever worked out why it happened. He was in the habit of giving the engine half a dozen turns with the handle in the mornings. Now, normally he backed the car into the garage, but I'd put her in nose first. I'd also left her in gear. Some people don't approve of that but it just happens to be a habit of mine. I slack the handbrake to stop the cables from stretching. In any case the point is academic; Jackie, being a good driver, always checked a motor for neutral anyhow. This morning he didn't. That was the first mystery. He switched on, opened the choke, wound up the dash accelerator and walked round to the front. He put the handle in the guides and gave it a pull-up. The second mystery was how the engine could fire, start in gear and keep on firing. She came forward so fast he didn't have a chance. The handle, with the vibrating dog behind it and all the weight of the motor, broke one of the concrete uprights clean off about eighteen inches from the ground. On the way, it passed through his leg.

I got down there as soon as I heard of course. They'd taken him off in a pretty bad way. I took the car back with me. In the evening they let Moira see him. I went over to the hospital with her. Jackie was in a private room. He lay there quietly, his face about the color of the bed linen. He ignored his wife completely. Some fool of a doctor had cut the handle up getting it out of his leg. Could I get him another starting handle as quickly as I could?

Moira began to cry. She didn't make any noise. The tears just tracked down her face to her chin. I took her out, sat her in the Vauxhall, went round and got in the driving seat. I gave her a cigarette and lit it for her. She lay back, eyes closed. She said, "You're going to hate me for this Bill. I hate myself."

I knew what was coming. I wished I didn't. "What do you mean?"

She said flatly, "I'm leaving him. I can't take any more. Will you drive me back so I can get my things?"

I sat and gripped the wheel and wished myself anywhere else but in that car. "It's not the sort of thing a man likes to do for his brother."

She reached for the door handle. "All right. If you won't I'll find someone else."

I switched on and rammed the starter. "I get tired of people hanging things over me. Bloody tired. Let's get it done with."

I took her to the house and waited while she packed. She didn't take long. Then I drove her the ten miles or so to her parents' home. I left her there and went back to Sheila. The way I was feeling only she could help me.

Jackie was in the hospital for weeks. There was a time when they thought he'd have to lose the leg. The damage healed eventually. It left him with a limp he'll always have. He came round to the garage as soon as they let him out. He wanted his car.

I stood and looked him up and down. "You can have it with pleasure, boy. Don't bring it back. How's Moira?"

"I . . . don't know. I haven't seen her."

I said, "As a matter of fact I think you'd better make yourself scarce as well. I can't cope with you anymore. You've gone past me."

He grinned lopsidedly. "Fair enough Bill. But get me the car. She's all I've got now."

I tried to start the rod but she wouldn't have any. The battery had lost its charge and I didn't have a service spare. I chucked Jackie out and told him I'd deliver her. Maybe that evening, maybe the next. He limped off without a word.

I put the battery on charge and left it overnight. Next day was hectic. I had to ask Don to stay on after six to help me with the delivering. By the time we'd cleared the shop it was almost eight. There was only the Scarlet Lady left. I fetched the battery and hooked it onto her. She wouldn't even cough.

I checked round her. The spark was good and she was getting fuel. I tried the starter again but it was no good. The

battery began to flatten once more. I found an old lorry handle that fitted her and gave it to Don. I said, "Turn her a bit, will you? For God's sake though, don't push her over the top."

He tried for ten minutes, engaging the handle and jerking it upwards. She was dead. He frowned, spat on his hands, took a fresh grip and spun the handle right round.

She backfired with a crash like a howitzer. Don was lifted straight off his feet. The handle racketed back round in the guides and he rolled across the floor to the wall. He got up clutching his arm.

He was a good boy. I put a jacket round his shoulders and ran to get the Vauxhall out onto the apron. On the way to the hospital he just sat and watched his wrist swell. They X-rayed and put on the first half of the plaster. Then I took him home.

It was late when I got back to the garage. The lights were still burning as I'd left them. The car grinned at me from across the workshop. I walked up and stood looking at her for a few minutes. Then I opened the bonnet and reset the distributor, retarding the spark. I switched on and tried to swing her. It was hopeless. Like juggling with sacks of coal. I put the spark back the way it was and stepped up to the handle feeling I was entering an arena. I gripped it and pulled up sharply.

She started like a lamb.

I drove her to Jackie's place. There was no lights on when I got there. I left the car outside the garage, put the keys through his letterbox and walked away, I didn't want to see him. I started hitch-hiking. I was lucky. I got a lift within a mile. I was home just before twelve.

I saw nothing of my brother for nearly a fortnight. Sheila asked me about him a couple of times and I just shrugged. I'd had enough. She started to use the silent reproach technique. I knew she was right of course; I couldn't just let things go on like that. One morning I rang his office from the garage. They said he hadn't showed up yet. I tried his home number and there was no answer there either.

I sat and drummed my fingers for a few minutes. I had a queer feeling something was wrong. I went and found Tim and told him to hold the fort for an hour. I got the Vauxhall out and drove over to my brother's house. I parked

outside and got out. Everything was very quiet. Nobody about. Somewhere an engine was running raggedly but that was the only sound. I started to walk toward the front door.

I swore at myself for a fool and ran back to the garage. The port was shut. The engine beat was coming from inside.

I stormed through the house scattering mats. No sign of Jackie. I went through the kitchen and opened the side door of the garage. White fumes met me, billowing out. I could just see the bonnet of the car inside.

I went in and groped at the driving door. He was in there and he was limp. I reached across him and stopped the engine. Then I tried to pull him clear. He was heavy and there was no room to move. I took a deep breath and heaved. The garage turned upside down and shook itself and I landed on the floor.

I got outside, soaked a handkerchief under the kitchen tap and tied it round my face. I felt my way back past the car to the port. I found the catch and released it. The door swung up letting in a burst of sunlight. Thick smoke rolled across the drive. I got hold of the car's fender and pulled, praying she wouldn't be in gear. She rolled forward stiffly. I dragged him out. I couldn't tell whether or not he was breathing. I laid him down and tried to remember what I'd been taught about artificial respiration.

I was still pumping away when somebody ran up behind me. I looked round. A woman, hand to her throat. She said, "I saw you pull him out. What happened?"

"Would you get an ambulance, please?"

"Is he dead?"

I said, "For Christ's sake get a bloody ambulance." She looked startled and scurried away.

A few minutes later Jackie coughed and tried to sit up. I got him on his feet and he hung on the fence, retching. I half carried him into the house, laid him down on the sofa in the lounge. I wiped his face and undid his collar. I put my jacket over him. He sprawled there breathing noisily, rolling his eyes at the door. There didn't seem to be anything else I could do for a minute. I went into the hall and phoned Moira's parents. The woman came back breathless. She said, "The ambulance is on its way."

Moira was on the line. I said, "Hello, love, Bill here.

Sorry about this but can you come over? Jackie's had an accident. . . ."

She gasped. She said, "What is it, is it bad? What's he done?" I heard the back door slam. I said, "Get over here, quick as you can." I dropped the phone and sprinted out of the house. He was just backing the Scarlet Lady into the road.

I broke all records for the fifty yard dash. He had to stop to engage first and I got the car door open. He swung at me with the jack handle and I caught his wrist and yanked. He came out neck and crop, rolled over and started to get to his feet still clutching the handle. I hit him when he was halfway up. He was still out when the ambulance came.

They kept him in for the night. Some fool had apparently given him a touch of concussion. They let me see him in the evening. Moira was already there when I arrived. She had a look on her face that suggested they'd sorted things out a bit. He said, "Hello, Bill. I tried to brain you, didn't I?"

I laughed. "Bit of a waste of effort, Jackie. Can't lose what I never had."

He put his hand out. "Sorry, Bill. For everything. I don't know what's been happening to me."

I said, "Skip it." I had the feeling I'd heard all this before somewhere. His next words gave me some hope. He said, "The car, Bill. Will you get rid of her for me?"

I said, "You're joking of course."

He shook his head tiredly. "I'm straight, Bill. Just do it. Tonight if you can. Where is she?"

"Still rammed across your drive unless she's steered herself off. That wouldn't surprise me."

He swallowed. "Somehow the car's been the cause of everything. I'm not making excuses, I've been ten sorts of bloody fool, but . . . I can't explain it, Bill. I've been trying to tell Moira. It was . . . well, like she owned me. I didn't know what I was doing half the time. I'd have killed you this morning if I could."

I stood up. "That's over and done with. The main thing is, are you serious? Because if I get rid of her, brother, you won't see her again."

He licked his lips. "That's what I want. I wouldn't want

her running round town. I don't want to see her again. Try and find her a good home, Bill. I don't care if you have to give her away."

I'd already got it organized. "Don't fret, Jackie; I'll see to it for you." I squeezed Moira's arm and left.

First thing next morning I got Tim to drive the big breakdown truck out onto the apron and fuel up. While he was doing it I rang a pal of mine called Ginger Harris. He had a scrapyard over on the other side of Bracewell. When he came on the line I said, "Ginger, this is Bill Fredericks from Warrington. I've got a job I want doing. It's pretty urgent. Can you help me out?"

He said, "Why, what's up, Bill?"

"I want a car broken. Doesn't matter why. You can have her today if you can do the job straight off."

He said cautiously, "Is this on the level, Bill?"

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"Sounds as if you've robbed a bank."

I laughed. "This is straight, Ginge. You can trust me." He didn't argue any more. I've got a pretty good name in the trade. I said, "There ought to be a couple of tons of stuff there at least. You'll do all right out of her. See you later on." I put the phone down, locked the office and went out to where Tim was waiting.

We got to Jackie's house and I stopped outside. The Scarlet Lady was still where I'd left her. I said, "Give me a hand to swing her into the road, Tim, then we'll hook on."

His eyes widened a bit. He said, "But she drives, doesn't she?" I shook my head. "Don't argue; just do what I say. You drive the truck, I'll steer the car. And take it steady. We're going to Ginger's, and I want to get there in one piece."

We pushed the Scarlet Lady out into the road and chained up. I wasn't taking any more risks. Lashed to the back of our truck she couldn't get up to anything. That was the theory anyway. As we moved off a funny idea came into my mind. I wondered if she knew where she was going.

Twenty yards down the road the tow parted. We got the spare chain out of the truck and fixed it. A quarter of a mile farther on I was bumping along with a flat nearside front tire and hooting like hell to stop. I began to sweat. She knew. . . .

There's nothing to being towed as long as the man in front

takes it steady. Tim was apt to get a bit enthusiastic; that's why I'd warned him. He trundled along at thirty for a while. Then he started to build up. By the time we were through Foxwell and about halfway to Ginger's yard he was batting along at a good fifty. But the Scarlet Lady was steering easily and I wasn't too bothered.

Just the other side of Foxwell the road gets hilly and there are a series of awkward bends. The last drop is very steep and there's a vicious left-hander at the bottom. Its one of the three or four Devil's Elbows in the district. On the way down the slope to it I started to close up on the truck, and touched the brake. There was nothing there. The pedal went down to the boards, spongily.

We were doing a good lick and it wasn't funny. I felt the sweat break out again as I pumped the pedal. Liquid splashed across the windscreen; a front slave cylinder had gone, or a line had broken. I snatched at the handbrake and believe it or not there was a sharp snap and the handle came back loose. I shoaved the clutch down and tried to crash the car into gear. Would she go? Would she hell. . . .

I was in the worst sort of trouble. The back of the truck was looming over me and the chain between us was flicking about and throwing big loops up over the car's bonnet. Any second now Tim was going to brake and I should overrun that tow and fetch it up round one of the front wheels. After that God alone knew where I should end up. I did the only thing that was left. The road was well banked and I steered off, trying to force the side of the car against the grass to reduce my speed. There was no time to play with the gears now. I needed both hands to steer. The car plowed into the side, cannoned across the road and back. Grass and earth flew; the tow snatched and tightened.

I saw Tim look back through the rear window of the cab and prayed he wouldn't do the first thing that came into his mind and step on the anchors. He didn't. He throttled instead and went at the hill flat out.

They say at such times your past life goes in front of your eyes. I can't claim that happened to me but I know I remembered the four individual rows I'd had with Sheila and regretted each one of them. The car was cutting huge swathes out of the grass and I had the wheel locked over to keep her into the bank. The whole column was vibrating

and my arms felt as if they were being fetched out at the sockets. Tim had his headlights on full beam and he was sounding whenever he could spare a hand for the horn button.

We made it somehow. I shall never know how. I swear we touched seventy on the way down. I saw the trees round the Elbow. They were coming up so fast it seemed we were dropping straight into their tops like linked stones. Then we ran out of road. I had a glimpse of drystone walling inches away, saw a car bumping up the opposite verge to get away from us. There was a feeling like you get on a roller coaster; we went into the corner with four wheels between us, there was a crash as the chain slewed me back straight, then we were round, with a long gradient on which to slow down. Tim stopped about fifty yards below the crest and the car rolled up to the truck, bumped gently and fell back. I snicked her into first to hold her and got out on the road.

Tim came round looking white. He said, "What was it, brakes?"

I nodded. I didn't trust my voice yet. I lay down on the road and pushed my head under the car's wing to see what had happened.

I heard the clunk as she came out of gear, and rolled away. She turned out in an arc and I lay and watched the offside front wheel go over the slack of my sleeve. Her tail hit the bank and she stopped again, this time for keeps. I went and sat by the hedge. In front of me the car gleamed in the sunlight. Where she'd plowed into the bank the branches and stones had ripped the paint off and all along her wing and bonnet were sparks and slashes of red where the old color was showing through. It looked as if she'd been bleeding at the mouth. I lit a cigarette. I figured I'd earned the smoke.

Tim came and squatted by me. He said, "We can't tow her now. Not without brakes. What are you going to do?"

I said, "You think about it." He frowned for a minute, then he started to grin. He unshackled the breakdown truck, backed it down the hill and coupled on behind. I got in the Scarlet Lady and started up. I didn't think she'd motor but she still had some pride left. We got to Ginger's yard in the

only way possible, drove in and stopped both vehicles by the shed where he did his sorting.

He came out and stood with his hands on his hips and laughed. He said, "Which one's the wreck?"

I said, "Funny man. Where do you want her?"

He wagged his thumb at a line of derelict cars across the field. "Doesn't matter. Anywhere over there." I drove the Scarlet Lady to the end of the line, switched off and got out. He followed me across. He said, "She's a goer then."

I opened the bonnet, took the wheelmaul off the scuttle and laid it round the distributor a few times. "Not any more she isn't."

He said, "I still reckon you've robbed a bank."

"All right, so we cut you in for a share when we dig up the loot. When can you start on her, Ginger?"

He shrugged. "Today maybe, tomorrow perhaps. Before the weekend at least."

I walked back to the breakdown truck. I said, "Don't get sentimental, will you? It wouldn't be worth your while."

He laughed again and ran a hand through his bright hair. "Can't afford it in this game, Bill. I only weep at the sight of a tenner." I left him to get on with the job and drove back feeling I'd done a good piece of work.

I was restless that evening. I prowled round the house until even Sheila snapped at me to sit down or go out and have a drink or something. I tried to concentrate on the television but it was no use. When I went to bed I couldn't sleep. It was a mild, still night. I lay and tossed until the sky started to brighten. I did sleep then. I had a vivid dream.

I was in a steel place, a cell or the inside of a machine. The details weren't clear but it was a complex structure full of planes and angles. I was trapped, and They were coming. I could hear Them beating at the walls. The sound of the hammers got closer and louder and everything began to glow cherry red like metal under a torch. Then the walls crumbled and fell in and I sat up with a yell and Sheila was coming into the room with cups of tea on a tray. She said, "Bill, what on earth's the matter? Were you dreaming or something?" I looked round. It was full daylight. The morning was sunny. Somewhere a builder was working. I could hear the ringing of a trowel on brick. I found I was

covered with sweat. Sheila sat down on the bed. "Come on, it's half past seven. You're going to be late."

Our first job that day was getting a recon engine into a Rover Ninety. We'd cleared everything for lowering the night before and I started on it straight away, swinging the unit up on a tackle and jockeying the car underneath. Tim lowered away while I steadied the engine down onto its bearers. I was leaning over the bonnet trying to wriggle the block into place when something hit me. I had the momentary idea the roof had caved in. When my sight cleared I was on my knees beside the car. Tim had his hands on my shoulders trying to pull me up. He said, "What happened, Bill; what did you do?"

I shook my head. It was still thick with pain. "Who slugged me?"

He was wide-eyed. "Nobody, Bill, you just fell over. Are you sick; can I get a doctor?"

I got up, swaying. "Carry on for a minute. Be all right, got to sit down." I walked toward the office. Halfway there the pain got me again. I leaned on the wall until it passed. I sat at my desk, shut the door and tried to light a cigarette. The pain came back. It was like hammer blows between the eyes. I blacked out. When I came round I felt better. Tim was in the office with me. He was picking up the phone. I reached out for it. He said, "No, Bill; you're sick. Got to get a doctor."

I took the handset from him. "I'm all right. It's gone off now. Just a dizzy spell. Got a call to make." The phone was ringing for Ginger before I realized what I was doing. I slammed the receiver down as if it had suddenly got hot. I'd been about to tell him not to scrap the Scarlet Lady after all, I'd take her over myself.

I stood up and went to the door. I'd got to get out for a bit. I said, "You'll have to carry on for a while, Tim. If anybody comes tell 'em I'll be back later." I left him staring, got in the Vauxhall and drove away.

The pain came back but I kept moving. It eased when I was ten miles from the garage. I kept going. The tank was full and I didn't care where I went. I had to have time to think.

An hour later I was deep in the country. I pulled up at a little pub, cleaned my hands, ditched my overalls and

went in. I had a beer and a couple of sandwiches. After that I walked. I found a place where a brook ran close to the road. There was a swell of ground that made it secluded. I could see neither cars nor houses. That suited me fine. I sat and smoked and looked at the water and the late autumn colors of the trees. It was the middle of the afternoon before I realized I was hungry. I got up feeling better than I'd done for weeks. I told myself I must make a note of the place and bring Sheila sometime. It would be great in the summer. I drove back to the garage. When I got there Tim had locked up and gone. I went home.

I made some excuse about the lunchtime and settled in front of the telly. About nine I got up. I said, "I'm just slipping down the road for a packet of fags, love. Shan't be long." I didn't stop at the off-license of course. I drove out to Ginger's place. The moon was up when I got there. Everything had an unreal, ghostly appearance. I got out of the car and looked over the gate. A skull watched me from across the field. I climbed the gate and started to walk toward it. I just had to know.

From the road the car had looked intact but when I got closer I saw Ginger had been as good as his word. She was a shell. The bonnet was there and the windshield, but the rest of her body from the doorpillars back had been stripped down to the chassis. Remnants of headlining moved gently like funeral ribbons. She had no wheels; her brakedrums were resting on piles of bricks.

I walked back round in front of her. She could still glare. I shook my head and stared at her for a long time. I said softly, "Could you have done that, sent those pains? Was that how you felt when the torch got you?"

There was no answer of course. I took a step forward. I said, "I've never seen anything like you. Can a machine be sentient?"

I heard something crack and leaped away. The bricks gave and the ruined body lunged forward. The brakedrums dug in the grass and she stopped a yard from my feet. She'd come as far toward me as she could, without wheels. . . .

I took the gate at a run and started up the Vauxhall. I didn't even use the mirror until I had streetlamps behind me.

Tim had to go past Ginger's place the next day and I

asked him to keep a lookout. He came back and said the job was almost done; Ginger had stripped her to the chassis and taken her engine out. I felt a wave of relief. At long last and far too late, that was the end of her.

I was wrong just once again. On the Saturday of that week she did the worst thing ever. And of course, I had to be there to see it.

Last thing on Friday a chap came in with an old Morris. The dynamo had burned out, could I find him a replacement? I phoned about but nobody had a spare. I tried Ginger. As I'd expected he'd got a shelf full of the things.

I drove over myself next morning as I wanted to make sure I got the right unit. I saw Ginger across the field. He had a heavy chassis propped up on its side and he was working on it with a torch. I recognised all that was left of the Scarlet Lady. I went into the shed and started rummaging about. A lad came out and looked in the door. I said, "It's all right, son; I always help myself. Tell Ginger I've come for the dynamo, will you?" He nodded and scuttled away.

I saw the thing I wanted and reached to lift it down. As my hand closed on the casing there was a crash from across the field and a series of noises that I suppose you could describe as screams. A pair of legs started running. I was attached to them so I went along.

I found out the details of what happened later. The boy told Ginger I was there and he nodded, cut off the flame, shoved his goggles up on his forehead and turned away to hang the torch on the gas cylinders. As he did so the chassis fell over. There was no reason for it; it was supported well enough. The side member hit Ginger behind the knees, knocked him on his face and pinned him. It didn't hold him with any great weight. It didn't have to. The part that lay across his legs was the part he'd just been working on, and the edges of the steel were red-hot. . . .

I forced myself to go back there on the Sunday. I found all the combustible parts of the car, the seats, tires, even the floorcarpets, made a pile of them and burned them. I finished cutting the chassis apart, working on it as it lay in the grass. By the time I'd done no piece was over two feet long. I dealt with the body paneling the same way. I got the block out of the shed and smashed the top hamper with

a sledge. I cracked up the gearbox and diff, the dynamo, the starter motor, even the battery. I got it all into a heap and left it. On Monday I called the man who collected Ginger's scrap and made it worth his while to do a special trip. I went over to show him what I wanted loading. When he saw the bits he shoved his cap back and laughed. He said, "What's you done to this one then?"

I said, "Cut it up."

He shook his head. "You haven't cut it up, mate; you've bloody murdered it."

We got the block onto the lorry, then all the rest of the junk. When we'd finished he got in and started up. I watched the lorry bumping away.

I saw something lying in the grass. I shouted after him. "Hang on, we've missed a bit." I picked up the length of girder, walked to the tailboard and threw it over onto the load. Something bit my hand sharply and I snatched it back. There was a long gash across the palm where a sharp edge had sliced the flesh.

I waved the lorry away, stood until its engine faded in the distance. Then I looked at my wet, bright hand and started to laugh. I leaned on the shed and let the noise come out, building a tower of sound. When I was through I walked to the Vauxhall. A mile up the road I remembered I'd still got the Scarlet Lady's keys somewhere. I stopped, searched my pockets till I found them and threw them over a hedge. I drove home.

As a matter of fact, I'm writing this in the hospital—I seem to have got a touch of septicemia from this hand. I've enjoyed the rest and the opportunity to write all this down, but I'll be glad to get home. Though Christ knows the doctors—several of them now—seem determined to dramatize everything: screens around the bed all day, if you please.

This is a somewhat different story for Avram Davidson, who usually leans toward richly detailed backgrounds and strong, pungent characterizations. Here his style is sparse, a bit Chandleresque. The story is still quite recognizably Avram Davidson, though.

THEY LOVED ME IN UTICA

Avram Davidson

The room was dirty and badly lit and it smelled strongly of cheap, greasy food and of something else, which the girl noticed as soon as she came in.

"You're at the wine again, huh? You can't wait till after the performance?"

"And what the hell is the idea, may I ask, of telling everybody you're my daughter? My daughter, for crying out loud! Who do you think is going to believe that?" he wanted to know.

They were at it again.

Nobody was sup*posed* to believe it, she said. It was just a convention. As a matter of fact, it would stand a better chance of being believed if the story was that she was his *grand*-daughter, but she wanted to save his face.

If this meant that he was supposed to look on with fatherly approval while some young punk made a play for

her, he said, in that case, he didn't want his face saved, and she could forget the whole idea. Convention! That was a hot one! Since when was she getting so conventional? As if anyone in this burg gave a damn if they were married or not.

"I went over great in Utica," he said. "Capacity house. They loved me in Utica." He drank some more of the sneaky pete. The girl, who had opened her mouth, closed it again. She cocked her head and shook it, half-annoyed, half-pitying. He was apt to go off on tangents like that, more and more every day. The guy was going to pieces fast. But she still thought she'd be able to pull him together again. All he needed was a little success—although, of course, a big one wouldn't hurt, either. Not in a one night stand like this, of course. But if he went over good here, if he just got his self-confidence back, if he'd stay away from the wine, if—

He was still a good-looking guy, with lots of stuff none of these young studs had. His voice was still good, even if he couldn't take the high notes. She noted that he'd cut himself shaving again, and this, for some reason, annoyed her.

"You mean *you* don't care if we're married or not!" she snapped. "All I am to you is a traveling shack-up job." But her heart wasn't in it, and he could tell it wasn't.

"Now, Honey," he said. "Don't pick at me, Sweetie. I'm a sick man. There's nothing the matter with a little light wine. It's like medicine, it's good for you. Have some."

But she said, No, thank you. "How about going over your material some more?" she suggested.

He shrugged. "I don't need to go over it. Once I learn a thing I never forget it. The rhapsodies—"

"Will you for heaven's *sake* please for*get* the rhapsodies?"

"—and the hymns—"

"Forget the hymns *too!* 'All new material' is what you're giving them here, remember?" Yes, he remembered. But he still had his doubts. The ballads were okay; though, boy! what a lie to call them "new"! Maybe they were new here, but, golly, he was singing them before the war—not the last war, the one before it. But he gave them up when the rhapsodies started going over so good.

Then, seeing her frown, he hastily said, "But they're good

stuff, the ballads. I had good material, nobody had better. They don't write material like that anymore."

He brooded over his cup. The girl could hear the crowd (if you could call that handful of yokels a crowd!), and this reminded her that the guy's act was supposed to open. "Okay, so you know the stuff. So let's hear it. The strings in tune?" He ran his fingers over them, nodded. He was still in the dumps. "Hey, you never told me where you picked up the ballads." Not that she really cared.

The guy shrugged. "Who the hell knows. Here, there. One of them—this one—" He sang the opening line. His voice was a little husky, but it was warm and sweet. "I was knocking it off with this hoofer, see . . . But you don't want to hear about that. . . . In those days I used to figure, once you're in big-time, you're always in. What did I know? Never figured I'd be singing for cakes in the boondocks again. But that's the way it is. You're only as good as your last season, kid. Gee, this past winter was the toughest I ever remember. I used to go down to the islands every winter. Haven't been able to afford it for years."

He warmed up to his troubles. ". . . and then the sky-pilots started in on me. 'What's with this guy?' they complain. 'Who needs *his* hymns?' I tell you, Sweetie, once you're down, they all jump on you. It's a great life if you don't weaken." An idea rippled its way across his face. He threw a swift, sly glance in her direction.

How would it be, he said; how would it be if he just threw in one, maybe two, of the rhapsodies? After all, they'd be expecting it. That was what made his rep.

She looked at him and shook her head with a bitter little smile. "Some people never *learn*," she said. "Can't you face up to it that the old material is strictly from Oldsville? Just give the ballads everything you've got. And, oh, say, listen. The M.C. says to throw in a little narration. Some story connecting the songs together."

"Yeah, but doll. I mean, these ballads. Like there *isn't* any story connecting them together. *You* know. There's *war* bits, *love* bits, *trag*edies . . . but, uh, no *story*."

Then he'd have to vamp one, she said; make it up as he went along. Why, for crying out loud! she complained—he, of all people, shouldn't have any trouble thinking up stories.

"Boy!" she said, "when I remember the stories you told *me!* Hey. What's with the tears bit all of a sudden?"

It took a minute, but he got control of himself. Then he said, "My lamps are giving out on me, babe. I can't even shave myself anymore. I can hardly make you out, over there. Don't leave me, kid. What would I do?" She didn't say a word. "Anything you want. A story to hold the songs together? All right. Sure. I can do that. But don't run out on me. Don't—"

The M.C. knocked, and came in without waiting for an answer. There were wine-stains on his clothes, and his sandals were badly scuffed, but he had a measure of coarse handsomeness; a long look passed between him and the girl which the older man didn't see.

"You ready to go on, Grandpa?" he asked.

"Who the hell are you calling 'Grandpa'?" the singer snapped, forgetting his troubles.

The M.C. bowed, exaggeratedly. "Oh, pardon *me,*" he said. "Are you ready to go on now, O sweet singer, whose songs deserve the laurels for all times to come?"

"That's better. That's the way to talk to the servant of the Muses . . . that's what somebody once called me in Utica, you know. They loved me in Utica. Hand me my strings, hon. Sure I'm ready. And, say—listen, pal: Give me a big build-up, will you, huh?"

"Yeah, yeah . . . sure— Oh, say, listen: Y'got a new name for your new act, so I can announce it?"

The old man gaped and blinked and moved his mouth, started to give his head a shake, No.

But swiftly the girl interposed. "A lot of these songs are about Troy, aren't they? Or what's the other name they used to call it? Ilium? Okay, then: so call your set the Troiad. Or the Iliad. What the hell's the difference?— Here's your lyre, Homer, honey. . . ."

When my wife Carol read this story she said, "I see why you like Borges so much: he's just like M. C. Escher." Absolutely right. If you've seen any of Escher's meticulous drawings in which he distorts and plays with reality, you'll recognize the kinship in Borges' fascinatingly detailed *ficcion* about the Library that was the universe.

THE LIBRARY OF BABEL

Jorge Luis Borges

By this art you may contemplate
the variation of the 23 letters . . .
The Anatomy of Melancholy,
part 2, sect. II, mem. IV

The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors. The distribution of the galleries is invariable. Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase. One of the free sides leads to a narrow

hallway which opens onto another gallery, identical to the first and to all the rest. To the left and right of the hallway there are two very small closets. In the first, one may sleep standing up; in the other, satisfy one's fecal necessities. Also through here passes a spiral stairway, which sinks abysmally and soars upwards to remote distances. In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Men usually infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite (if it really were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite. . . . Light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps. There are two, transversally placed, in each hexagon. The light they emit is insufficient, incessant.

Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth; I have wandered in search of a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues; now that my eyes can hardly decipher what I write, I am preparing to die just a few leagues from the hexagon in which I was born. Once I am dead, there will be no lack of pious hands to throw me over the railing; my grave will be the fathomless air; my body will sink endlessly and decay and dissolve in the wind generated by the fall, which is infinite. I say that the Library is unending. The idealists argue that the hexagonal rooms are a necessary form of absolute space or, at least, of our intuition of space. They reason that a triangular or pentagonal room is inconceivable. (The mystics claim that their ecstasy reveals to them a circular chamber containing a great circular book, whose spine is continuous and which follows the complete circle of the walls; but their testimony is suspect, their words obscure. This cyclical book is God.) Let it suffice now for me to repeat the classic dictum: *The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible.*

There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say. I know that this incoherence at one time seemed mysterious.

Before summarizing the solution (whose discovery, in spite of its tragic projections, is perhaps the capital fact in history) I wish to recall a few axioms.

First: The Library exists *ab aeterno*. This truth, whose immediate corollary is the future eternity of the world, cannot be placed in doubt by any reasonable mind. Man, the imperfect librarian, may be the product of chance or of malevolent demiurgi; the universe, with its elegant endowment of shelves, of enigmatical volumes, of inexhaustible stairways for the traveler and latrines for the seated librarian, can only be the work of a god. To perceive the distance between the divine and the human, it is enough to compare these crude wavering symbols which my fallible hand scrawls on the cover of a book, with the organic letters inside: punctual, delicate, perfectly black, inimitably symmetrical.

Second: *The orthographical symbols are twenty-five in number.*[1] This finding made it possible, three hundred years ago, to formulate a general theory of the Library and solve satisfactorily the problem which no conjecture had deciphered: the formless and chaotic nature of almost all the books. One which my father saw in a hexagon on circuit fifteen ninety-four was made up of the letters MCV, perversely repeated from the first line to the last. Another (very much consulted in this area) is a mere labyrinth of letters, but the next-to-last page says *Oh time thy pyramids*. This much is already known: for every sensible line of straightforward statement, there are leagues of senseless cacophonies, verbal jumbles and incoherences. (I know of an uncouth region whose librarians repudiate the vain and superstitious custom of finding a meaning in books and equate it with that of finding a meaning in dreams or in the chaotic lines of one's palm. . . . They admit that the inventors of this writing imitated the twenty-five natural symbols, but maintain that this application is accidental and that the books signify

[1] The original manuscript does not contain digits or capital letters. The punctuation has been limited to the comma and the period. These two signs, the space and the twenty-two letters of the alphabet are the twenty-five symbols considered sufficient by this unknown author. (*Editor's note.*)

nothing in themselves. This dictum, we shall see, is not entirely fallacious.)

For a long time it was believed that these impenetrable books corresponded to past or remote languages. It is true that the most ancient men, the first librarians, used a language quite different from the one we now speak; it is true that a few miles to the right the tongue is dialectal and that ninety floors farther up, it is incomprehensible. All this, I repeat, is true, but four hundred and ten pages of inalterable MCV's cannot correspond to any language, no matter how dialectal or rudimentary it may be. Some insinuated that each letter could influence the following one and that the value of MCV in the third line of page 71 was not the one the same series may have in another position on another page, but this vague thesis did not prevail. Others thought of cryptographs; generally, this conjecture has been accepted, though not in the sense in which it was formulated by its originators.

Five hundred years ago, the chief of an upper hexagon[1] came upon a book as confusing as the others, but which had nearly two pages of homogeneous lines. He showed his find to a wandering decoder who told him the lines were written in Portuguese; others said they were Yiddish. Within a century, the language was established: a Samoyedic Lithuanian dialect of Guarani, with classical Arabian inflections. The content was also deciphered: some notions of combinative analysis, illustrated with examples of variation with unlimited repetition. These examples made it possible for a librarian of genius to discover the fundamental law of the Library. This thinker observed that all the books, no matter how diverse they might be, are made up of the same elements: the space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. He also alleged a fact which travelers have confirmed: *In the vast Library there are no two identical books.* From these two incontrovertible premises he de-

[1] Before, there was a man for every three hexagons. Suicide and pulmonary diseases have destroyed that proportion. A memory of unspeakable melancholy: at times I have traveled for many nights through corridors and along polished stairways without finding a single librarian.

duced that the Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages. Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books.

When it was proclaimed that the Library contained all books, the first impression was one of extravagant happiness. All men felt themselves to be the masters of an intact and secret treasure. There was no personal or world problem whose eloquent solution did not exist in some hexagon. The universe was justified, the universe suddenly usurped the unlimited dimensions of hope. At that time a great deal was said about the Vindications: books of apology and prophecy which vindicated for all time the acts of every man in the universe and retained prodigious arcana for his future. Thousands of the greedy abandoned their sweet native hexagons and rushed up the stairways, urged on by the vain intention of finding their Vindication. These pilgrims disputed in the narrow corridors, proffered dark curses, strangled each other on the divine stairways, flung the deceptive books into the air shafts, met their death cast down in a similar fashion by the inhabitants of remote regions. Others went mad. . . . The Vindications exist (I have seen two which refer to persons of the future, to persons who perhaps are not imaginary) but the searchers did not remember that the possibility of a man's finding his Vindication, or some treacherous variation thereof, can be computed as zero.

At that time it was also hoped that a clarification of humanity's basic mysteries—the origin of the Library and of time—might be found. It is verisimilar that these grave mysteries could be explained in words: if the language of philosophers is not sufficient, the multiform Library will have produced the unprecedented language required, with

its vocabularies and grammars. For four centuries now men have exhausted the hexagons. . . . There are official searchers, *inquisitors*. I have seen them in the performance of their function: they always arrive extremely tired from their journeys; they speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them; they talk with the librarian of galleries and stairs; sometimes they pick up the nearest volume and leaf through it, looking for infamous words. Obviously, no one expects to discover anything.

As was natural, this inordinate hope was followed by an excessive depression. The certitude that some shelf in some hexagon held precious books and that these precious books were inaccessible, seemed almost intolerable. A blasphemous sect suggested that the searches should cease and that all men should juggle letters and symbols until they constructed, by an improbable gift of chance, these canonical books. The authorities were obliged to issue severe orders. The sect disappeared, but in my childhood I have seen old men who, for long periods of time, would hide in the latrines with some metal disks in a forbidden dice cup and feebly mimic the divine disorder.

Others, inversely, believed that it was fundamental to eliminate useless works. They invaded the hexagons, showed credentials which were not always false, leafed through a volume with displeasure and condemned whole shelves: their hygienic, ascetic furor caused the senseless perdition of millions of books. Their name is execrated, but those who deplore the "treasures" destroyed by this frenzy neglect two notable facts. One: the Library is so enormous that any reduction of human origin is infinitesimal. The other: every copy is unique, irreplaceable, but (since the Library is total) there are always several hundred thousand imperfect facsimiles: works which differ only in a letter or a comma. Counter to general opinion, I venture to suppose that the consequences of the Purifiers' depredations have been exaggerated by the horror these fanatics produced. They were urged on by the delirium of trying to reach the books in the Crimson Hexagon: books whose format is smaller than usual, all-powerful, illustrated and magical.

We also know of another superstition of that time: that of the Man of the Book. On some shelf in some hexagon (men reasoned) there must exist a book which is the formula and

perfect compendium *of all the rest*: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god. In the language of this zone vestiges of this remote functionary's cult still persist. Many wandered in search of Him. For a century they exhausted in vain the most varied areas. How could one locate the venerated and secret hexagon which housed Him? Someone proposed a regressive method: To locate book A, consult first a book B which indicates A's position; to locate book B, consult first a book C, and so on to infinity. . . . In adventures such as these, I have squandered and wasted my years. It does not seem unlikely to me that there is a total book on some shelf of the universe;[1] I pray to the unknown gods that a man—just one, even though it were thousands of years ago!—may have examined and read it. If honor and wisdom and happiness are not for me, let them be for others. Let heaven exist, though my place be in hell. Let me be outraged and annihilated, but for one instant, in one being, let Your enormous Library be justified. The impious maintain that nonsense is normal in the Library and that the reasonable (and even humble and pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception. They speak (I know) of the "feverish Library whose chance volumes are constantly in danger of changing into others and affirm, negate and confuse everything like a delirious divinity." These words, which not only denounce the disorder but exemplify it as well, notoriously prove their authors' abominable taste and desperate ignorance. In truth, the Library includes all verbal structures, all variations permitted by the twenty-five orthographical symbols, but not a single example of absolute nonsense. It is useless to observe that the best volume of the many hexagons under my administration is entitled *The Combed Thunderclap* and another *The Plaster Cramp* and another *Axaxaxas mlö*. These phrases, at first incoherent, can no doubt be justified in a cryptographical or allegorical manner; such a justification is verbal and, *ex*

[1] I repeat: it suffices that a book be possible for it to exist. Only the impossible is excluded. For example: no book can be a ladder, although no doubt there are books which discuss and negate and demonstrate this possibility and others whose structure corresponds to that of a ladder.

hypothesi, already figures in the Library. I cannot combine some characters

dhcmrlchtdj

which the divine Library has not foreseen and which in one of its secret tongues do not contain a terrible meaning. No one can articulate a syllable which is not filled with tenderness and fear, which is not, in one of these languages, the powerful name of a god. To speak is to fall into tautology. This wordy and useless epistle already exists in one of the thirty volumes of the five shelves of one of the innumerable hexagons—and its refutation as well. (An *n* number of possible languages use the same vocabulary; in some of them, the symbol *library* allows the correct definition *a ubiquttous and lasting system of hexagonal galleries*, but *library* is *bread* or *pyramid* or anything else, and these seven words which definite it have another value. You who read me, are You sure of understanding my language?)

The methodical task of writing distracts me from the present state of men. The certitude that everything has been written negates us or turns us into phantoms. I know of districts in which the young men prostrate themselves before books and kiss their pages in a barbarous manner, but they do not know how to decipher a single letter. Epidemics, heretical conflicts, peregrinations which inevitably degenerate into banditry, have decimated the population. I believe I have mentioned the suicides, more and more frequent with the years. Perhaps my old age and fearfulness deceive me, but I suspect that the human species—the unique species—is about to be extinguished, but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret.

I have just written the word "infinite." I have not interpolated this adjective out of rhetorical habit; I say that it is not illogical to think that the world is infinite. Those who judge it to be limited postulate that in remote places the corridors and stairways and hexagons can conceivably come to an end—which is absurd. Those who imagine it to be without limit forget that the possible number of books does have such a limit. I venture to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: *The Library is unlimited and cyclical.* If

an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order). My solitude is gladdened by this elegant hope.[1]

Translated by J. E. I.

[1]Letizia Alvarez de Toledo has observed that this vast Library is useless: rigorously speaking, *a single volume* would be sufficient, a volume of ordinary format, printed in nine or ten point type, containing an infinite number of infinitely thin leaves. (In the early seventeenth century, Cavaleri said that all solid bodies are the superimposition of an infinite number of planes.) The handling of this silky vade mecum would not be convenient: each apparent page would unfold into other analogous ones; the inconceivable middle page would have no reverse.

Barrington J. Bayley, a British writer, has produced a story written in the high fantasy vein of Tolkien. There's beauty here, and wonder—but also a deep sense of foreboding.

THE SHIP OF DISASTER

B. J. Bayley

The great *Ship of Disaster* rolled tirelessly over the deep and endless ocean. Long she was, strong and golden, and the somber waters washed like oil beneath her prow. Yet a ship of disaster she truly was: vapors obscured the air about her, and nowhere could a horizon be seen. Her crew knew not where to find land, and already her hasty provisions ran low.

For it was by disaster that this ship lived. Disaster had struck the yards that built her, and now disaster had run its full course upon the elf-nation that had equipped her for war.

On a high seat in her poop languished Elen-Gelith, elf-lord of the Earth's younger days when men had not yet come into their own. "Disaster," he promised to himself, "shall come upon any accursed enemy that I find!" His hands, like thin wax laid on bone, rested negligently, yet there was power in them, as ever there was in an elf's grace.

His pale and beautiful features were calm for all his anger; but his eyes, large and black, gazed at nothing but his own dark reflections. For it did not suit an elf to see his people defeated in battle, their cities reduced and their navies scattered.

And as he brooded his dark and pointed thoughts, a cry came from the look-out. A ship to port! The elf-lord's prayer was answered! Swiftly the *Ship of Disaster* heeled about, seeking surcease for her injured pride. Her war-gear had long been prepared, her warriors hungry for vengeance.

Drawing closer, a hint of disappointment showed on Elen-Gelith's face. This was no enemy's ship, for they were easily recognizable, as huge hulking beasts of the sea which wallowed with its drift. This was a ship built by men, a wretched craft compared to the elf-lord's shining war-galley, for men had none of the elves' science in ship-building. Nevertheless it was rumored that they had traded with trolls in times past, and apart from any other consideration Elen-Gelith's temper was far from good. Cold and sharp, his silvery voice rang out.

"Ram them broadside!"

The second officer echoed the command. With a series of rhythmic thuds the oars turned the ship about, and poised for a bare second.

The water, on which the two ships stood like a king's mansion beside a peasant's hut, was covered with a fine mist. The oars dipped and drove. The *Ship of Disaster*, carried forward by the labors of troll galley-slaves, smashed the defenseless vessel with her underwater beak.

Elen-Gelith, still not stirring from his sheltered chair in the poop, laughed with the full flavor of malice. He gave a fresh command, and his sailors were quick to do his bidding, pouring slick green oil upon the sea where human survivors struggled to stay afloat. A lighted brand followed, and Lo, the elf galley floated unharmed upon a sea of fire! The specially treated wood of her own tall hull was proof against the flame she used to such deadly purpose.

Yet there was one who survived even that peril. As the galley's bow fell upon his vessel, he had leaped upwards to cling to her carved and painted woodwork. Now, as the blistering heat of the blazing ocean billowed over him, he

pulled himself up the ship's side and dropped into her slave-pits.

He did not stay there long. The burning wreck, the searing ocean, were scant yards astern when he was dragged before Elen-Gelith. The elf looked disdainfully on his prisoner. To him, a man was little more than a brute beast.

"Speak, animal, if you have the wit to do it," he said. "What do they call you in that coarse grunting you use for talk?"

The man answered in the merchant's tongue, a low-class derivation of elf-language crudely known the world over. "Ours was a trading ship!" the man protested angrily. "You had no call to attack us. As for my name, I have no obligation to tell it."

"Ho, ho!" The elf-lord was amused. "This is an animal not yet fully domesticated! That was ever the pity among men, so I hear." A harder glint came into the elf's eyes. "Well, animals can be tamed."

He signaled, with one finger. A cruel lash descended, twice, on the man's back. "Your name?" Elen-Gelith demanded, distantly.

The man spat impotently. "Kelgynn of Borrod, son of Jofbine, whom you have just sent to the bottom of the ocean."

"Such terrible dangers these sailors meet!" taunted the elf. "Well, Kelgynn of Borrod, we have lost one of our trolls. Alas for the poor fellow, he fell sick and had to be thrown overboard. I fear you have no troll's muscles, but you will have to do."

By now the elf-lord was no longer looking at him. He gazed over his head, towards the prow, as if already he was returning to deeper problems.

"To the bench with him," he ordered absently.

With surprising elfin strength slender hands yanked at Kelgynn and threw him to a vacant place at the rear of the oar-benches. Dazed, he submitted to being chained with the light, clinking metal elves used, reputedly stronger than the finest iron.

At first he refused to work. But gradually, partly by the punishment meted out to him, partly by the indifference of the elf hortator, he was persuaded to grasp the oar's handle and learn the stroke.

It was almost more than he could bear. The oar was made for trolls, not men. Like a great unwieldy stanchion, it was so big that his hands could hardly get purchase. Before and behind him, the great beveled oars kept up their inexorable sweep, forcing him to keep pace until his body cried out for rest.

After endless hours the trolls were fed, and he heard their snorts and grunts of satisfaction. A chunk of putrid meat was thrown down at him. He turned his head away in nausea. Even had the meat been fresh, it was from an animal that to him was utterly uneatable. He retched as the foul odor entered his throat and nostrils, and, seeing his distaste, the elf took it up again. A few minutes later a small cake of bread was handed to him.

Despite his misfortune, Kelgynn grinned. It was elf-bread, worth half a fortune in his home town, for few humans ever tasted elves' food. As he bit into the tiny loaf the bread dissolved in his mouth, nothing of it reaching his stomach. Immediately its vivifying effects ran through him like a woman's touch, but he knew that it would not sustain him properly, as it would a finer-bodied elf.

Scarcely had he taken his hands from the oar when a lash touched his back as a signal to resume rowing. The bull-like trolls rumbled mournfully, throwing up waves of indescribable perspiration. Head drooping with weariness, Kelgynn pulled on his oar, trying beyond hope to keep up with the aloof pounding of the hortator's drum.

On and on rowed the *Ship of Disaster.* Elen-Gelith stared eternally ahead from his position in the poop of the steady-driving vessel. The fit of temper which had gained him a rower availed him of no real pleasure. He was not one to feel triumph in petty victories. But elves are constant creatures, and the icy rage which blew through him at the thought of his people's defeat would not soon, if ever, abate.

Elen-Gelith knew not where they were bound. They were hopelessly lost in this strange mist. His sole hope for salvation—if an elf can be said to harbor hope in his heart—was that if they continued on without changing direction, sooner or later they must strike land. So, patient but tense, he waited.

In this manner six days passed, and despite the vast dis-

tance covered the look-out remained silent. The sea stayed placid, gleaming with strange dull colors and lifting with a regular mechanical swell. Hanging in cold curtains, the vapors cut off the world fifty yards away, creating the illusion that the ship made absolutely no progress.

On board, the situation had reached danger point. The galley's provisions, already scanty by reason of her urgent departure and the failure of the crops the year before, were all but gone.

Yet there appeared to be little that could be done. Casting about for some small action, Elen-Gelith had his officers bring the man to him. The new prisoner had not been much use as a rower. For one thing, it had proved impossible to keep him awake for more than three days, whereas trolls, like elves, could if need be live indefinitely without sleep. True, trolls achieved this only at the cost of hideous daydreams, fearful ancestral memories which rose before their eyes and plagued all their waking hours with suffering and terror . . . but this little concerned their elf masters. And after a while the trolls were grateful for the whips which kept them awake. For without goading now, they fell despite their most desperate efforts into an even worse slumber, a sleep of which they lived in perpetual horror, in which they were assailed by nightmares a hundred times more unbearable.

So Kelgynn, who slumped in an envied sleep of exhaustion across his oar, was called for. He was dull-eyed for some time after they dragged him from his bench, but after the elf-lord had generously allowed him a mouthful of wine, he recovered sufficiently to speak.

"Animal," Elen-Gelith told him, "we have nothing to feed you with, unless you care after all for trolls' food."

"Elf bread suits me well enough," Kebynn answered wearily, "though I find it somewhat thin." Then, as his senses awoke, he suddenly understood the elf's meaning.

"So," he said wonderingly, "you have nothing to eat, either."

After a brief hesitation, Elen-Gelith nodded.

Yet already his interest in the conversation seemed to have waned, and he gazed with an abstracted expression over Kelgynn's head. Not knowing his purpose, Kelgynn

waited, surmising that perhaps he would be sent back to the bench.

Abruptly the elf pricked up his pointed ears and leaned forward to look more closely at him.

"Tell me," he said in a confidential tone, "are you acquainted with these waters?"

Slowly Kelgynn shook his head. "None of us knew of it. We were trying to find a new passage to Posadoras."

"Posadoras?" The elf raised his eyebrows. "You were truly off course."

"As well we knew. We had almost despaired of seeing land again, when you sighted us."

The elf leaned back, becoming meditative. "A sad idea for a sailor to have."

Kelgynn shrugged.

Elen-Gelith sighed resignedly, gazing blandly across the warship's deck, into the sea and mist. The mist, hanging and eddying, drifted abstractedly, placing a vague pearly layer over all surfaces, even here under the lord's awning.

Kelgynn was truly amazed at how much more amiable Elen-Gelith had become. The sudden change of mood was inexplicable by the simple standards of his own folk.

"Without doubt this is an uncommon region," the elf went on in a friendly tone," and I have never seen the like. I confess to you, human, this sea lies outside my knowledge of the oceans, also. I do not know where we are, and hardly more do I know how we got here."

Then he leaned towards Kelgynn again, and his voice became more commanding. "Now you will tell me how *you* came to enter the Misty Sea."

"I already have told you. We were seeking a route to Posadoras."

"And that is all?"

Kelgynn hesitated.

"Speak on," Elen-Gelith urged. "You have somewhat to say?"

"Perhaps it is of interest," Kelgynn said at last, "so I will speak of it. Our shamans performed a sacrifice before we sailed. No sooner had the magic sticks been dipped in the blood than the sky was covered from east to west with a single flash of lightning. One shaman said it was a good omen, another bad. Well, good or bad, we put to sea. Fifteen

days into strange waters, there was another lightning flash. From then on the ocean began to change. We sailed for another twenty days before . . . you came upon us."

"And how do you account for this lightning?"

"By the skill of our shamans in sacrifice."

Kelgynn glanced apprehensively at the elf, to see whether his boast would evoke jealousy in his haughty, acute countenance. Elen-Gelith laughed mockingly. "Semi-sentient humans speak of *magic,*" he said. "We elves have *science.* But pray continue with your tale."

"There is nothing else to tell," Kelgynn answered.

"Did you, also," he ventured, "see lightning?"

Inwardly Elen-Gelith snorted. Why, no—and if there had been any, how would he have noticed it amidst the uproar of the giant sea-battle? Torment take the animal! Would he have him tell of the earth-shaking Armageddon when the *Ship of Disaster,* like many other remnants, had fled to save herself? Yet if he were to tell the truth, he must admit that there had been a sense of weirdness aboard the vessel in those last stages, when they had been caught in a sudden rolling gust of mist, and had pulled hard into its friendly cover, escaping the furious black troll-fire and the pursuit of the enemy's barges.

Just the same, he could not accept the human's attempt to put a supernatural turn on events. This sea was a part of the world's geography, he was certain of that.

"I saw nothing," he answered flippantly, "but here is a marvel for you. The trolls have devised a fire which burns black, and nothing withstands it. What think you of that?"

Kelgynn smiled. He was cheered by the elf's admission that he was lost. Making up his mind, he decided there was no point in deference.

"The tricks of neither elves nor trolls impress me," he said flatly.

Elen-Gelith's unpupiled eyes glowed luminously. It was fortunate for the animal that he had no true mind, and his words were not significant. . . .

But Kelgynn had made a stand. "I see nothing in elves except conceit. Nothing in trolls except brute force. Shortly the world will see the end of both."

Elen-Gelith waved a hand negligently, aware that even in the animal kingdom men were an insignificant breed. His

prisoner had little comprehension of the great war being waged by the only two truly intelligent races of the world.

An age ago elf savants had casually observed men appear from random mutations among lower animals. Thus they sprang from quite different sources than did either elves or trolls. Why, elves had maintained their beauteous civilization for as long as record persisted! The whole Earth was but their playing ground. The man's pathetic attempts to claim magical abilities for his people could be taken as a sign of a dim awareness of his own inferiority.

Elves had no animal heritage at all. It was recorded that they had come into being as an act of self-creation. Springing into existence perfectly formed, of their own will, they were destined to be Earth's fairest flower.

Kelgynn pressed his point. "Listen," he said, maliciously earnest, "is it not true that your crops have been failing? Stories reach us. Your stores of elf-bread dwindle. In a few years you face starvation!"

A dangerous mood flickered involuntarily across Elen-Gelith's face. "That is due to the trolls."

Kelgynn pulled a small pouch from among the folds of his clothing. Opening its neck, he poured some of the contents into the palm of his hand. Tiny grains of a dull gold color glittered there.

"Look, *we* have food. Too coarse for elves, too fine for trolls, but food for men. We call it wheat."

Elen-Gelith stared at the grains. For no accountable reason something so terrible stirred in him that he could barely contain his emotion. With an effort at indifference he said: "What of it? And how easily you slander the masters of the world, whose skills and science none can match."

"For what do you use your science, besides your own gratification?" Kelgynn countered quickly. "Do you ever give thought to anything that does not further your own pleasure?"

The elf-lord started forward, startling Kelgynn with the cold flash of his visage. "You are too perspicacious, human. Learn to guard your tongue or it will be cut out."

For some seconds Kelgynn was intimidated. "They say elves had grace once," he murmured, half to himself, "yet look at this one—from the first meeting a murderer." As he said this, he glanced up again at Elen-Gelith.

Suddenly recovering his humor, the elf-lord enjoyed the frightened, white defiance of the young man's expression. "If you were an intelligent being," he said, "for those words you would have been tortured as only elves can torture. You being human, it is of no consequence. It only remains to decide whether we throw you overboard or keep you as food for our trolls, who soon will be growing hungry."

Kelgynn let the wheat grains fall to the deck.

"Tell me," Elen-Gelith continued after a pause, "what do men do when they run out of food at sea?"

"We carry little food in any case. We fish."

"You do what? Catch fishes?"

"Yes. The sea is bountiful."

Elen-Gelith reflected. "Could elves eat fishes, do you think?"

"I do not know. There are many kinds of fish in the sea."

"If you help me, Kelgynn of Borrod, I may set you free when we strike land."

Kelgynn laughed unpleasantly. "You think I would trust an elf's mercy! Just the same, I will fish for you, if only to fill my own stomach while I live. Give me a hook and line."

While the tackle was being prepared Kelgynn took his first close look at the *Ship of Disaster,* seeing in detail the long, high sweep of the decks, the beautiful abstract carvings which adorned the woodwork. A vessel of great size and mass, the ship depended for motive power solely upon troll rowers. The decks were inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl designs depicting elf-lore. Everywhere, in fact, was proof of untold wealth and craftsmanship, making a gleaming setting for the battle equipment which studded about.

Only one thing marred the effect. One side of the golden hull bore a long charcoal-black scorch-mark, the result of a badly aimed gout of troll-fire.

Everything came sharply to Kelgynn's eye. The lines of the ship, the enveloping vapor, the oily sea. His gaze lifted and lingered on the lonely elf commander. Kelgynn did not think he was wrong when he discerned behind the noble, aloof posture a spirit of overwhelming dejection.

Yes, she was a wondrous creation, this foreign war-galley. Wondrous, powerful, dutifully-functioning. But for all her beauty she carried the flavor of all elves: self-contained arrogance. Elf civilization was materialistic, inbred.

As for trolls, their character might be different; but the same errors lay ingrained in their being.

Elen-Gelith gave an order for the rowers to ship their oars. The trolls bellowed in wild despair, pulling at their chains and begging to be given no respite. But the elf masters seemed not to hear, and perforce the wretched slaves gave themselves up willy-nilly to the all-dreaded sleep.

Deprived of motive power the *Ship of Disaster* coasted a short distance before giving herself up to the regular swell of the ocean. Kelgynn cast his line into an undisturbed sea.

Elen-Gelith returned to his thoughts.

For many hours he lounged in his high seat, his mind still, calm, but all-encompassing and brooding. No amount of intellectual detachment—and elves had plenty of that—could make elves emotionally dispassionate. One look at their physical forms, their sharp glowing faces, their light, nerve-burning bodies, would have assured any creatures of that. Elen-Gelith would retain his steady-burning elf emotions, would remain cruel, egotistical and unremitting, even though his mind ranged to the far reaches of the universe and found that all existence cried out against his ways. Of all other inquiries he might make, he would never question his own nature.

Even so, the constant creature suffers more than the flighty one; Elen-Gelith found no solace for himself, nor sought any. Not one moment came to salve the torment of his hot unwavering mind.

Bending, he picked up two of the grains the human had dropped, inspecting them curiously. The man had been right in his information, inadvertently reminding Elen-Gelith of the root cause of his fury. The trolls had evidently found a way to poison the crops, for year after year the downy harvest refused to blossom.

And at this very moment the same mighty enemy was laying waste the finest, as well as the most self-dependent, civilization that could ever exist from the beginning to the end of time.

Meanwhile, instead of returning to succor the elf-nation, the warship under Elen-Gelith's command was hopelessly, inexplicably lost.

This fact also gave him cause for much anguish.

He tossed the two grains aside, Unnoticed by him, they fell overboard.

"What?" he muttered to himself. "Will trolls rule the world?"

Eventually he rose and retreated back into the shadow of his awning. Here, on a small table, was a jug of wine and a bowl; also various small trinkets and figurines, such as any elf commander might carry with him to remind him of absent companions. He fingered one, smiling gently. Imt-Tagar, valiant soldier, burning with his ship in billowing black fire!

Elen-Gelith poured himself a bowl of wine.

Then a shout came from outside, and he stepped onto the open deck to see that the man was struggling with his tackle. Where the cord met the sea the water thrashed and swayed. Quickly the elf-lord motioned a sailor to help.

Suddenly the sea welled up and streamed from an enormous flat head fully five feet across.

Kelgynn gazed in fascination at the sea-beast which his fishing had so unexpectedly provoked. The hide seemed wrought in hammered copper. Strength and solidity gleamed from every scabrous knob, and Kelgynn stared into a partly-opened mouth which could have swallowed him whole.

The focus of his eyes shifted slightly; then he gasped in outraged horror. The beast was *looking* at him, with eyes revealing an intelligence which was unrefined, primeval, yet greater than his own.

Kelgynn's whole consciousness became fixed on the unknown space behind those staring eyes. A shiver of terrified delight vibrated through him. He seemed to have been sucked away from the immediate presence of the world.

Fantastic notions formed in his brain. The beast clearly stared at something more than just him. The eyes seemed to reflect something beyond his ability to perceive. *"Future,"* they glinted. *"Future."*

In the beast's eye, Kelgynn fancied he saw the motion of the unfolding future.

The experience was over in a second. He staggered back. At the same time the iron-snouted head disappeared into the sea.

Moments later he realized that the line was still pulled.

He hauled feebly until a stronger-nerved elf came to his side, and together they heaved a fish over the side.

Once on the deck the fish ceased to struggle and lay still, giving Kelgynn and the elves time for a leisurely study. It was nearly the size of a man. Its skin had a pearly pallor, delicately tinged with pink. Its back was a broad expanse, carrying a shallow superstructure of pink sea-shell, built up into elaborate decorations and whorls. Along the sides, dipping slightly in towards the curve of the belly, ran twin rows of fluted orifices. The thinly-ribbed fins and tail glistened in all colors, translucent, shining.

The mouth lay open, showing creamy white flesh torn by the metal hook. The eyes were closed—to Kelgynn's surprise, for he had never seen a fish's eyes close before. Long, curved eyelashes rested on the soft skin.

The effect was that of a sleeping babe.

Then, through the fluted orifices which Kelgynn had taken to be gills, air sighed, building up to a mewling, distressed cry. Kelgynn even thought he detected half-coherent words, voiced in helpless protest. It was exactly like the cry of a distressed child.

Unlike Kelgynn, the elves seemed unaffected. A pause descended on the *Ship of Disaster*, during which Elen-Gelith came forward, his cloak falling into listless shapes about his spare body, bending to inspect Kelgynn's catch.

He looked up and caught Kelgynn's eye with an interrogative glance.

Cold sweat broke out in the palms of Kelgynn's hands. What did the elf commander intend to do with this—monster?

"Quite so," the elf said, quietly thoughtful. He motioned to his sailors. "Dispose of it."

While the corpse was being heaved over the side he turned to Kelgynn. "Now cast your line again."

"Have you not seen enough?" Kelgynn muttered, his eyes on the deck.

"Enough? Enough for what?" The elf's voice was supercilious and threatening. "Keep to your bargain or the penalty is quick and final."

Kelgynn dared a brief look into Elen-Gelith's unblinking eyes. Did the elf not sense the potency in this deep sea?

Something wakeful, implacable, reducing all purpose to vanity.

The elf-lord regained his awning and disposed himself leisurely on his seat. "Make your choice," he said casually, looking the other way.

Kelgynn vacillated for a moment, trying not to shiver. "I would not care to fish here again," he said in a subdued voice, "but I'll risk it elsewhere."

The elf nodded absently.

With a great concerted groan of relief the trolls awakened from their noisy, horrid slumber, pleading mournful gratitude to the lashes of their keepers. Soon the oars were unshipped, and the great vessel was under way.

Then all was silent aboard the elf ship save for the slow beating of the hortator's drum, the thud and creak of the oars, the desultory wash of water as the blades lifted from the sea. Since boarding the *Ship of Disaster* Kelgynn had felt no hope for himself, but until now he had not cared unduly. Now a dark shadow came over his mind. He felt an immeasurable foreboding.

He sank so deep into himself that at first he failed to notice the stir of interest that suddenly rustled through the crew of the ship. When he did finally turn his attention to the cause of the interest, all he saw at first was a vague movement and color in the distance.

But as they drew closer definite forms appeared, claiming his attention with a still, soundless lure.

They were more like pictures than real objects. Shapes, blocks, sights and scenes projected themselves up from the deep, spilling over the face of the sea. They were ever-changing, rising up, displaying, falling and transforming like the turning pages of a book. Unimaginable buildings, streets and bridges spread themselves over the water. It was a scene of silent, deliberate activity.

Kelgynn blinked. He could not make up his mind at first if he really saw what he saw. It was like a film of memory occluding what lay before the eyes. Or like a vivid dream which persists in the mind's eye, overlaying the real world, for several seconds after a man has forcibly awoken.

But even this impression did not take away the color, the clarity, the senses of presence. If it was a phantom, it was

an external phantom, not a derangement of the mind—unless this whole impossible sea was such a derangement.

No comment was made on the decks. The ttolls' muscles bore them steadily onwards into the region of the strange visions, and Kelgynn looked to left and right. Then they were in the midst of a fantastic city. Broad avenues, vast boulevards, giant buildings and throngs of people debouched onto the sea, and lingered, to be replaced by others. Rectilinear shafts of towers soared skywards. He craned his neck, up and up, but the summits simply disappeared into the mist.

"What is this we see?" wondered Elen-Elith to himself. Yet in fact he already half knew, for he also had looked into the sea-beast's eyes. He saw images of future ages.

The thought brought into motion a deeper, frightful knowledge which he fought to quell, for as they passed he had been inspecting closely the phantom inhabitants of this phantom city. Now they came to another part of it, which after a while he realized must be a harbor. The realization took time, for it was by no means immediately that he was able to recognize the huge shapes resting there as . . . ships. They were such gigantic ships as made his own *Ship of Disaster* seem no more than a boat.

The elf craft bore down on one such floating mountain, and within seconds they had passed through the dull gray hull and were rowing through a cavernous interior. The vision hung around them, floating like thoughts in the mind. Unfamiliar contrivances lay about, tended by . . . men.

Where were the elf overseers who should have been supervising these animals? There were none. There had been none in any of the scenes in the city; and the men did not wear the expressions of slaves.

The elf-lord looked sharply this way and that, shifting uncomfortably. Then, despite all his efforts at self-control, a shudder passed right through him.

Kelgynn, who had moved closer, noticed this and laughed cruelly.

Kelgynn himself did not know it, but this was the sea of the Earth's imagination. Here the Earth dreamed and thought to herself, planning the clothing with which she would adorn herself in future. But the talk of the shamans

came easily to him, and now he cast aside all caution and spoke up again.

Breaking through the opposite side of the metal hull, the ship came into the open sea. Behind them, the fantastic visions died away like spoken words.

"Does this prove what I said?" he cried. "The world has finished with elves! You think the Earth is just dead matter with which you can do what you will. But it is the *Earth* that created us, for her own pleasure. You elves have taken all the pleasure for yourselves and ceased to be of use to her."

Elen-Gelith said softly: "You were not given permission to speak, animal."

Kelgynn tossed his head. "Arrogance still blinds you. You do not realize that you are completely in the power of the world in which you exist. If it cuts off its support, you perish."

Earnestly he continued: "Listen. You think the trolls poisoned your crops—but the truth is that they believe the same of you. Their herds of three-horns and long-necks are no longer breeding, and for this they blame the elves."

Elen-Gelith glared at him, for the first time in his centuries-long existence faced with a completely new fact.

"It is the Earth herself who has denied you food," Kelgynn told him. "For hundreds of years you have robbed her without giving anything in return. Inevitably, she has withheld her bounty; for you, the soil no longer works. And while you still pride yourself on your science, your knowledge decays steadily."

Impudent worm! All that mattered in the whole universe was that elves lived and ruled.

Elen-Gelith was silent.

Presently he stirred, and spoke to his officers in a silvery tone.

"Bring me one of those sluggards on the benches," he demanded. "The brightest, if there be any bright ones among them."

A troll was led onto the deck, a bull-shouldered brute wearing an expression of woe-begone melancholy, dull-eyed from long years on the bench. He blinked, and skirted nervously round the inlaid pictures of elf mythology, snort-

ing with superstitious fear. Kelgynn allowed himself to feel a trace of pity for the creature's degraded condition.

"Tell me, fellow," the elf-lord said sharply, "what do you understand by what you have seen?"

The troll's short, curved horns waggled; he seemed incapable of answering. To Kelgynn it was clear that he thought nothing of what he had seen. His slavery had broken his spirit, and unlike the penetrating elf, he took little interest in things new. He thought of nothing but home, where earthy, strong-smelling trolls huffed in carousal, sometimes sad, sometimes ebullient, and cow-like troll maidens made the floors quiver with their tread.

"Away with this moron!" Elen-Gelith said after a moment. "Over the side with him!"

Lowing in ineffectual protest, the troll was herded to the side of the ship and brought up against the railing, where he cowered miserably. A few seconds afterwards there was a heavy splash.

Elen-Gelith called a halt.

"Will this place do?"

"Eh?" Kelgynn growled.

"Fish!"

"Fish be damned! I'll do no more for an extinct species."

Elen-Gelith half rose in his seat. Kelgynn fell back, gasping with shock. He had never seen such emotion. As he gazed, spellbound, he saw that behind elfin loftiness lay a gloom more intense, more hopeless of cessation, than the merely human frame could have borne.

The elf-lord made a gesture, of whose meaning his servants were well conversant. Kelgynn was hurled over the plush railing of the ship and hit the ocean with a quiet, soon-forgotten splash.

This time he made no attempt to climb the hull. The sea was cold and slick as it closed over his head, lacking in salt. Kelgynn sank, waiting for the few seconds to pass before he must draw that oily, painful water into his body.

Then he became aware of salt on his lips, and sea-sounds in his ears. A surging wave dashed against his head to cover him in spray.

When he breathed in, tangy air filled his lungs. He opened his eyes. The elf ship, the alien ocean, were gone.

He saw an azure sky and a warm sun, beneath which a living ocean swelled and sparkled. Not far off, he saw a white line of foam and a yellow beach, and tall trees.

"Thanks, elf-lord," he thought. "You said you would spare my life."

He struck out towards the shore.

Elen-Gelith seated himself again. "Forward!" he called in his high, yelping voice.

He sat in the poop, alert, intelligent, utterly despondent. Provisioned only with despair, the *Ship of Disaster* drove steadily on, occasionally veering in vain attempts to find a direction, landless, futureless, but ever vengeful.

Joanna Russ has stirred a lot of enthusiasm with her sf novels *Picnic on Paradise* and *And Chaos Died,* both fast and sharp-edged adventures in the future. The present story finds her in a much different mode, rather wistfully ironic. (She subsequently adapted this story as a one-act play, which was produced by a small theatre company in New York to very good reviews.)

WINDOW DRESSING

Joanna Russ

Mannequins—as everyone knows or should know—have only one aim in life: to make some pervert fall in love with them. It is because no one loves them that they have no souls; and because they have no souls that their lives, perfect and beautiful as they are, are so queerly disconnected, for every mannequin dreads that time of night when the lights are turned off in the windows. Then, not being seen, she ceases to see herself, and the memories dictated to her by the dress she is wearing (mannequins change their memories every time they change their souls) completely disappear. Then she falls into an uneasy, troubled sleep and dreams vague, unpleasant dreams of the factory in which she was made, of plaster, paint and lumber, of spinning down con-

veyor belts, of horrid whirrings and grindings—but then she wakes up. The sun is out, oh bliss! and she wears a hostess gown and remembers, as clearly as clearly can be, dinner at the St. Regis and a drive in Central Park. It is a great comfort to exist again. They know, of course, that they will eventually die, having first been chopped up or melted away or crushed for industrial fill or land reclamation, but even though they know it, they are brave and there is always the chance that someone—someone—

Marcia was wearing a bathing suit when William first saw her. She had the stiffish, uncomfortable look mannequins adopt at such times. She knew that the bathing suit (it was a revealing one) showed the lines where her hips joined her waist, and in a helpless, frustrated rage she arched her arms, spread her fingers, and threw back her whole body as if to say "Do with me what you please; I'm still more beautiful than *you!*" But William did not know this. Had Marcia only been aware of it, it was all the same to William whether she had a crack at her waistline or not; for he had never seen a real woman in a bathing suit, being far too terrified to look at one. He was not afraid of the mannequins, however. With deep respect he investigated her perfect feet, her aristocratic legs, her gay arms flung back; he even returned his glance to her suit (she had no navel) and tried to pierce the obscurity of her dark glasses to see what painted, fretted moth-lashed eyes could match that tip-tilted nose and that enchanting, pouting, fashionable mouth. He stared at her, moving his tongue slowly over his front teeth. Marcia could not move, of course, but she could see him plainly, a fat young man in a zip-front cloth jacket and glasses, and she was in ecstasy. A radiant flame seemed to bathe her from head to foot. To her he was in every way the handsomest and best of mankind, for mannequins know nothing of men; the male figures they sometimes have to associate with in window displays are, without exception, sheep-faced juveniles with nothing at all on their minds and hardly more on their faces. Moreover, as the mannequins say, "*They* can't do anything for a girl." Thus Marcia kindled, thus she bloomed, thus she threw back her arms more gaily than ever, and pouted and posed and tried (even though she was wearing a bathing suit) to show him how she appreciated, no, how she loved him, and how happy she

would be if only he could transport her to Southampton or the West Indies to wear her Bergdorf bathing suit on the real beach under the real sun, and to be a real woman forever. William, on his part, gulped, swallowed, stirred a little, and then went away. And that was the beginning.

Now the year wore on, and William went away and came back; the leaves fell in the park and Marcia wore a raccoon coat and carried a little flag; William pressed his nose, morning and evening, against the glass; it snowed and Marcia was clothed in a black evening gown; William came on his lunch hours and Marcia noticed that he carried books; William waved and Marcia radiated. She began to look respectfully (as well as she could without moving her eyes) at the objects placed in the window with her, especially the books, for she thought "I shall have to read things and go places when I am a woman." One day the designer (towards whom the mannequins feel as towards God) came into the window and clothed Marcia in a pink cocktail dress reminiscent of the twenties. He put shoes on her feet and a headache band on her head. He adjusted the pole that held her up and arranged her arms and legs so that she seemed to be dancing. He left a copy of a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald open at her feet and Marcia tried to read the back jacket, for she thought "I shall have to know about such things when I am a woman." William came at six o'clock when the street lights were lit and the snow gleamed in the park. He stared at her for a long time. One of Marcia's arms was up and one was down; her body bent forward and one pointed foot barely touched the ground, its knee glowing rosily through the pink silk fringes of her dress. Her blue-gray eyes beamed softly, her mouth laughed, her enchanting nose enchanted twice as much as it ever had before. Slowly, glancing first to each side of the street to make sure that nobody saw him, William printed a kiss on the glass; then suddenly, with a leap as if an electric shock had run up the sidewalk into the soles of his shoes, he shouted one unintelligible word and raced away. Marcia was desolate. She tried to move. She could not, of course, but the headache band unaccountably slipped down over her face (an indignity that frightens and disgusts every mannequin). Her mind was in complete turmoil; why had he run away? Why had he come at all then? Had he changed his mind? She

was not used to such perplexities. She laughed and danced in her window, although she would have wept if she had been a woman, and when the lights went out late at night she had very unpleasant dreams, dreams of bumps and shocks, of strange sounds, of swinging up and down, of stopping and starting, of something flapping, smothering, and crushing her in folds. It was the worst nightmare she had ever had. She tried to cry out, but mannequins cannot speak; she tried to wake up, wishing urgently, bitterly for daylight, and as the last series of shocks stopped—something bumping rhythmically on her head—there was light, she was someone, she was somewhere, and she woke up.

William was kneeling before her. She was in a room unlike any window she had ever lived in. "Is this where Daisy lives?" she thought wonderingly (for she had read about Daisy on the book jacket the day before) but just at that moment an excruciating pain, a sort of dissolving sting, shot up her arm; William had kissed her hand.

"Oh you moved, you moved, I knew you would!" cried he, burying his face in her skirt, and throwing his arms around her knees, he proceeded to tell her all about himself. The same unbearable pain flashed through all of Marcia's plaster limbs but she kept quite still for mannequins have great pride of *metier,* and even when the pain was at its worst she did not move, only rocking back and forth a little as William hugged her. He was kissing her all over her face. Then he stood back and beamed. He scurried to the other end of the room and washed his hands and face, drying them in an old towel. He squirmed out of his jacket. "You can trust me," he said. "I used a glass-cutter. They'll never find you." He smiled slyly. "I knew you were looking at me," he said.

"I love you," said Marcia. William dropped his towel.

"You spoke to me!" he cried. "You spoke to me!" She smiled.

"Yes," she said. It was difficult to speak. It was difficult to smile, or to move, but she smiled again (a little stiffly) and moved (a little stiffly) until William prevented her walking towards him by rushing up to her, grabbing her hand, and dropping to his knees. "Speak to me," he said.

"Hello," said Marcia. She felt light as air. "You're charming," she said. "Do you think I'm charming? Do you read F.

Scott Fitzgerald? Is this the Colony? Can we dance here?"

"No," said William, a little crestfallen, "I don't dance."

"I do," said Marcia, "I dance the Charleston," and she went dancing around the room, her skirt swinging, filled with delight, crying "Charleston! Charleston! Charleston! Charleston!"

"Ssssh!" cried William, "Sssssh! somebody'll hear you!"

"Charleston, Charleston, Charleston!" screamed Marcia, "Oh—how—I—love—the—Charleston—"

"Stop it, stop it!" shouted William, and chasing after her, he tripped and fell on top of her to the floor where she still sang out "Charleston! Charleston!" her legs moving as if she were dancing. Mannequins never take much notice of what position they are in, since the pole holds them up when they are vertical and they are often stored horizontally in warehouses. But after an instant Marcia realized the position she was in, whereupon she said very reproachfully, "Oh William, you're taking advantage of my position" and smiled very sweetly as he let her get up. It was easy to smile now.

"My name is Marcia," she said. "Is this the Colony?"

"Uh . . . no," said William.

"Then I can't stay here," said Marcia, looking in William's shaving mirror (which hung over the bureau) and fixing her hair. "Because it's not the Colony, you see." She turned to look at him. "Are you F. Scott Fitzgerald?" she said.

"No," said William.

"Are you a Princeton man?" she asked.

"Uh . . . no," said William, his head sinking.

"Not a Princeton man!" cried Marcia, shocked. "Don't tell me you're a Yale man!"

"Uh . . . no," said William.

"Where *did* you go to college?"

"Uh . . . nowhere," said William.

"Nowhere!" she cried.

William bowed his head. Marcia was silent. After a moment she stealthily pulled her skirt away from contact with him and slid one foot towards the door, but William—anticipating her—rushed between them. Marcia pouted. William wrung his hands. Marcia tapped her foot. She shrugged angrily and, practicing little dance steps, began to move

towards the door, but William, in terror at her leaving him, ran after her and clutched at her dress.

"You're not a gentleman, you're not a gentleman, stop it!" shouted the mannequin. William grabbed her arm and Marcia struggled; William tried to kiss her and Marcia began to cry; William begged and pleaded and Marcia maintained stubbornly that this was not the Colony, she knew it was not the Colony, and why was he keeping her from the dance? She could not get rid of the idea that there was a dance going on somewhere nearby. William glared and panted, terrified that she might run away from him into the street; Marcia beat at him with her hands and tried intermittently to dance; William pulled at her and Marcia screamed: William grabbed her by the dress—and the dress ripped from top to bottom. Both stood stock-still. Marcia did not breathe. At this sacrilege, this desecration, she could scarcely keep on her feet; she felt her personality, her whole world, her very consciousness totter. Hardly knowing what she did she ran to the window; windows had always been her friends; she had lived all her life in windows; and it was with a confused idea of getting back to Bergdorf's and the designer, back to the beautiful backgrounds and the still, shining lights, that she climbed up on to the sill and jumped out.

William restrained her. Unfortunately her head fell out of the window in the process. He stood stupefied for several seconds. Then as the sound of Marcia's head shattering on the sidewalk below penetrated his mind, he dropped what was left of her, her headless body, her dress, her shoes and all the rest in one convulsive moment, leaped violently into the hall, and ran out of the house. He never came back.

And Marcia? She lay in William's room for almost a week. Then, as the room was to be rented, she was put out into the street along with the china figurine of a dog, a load of William's books and some garbage for the Sanitation Department. A painter from Hoboken found her first. He took her to his studio where he propped her against a wall among the mice, the dropped paint rags, and the used-up tubes. He gave her shoes to one friend and her dress to another; now he uses the sheet he had draped about her to wipe his brushes on. Even without a head a mannequin is sentient in a blind, slow, slug-like way, and the various

giggles, shrieks and titters Marcia perceives from time to time distress her very much. They do not seem quite proper. Very slowly she is turning into a thing, forgetting her window at Bergdorf's, forgetting William, forgetting everything—no personality can come to her from the sheet and the paint for these are too real, and in a few months she will be nothing but a piece of plaster. Every once in a while the painter takes his latest girl to see the headless body, and the girl—a plump, coarse-skinned travesty of a Bergdorf mannequin—laughs at her.

"*That's* Pop Art, if you please!" says the artist.

He despises it.

Sometimes we get just intimations of what other worlds are like—things slip through the cracks between worlds, or seep through the walls. Sometimes we notice them, and think about them, and learn from them; sometimes we don't. It depends on whether we're paying attention.

Harry Harrison

BY THE FALLS

It was the rich damp grass, slippery as soap, covering the path, that caused Carter to keep slipping and falling, not the steepness of the hill. The front of his raincoat was wet and his knees were muddy long before he reached the summit. And with each step forward and upward the continuous roar of sound grew louder. He was hot and tired by the time he reached the top of the ridge—yet he instantly forgot his discomfort as he looked out across the wide bay.

Like everyone else he had heard about The Falls since childhood and had seen countless photographs and films of them on television. All this preparation had not readied him for the impact of reality.

He saw a falling ocean, a vertical river—how many millions of gallons a second did people say came down? The Falls stretched out across the bay, their farthest reaches obscured by the clouds of floating spray. The bay seethed and boiled with the impact of that falling weight, raising foam-capped waves that crashed against the rocks below. Carter could feel the impact of the water on the solid stone as a vibration in the ground but all sound was swallowed

up in the greater roar of The Falls. This was a reverberation so outrageous and overpowering that his ears could not become accustomed to it. They soon felt numbed from the ceaseless impact but the very bones of the skull carried the sound to his brain, shivering and battering it. When he put his hands over his ears he was horrified to discover that The Falls were still as loud as ever. As he stood swaying and wide-eyed one of the contantly changing air currents that formed about the base of The Falls shifted suddenly and swept a wall of spray down upon him. The inundation lasted scant seconds but was heavier than any rainfall he had ever experienced, had ever believed possible. When it passed he was gasping for air, so dense had been the falling water.

Quivering with sensations he had never before experienced Carter turned and looked along the ridge toward the gray and water-blackened granite of the cliff and the house that huddled at its base like a stony blister. It was built of the same granite as the cliff and appeared no less solid. Running and slipping, his hands still over his ears, Carter hurried toward the house.

For a short time the spray was blown across the bay and out to sea, so that golden afternoon sunlight poured down on the house, starting streamers of vapor from its sharply sloping roof. It was a no-nonsense building, as solid as the rock against which it pressed. Only two windows penetrated the blankness of the front that faced The Falls—tiny and deep, they were like little suspicious eyes. No door existed here but Carter saw that a path of stone flags led around the corner.

He followed it and found—set into the wall on the far side, away from The Falls—a small and deepset entry. It had no arch but was shielded by a great stone lintel a good two feet in diameter. Carter stepped into the opening that framed the door and looked in vain for a knocker on the heavy iron-bolted timbers. The unceasing, world-filling, thunder of The Falls made thinking almost impossible and it was only after he had pressed uselessly against the sealed portal that he realized that no knocker, even one as loud as cannon, could be heard within these walls above that sound. He lowered his hands and tried to force his mind to coherence.

There had to be some way of announcing his presence.

When he stepped back out of the alcove he noticed that a rusty iron knob was set into the wall a few feet away. He seized and twisted it but it would not turn. However, when he pulled on it, although it resisted, he was able to draw it slowly away from the wall to disclose a length of chain. The chain was heavily greased and in good condition—a fair omen. He continued to pull until a yard of chain emerged from the opening and then, no matter how hard he pulled, no more would come. He released the handle and it bounced against the rough stone of the wall. For some instants it hung there. Then with a jerky mechanical motion, the chain was drawn back into the wall until the knob once more rested in place.

Whatever device this odd mechanism activated seemed to perform its desired function. In less than a minute the heavy door swung open and a man appeared in the opening. He examined his visitor wordlessly.

The man was much like the building and the cliffs behind it—solid, no-nonsense, worn, lined and graying. But he had resisted the years even as he showed their marks upon him. His back was as straight any young man's and his knob-knuckled hands had a look of determined strength. Blue were his eyes and very much the color of the water falling endlessly, thunderously, on the far side of the building. He wore knee-high fisherman's boots, plain corduroy pants and a boiled gray sweater. His face did not change expression as he waved Carter into the building.

When the thick door had been swung shut and the many sealing bars shoved back into place the silence in the house took on a quality of its own. Carter had known absence of sound elsewhere—here was a postive statement of no-sound, a bubble of peace pushed right up against the very base of the all-sound of The Falls. He was momentarily deafened and he knew it. But he was not so deaf that he did not know that the hammering thunder of The Falls had been shut outside. The other man must have sensed how his visitor felt. He nodded in a reassuring manner as he took Carter's coat, then pointed to a comfortable chair set by the deal table near the fire. Carter sank gratefully into the cushions. His host turned away and vanished, to return a moment later with a tray bearing a decanter and two glasses. He poured a measure of wine into each glass and set one

down before Carter, who nodded and seized it in both hands to steady their shaking. After a first large gulp he sipped at it while the tremors died and his hearing slowly returned. His host moved about the room on various tasks and presently Carter found himself much recovered. He looked up.

"I must thank you for your hospitality. When I came in I was—shaken."

"How are you now? Has the wine helped?" the man said loudly, almost shouting, and Carter realized that his own words had not been heard. Of course, the man must be hard of hearing. It was a wonder he was not stone deaf.

"Very good, thank you," Carter shouted back. "Very kind of you indeed. My name is Carter. I'm a reporter, which is why I have come to see you."

The man nodded, smiling slightly.

"My name is Bodum. You must know that if you have come here to talk to me. You write for the newspapers?"

"I was sent here." Carter coughed—the shouting was irritating his throat. "And I of course know you, Mr. Bodum—that is I know you by reputation. You're the Man by The Falls."

"Forty-three years now," Bodum said with solid pride, "I've lived here and have never been away for a single night. Not that it has been easy. When the wind is wrong the spray is blown over the house for days and it is hard to breathe—even the fire goes out. I built the chimney myself—there is a bend part way up with baffles and doors. The smoke goes up—but if water comes down the baffles stop it and its weight opens the doors and it drains away through a pipe to the outside. I can show you where it drains—black with soot the wall is there."

While Bodum talked Carter looked around the room at the dim furniture shapes barely seen in the wavering light from the fire and at the two windows set into the wall.

"Those windows," he said. "You put them in yourself? May I look out?"

"Took a year apiece, each one. Stand on that bench. It will bring you to the right level. They're armored glass, specially made, solid as the wall around them now that I have them anchored well. Don't be afraid. Go right up to it. The window's safe. Look how the glass is anchored."

Carter was not looking at the glass but at The Falls outside. He had not realized how close the building was to the falling water. It was perched on the very edge of the cliff and nothing was to be seen from this vantage point except the wall of blackened wet granite to his right and the foaming maelstrom of the bay far below. And before him, above him, filling space, The Falls. All the thickness of wall and glass could not cut out their sound completely and when he touched the heavy pane with his fingertips he could feel the vibration of the water's impact.

The window did not lessen the effect The Falls had upon him but it enabled him to stand and watch and think, as he had been unable to do on the outside. It was very much like a peephole into a holocaust of water—a window into a cold hell. He could watch without being destroyed—but the fear of what was on the other side did not lessen. Something black flickered in the falling water and was gone.

"There—did you see that," he called out. "Something came down The Falls. What could it possibly be?"

Bodum nodded wisely. "Over forty years I have been here and I can show you what comes down The Falls." He thrust a splint into the fire and lit a lamp from it. Then, picking up the lamp, he waved Carter after him. They crossed the room and he held the light to a large glass bell jar.

"Must be twenty years ago it washed up on the shore. Every bone in its body broke too. Stuffed and mounted it myself."

Carter pressed close, looking at the staring shoe-button eyes and the gaping jaws and pointed teeth. The limbs were stiff and unnatural, the body under the fur bulging in the wrong places. Bodum was by no means a skillful taxidermist. Yet, perhaps by accident, he had captured a look of terror in the animal's expression and stance.

"It's a dog," Carter said. "Very much like other dogs."

Bodum was offended, his voice as cold as shout can be. "Like them, perhaps, but not of them. Every bone broken I told you. How else could a dog have appeared here in this bay?"

"I'm sorry, I did not mean to suggest for an instant—Down The Falls, of course. I just meant it is so much like

the dogs we have that perhaps there is a whole new world up there. Dogs and everything, just like ours."

"I never speculate," Bodum said, mollified. "I'll make some coffee."

He took the lamp to the stove and Carter, left alone in the partial darkness, went back to the window. It drew him. "I must ask you some questions for my article," he said but did not speak loudly enough for Bodum to hear. Everything he had meant to do here seemed irrelevant as he looked out at The Falls. The wind shifted. The spray was briefly blown clear and The Falls were once more a mighty river coming down from the sky. When he canted his head he saw exactly as if he were looking across a river.

And there, upstream, a ship appeared, a large liner with rows of portholes. It sailed the surface of the river faster than ship had ever sailed before and he had to jerk his head to follow its motion. When it passed, no more than a few hundred yards away, for one instant he could see it clearly. The people aboard it were hanging to the rails, some with their mouths open as though shouting in fear. Then it was gone and there was only the water, rushing endlessly by.

"Did you see it?" Carter shouted, spinning about.

"The coffee will be ready soon."

"There, out there," Carter cried, taking Bodum by the arm. "In The Falls. It was a ship, I swear it was, falling from up above. With people on it. There must be a whole world up there that we know nothing about."

Bodum reached up to the shelf for a cup, breaking Carter's grip with a powerful movement of his arm.

"My dog came down The Falls. I found it and stuffed it myself."

"Your dog, of course, I'll not deny that. But there were people on that ship and I'll swear—I'm not mad—that their skins were a different color from ours."

"Skin is skin, just skin color."

"I know. That is what we have. But it must be possible for skins to be other colors, even if we don't know about it."

"Sugar?"

"Yes, please. Two."

Carter sipped at the coffee—it was strong and warm. In spite of himself he was drawn back to the window. He

looked out and sipped at the coffee—and started when something black and formless came down. And other things. He could not tell what they were because the spray was blowing toward the house again. He tasted grounds at the bottom of his cup and left the last sips. He put the cup carefully aside.

Again the eddying wind currents shifted the screen of spray to one side just in time for him to see another of the objects go by.

"That was a house! I saw it as clearly as I see this one. But wood perhaps, not stone, and smaller. And black as though it had been partially burned. Come look, there may be more."

Bodum banged the pot as he rinsed it out in the sink. "What do your newspapers want to know about me? Over forty years here—there are a lot of things I can tell you about."

"What is up there above The Falls—on top of the cliff? Do people live up there? Can there be a whole world up there of which we live in total ignorance?"

Bodum hesitated, frowned in thought before he answered. "I believe they have dogs up there."

"Yes," Carter answered, hammering his fist on the window ledge, not knowing whether to smile or cry. The water fell by; the floor and walls shook with the power of it.

"There—more and more things going by." He spoke quietly, to himself. "I can't tell what they are. That—that could have been a tree and that a bit of fence. The smaller ones may be bodies—animals, logs, anything. There is a different world above The Falls and in that world something terrible is happening. And we don't even know about it. We don't even know that world is there."

He struck again and again on the stone until his fist hurt.

The sun shone on the water and he saw the change, just here and there at first, an altering and shifting.

"Why—the water seems to be changing color. Pink it is —no, red. More and more of it. There, for an instant, it was all red. The color of blood."

He spun about to face the dim room and tried to smile but his lips were drawn back hard from his teeth when he did.

"Blood? Impossible. There can't be that much blood in

the whole world. What is happening up there? What is happening?"

His scream did not disturb Bodum, who only nodded his head in agreement.

"I'll show you something," he said. "But only if you promise not to write about it. People might laugh at me. I've been here over forty years and that is nothing to laugh about."

"My word of honor, not a word. Just show me. Perhaps it has something to do with what is happening."

Bodum took down a heavy Bible and opened it on the table next to the lamp. It was set in very black type, serious and impressive. He turned pages until he came to a piece of very ordinary paper.

"I found this on the shore. During the winter. No one had been here for months. It may have come over The Falls. Now I'm not saying it did—but it is possible. You will agree it is possible?"

"Oh, yes—quite possible. How else could it have come here? Carter reached out and touched it. "I agree, ordinary paper. Torn on one edge, wrinkled where it was wet and then dried." He turned it over. "There is lettering on the other side."

"Yes. But it is meaningless. It is no word I know."

"Nor I, and I speak four languages. Could it have a meaning?"

"Impossible. A word like that."

"No human language." He shaped his lips and spoke the letters aloud. "Aich—Eee—Ell—Pea."

"What could HELP mean," Bodum shouted, louder than ever. "A child scribbled it. Meaningless." He seized the paper and crumpled it and threw it into the fire.

"You'll want to write a story about me," he said proudly. "I have been here over forty years, and if there is one man in the entire world who is an authority on The Falls it is me. "I know everything that there is to know about them."

Kris Neville, along with a select few other writers such as Roger Zelazny, is doing a good job preserving the openly romantic tradition in sf. *The Night of the Nickel Beer* is a story that draws heavily on nostalgia . . . but also on reality.

Kris Neville

THE NIGHT OF THE NICKEL BEER

Twelve thirty, Friday night. His wife slept.

In the darkness he got from the bed and dressed with no particular destination in mind.

He walked into the night air beyond the house. The time? He had forgotten his watch on the nightstand by the bed.

Forty. The turning point. Forty. Earlier, the cake with one candle: for the time of numbering the years wtih separate candles had passed, and now the one served to stand for the thirty-nine others as well. Forty. A brittle breaking. A mortal wound never recovered from. Entrance into a cavern. Would she miss the warmth of his body? Not likely, for she slept as though drugged, exhausted by her own day, as he had been by his until restlessness left him turning with pointless thoughts of time as the day passed into tomorrow. That was all last night, now.

The air was filled with ocean mist. The clean moisture entered his lungs, bringing youth again. Youth!

A world was blurred into a dim reality of shifting lights. A silent car came, its headlights flaring out and then being lost. Turn: no sign of the passage of the car, only the white, moving mist and the distant sounds without identity.

He walked, putting his hand in his pocket, feeling the change there between the thumb and forefinger: a twenty-five cent piece, pennies, perhaps a dime. His fingers could not distinguish the small coins, and there was an impulse to bring them out and hold them close before his face for identification.

He looked down at the swirling mist made alive by his movement. He walked on, turning from street to street. The coins in his pocket. The coins only. He had forgotten the billfold, lying with the watch on the nightstand.

Lights came from the darkness, smeared away in the ocean mist, and were absorbed. Lights falling into white darkness like his breath. Far sounds, bright as though near.

Now and then, passing him, the cars; he, now and then, passing the lights of some late establishment. The coins in his pocket. A cafe or perhaps a tavern ahead, after the timeless walk. Today, he remembered, California goes off daylight savings time.

He came abreast and paused and peered inside through the moist glass into the warm, bright interior, his face haloed with orange neon. A beer bar, he decided, drawn by its warmth. Inside were kids, a dozen or more of them, most gathered at a long central table, sitting quiet in the lateness of the hour. There a guitar. A girl with long blonde hair and eyes large and clear; seated beside her, a youth in a beret. Slow sipping of beer and talk. The taste of beer came to his mouth, bitter with hops, bringing thirst.

The young man in the beret looked toward the window. He smiled recognition and gestured, inviting the man in.

He turned to continue his solitary walk, feeling the coins in his pocket, but after a few steps, he hesitated, came back. After an indecisive moment, he entered the tavern, the mist swirling around him like a cloak. The young man in the beret smiled again, more distantly, as though identification, once certain, now hung on the rim of memory unabsorbed.

He nodded noncommittally. The tavern was small, and

he squeezed himself behind a corner table. He was only feet removed in space from the central table, but in time, now, cut off forever from its youthful occupants.

The tavern smelled of beer and of a particular moistness of young bodies. There was the sleepy, late-night softness of conversations, reluctant to end. The young man in the beret turned to look at him, as did his blonde companion.

He looked away, and waited for someone to come and take his order. Behind the bar, the bartender, resting on an elbow before the waitress with her tray. The mirror presented the waitress full face, and he saw himself, too, at the table, peering back from the reversed world captured in the hard, bright surface.

The clock above the bar mirror told the time: 1:05. Had it been yet turned back? Had this night-time hour, beginning at a previous 2:00 A.M., been regained by the world? He did not know how long he had walked. Was there less than one hour or two? No matter, he thought, thinking of the coins in his pocket. A few minutes, then back into the night, home at last to rejoin his wife, his body pleasantly tired from the unaccustomed late-night exercise.

The young waitress came, smiling. She put a smooth hand lightly on his table.

"A glass of beer," he said.

The conversation at the central table was of unfamiliar worlds, illuminated with the crystalline brightness of youthful fantasy. He studied the people. One wore patched corduroy pants, such as he had not seen for years, and sat far back in his chair, eyes partly closed. Another lifted the guitar and strummed idly, the strings capturing his restless fingers but not his tongue. Another poured from a pitcher to the brim of his glass, spilling none, forming a head hardly thicker than the mist outside, so slowly was the last careful tilt.

The waitress returned. "That will be a nickel, sir," she said.

A nickel. It had been many years since he had bought a glass of beer for a nickel. The quarter in his pocket suddenly extended time.

He brought out the change to inspect it in the light. A quarter, an old one, the pennies, and a dime.

He gave her the dime. "Keep the change," he said.

She smiled. "Thank you, sir," she said.

He settled back with the beer, cool and dark. The glass made circles on the table top, and the condensed moisture on the surface was cold to his touch. The taste was bright and flowery, more characteristic of European than American beer. He drank a long swallow and the liquid moved in his throat as though across an internal desert. He could not remember a time, since early childhood, when from his father's glass, beer had held that excitement for him.

"Won't you join us?" the young man in the beret asked.

He put down the glass.

"Please do," said his blonde companion. Her voice was soft, bringing memories of some former time. As she turned, he noted the jeans she wore were faded. A masculine white shirt, open at the neck, did not fully conceal the contours of her upper body, and part of her high, smooth collar bone was visible as a rise in the flesh. The broad belt above feminine hips embraced a waist scarcely thicker than he could encircle with his hands. She could not be over twenty years old, he thought, noting there was no glass before her place.

He was made welcome at the empty seat beside the girl. "Please go on with your conversation," he said. "Don't let me interfere, I'll just sit here listening."

"We were saying," the young man in the beret said, "when we saw you out there at the window that we'd seen you somewhere before."

"Where would that be?" asked the girl.

He smiled. "Perhaps you've confused me with someone else?"

With them at the long table, he felt a sense of belonging, as though in some way he were a contemporary of theirs, inexplicably grown older. They were talking about a movie he could not remember having seen but seemed vaguely to remember: there were some old stars in it. He felt his body slowly relax, and he drank again from the beer before him, and then once more, the glass was empty, the foam a little white circle near the top, and breaking invisibly on his upper lip. Suddenly he wished to remain here, in the soft quiet of this warmth and brightness, while the clock progressed to the uncertain hour.

The young man in the beret filled his glass from the pitcher on the table, emptying it. "Somewhere."

"Thank you," he said, observing the empty pitcher and signaling for the waitress. "Let me get another one." The waitress nodded at his gesture and turned to the bartender.

"Thank you for buying," said the girl, although she had no glass in front of her. He was embarrassed, because he could not ask her if he could buy her something. The pitcher would consume his change.

"I didn't come away with much money," he said apologetically. "I just came out for a walk."

"I wish I could remember where I've seen you," said the young man in the beret.

"I've lived in town for twelve years. Maybe you've seen me in a restaurant, somewhere like that, somewhere around."

"I'm not even sure it was here exactly," said the girl. She wrinkled her brow and brought her lower lip between her front teeth, thinking.

The waitress came with the pitcher, and he reached into his pocket. The hand came out with two quarters and the pennies. Both quarters were old, with milled edges worn to parent metal rather than the copper inner construction of recent mintage.

"Twenty cents," she said.

He passed the quarter to her. "Keep the change." He returned the remaining coins to his pocket.

"Pass it around," he said.

The young man in the beret complied, and most of the contents of the pitcher emptied into glasses, bright, cold, foamy.

"Funny," said the girl, her thoughts apparently still on the identity problem. He was conscious of a perfume he did not recognize and needed the time to place. It was too faint and subtle to activate pathways to other thoughts.

In the moment, then, it seemed to him that, in former days, the confused sense of identity might have arisen had one of his own group returned, one evening, with both age and amnesia. So again the feeling came that he was their contemporary, but returned from a long journey, perhaps to other worlds, while they had remained ageless and outside of time, suspended.

Meanwhile, coexistent with his thoughts, their conversa-

tion flowed as did the time itself, and the lateness grew. He listened momentarily to some middle point:

"I saw him come down the street on a motorcycle," said the man in corduroy. The guitar man strummed. "That was last Friday."

"Well, I didn't think he went in much for that, but he did sell the 'cycle day before yesterday."

An unfathomable subject, so he partly closed his eyes, hoping eventually to catch the background of the conversation, but feeling no compelling need to do so.

"That reminds me," the man with the guitar said, hitting the strings heavily for emphasis. "Same thing happened to a friend of mine about a year ago, although I think in his case it was an accident on the thing more than anything else." He paused from the strings and poured from the pitcher.

"Well, I never expected it."

He was content to sit among them, accepted as a member of the group, seeking to recreate some memory that he could not, for time had aged all his youthful companions and many were lost in memory and more were lost in the world. The ones around him, tonight, might, in their way, see themselves in him.

Outside his thoughts, the conversations went: of persons and places veiled with familiarity from an outsider. He drank again, and the pitcher he had bought was empty. The hands of the clock had moved to 1:35.

"Earlier we were talking about the beach," the man in the corduroy said. "We can sit in the cars there. Who wants to come?"

He looked at the faces around him, all eager and full of youth. His body was absorbing the warmth of the room, and for the first time he was conscious of the chill of the outside. He pictured the beach and the dark waves beneath the overcast, and the mists swirling around automobiles like smoke from some ice fire, and the picture he drew in his mind was beautiful with a strange heartbreak.

And suddenly a sense of panic came to him. He desperately wanted them not to leave him here in the tavern; but rather to stay until the inevitability of the clock forced them from him: to keep the soft murmuring conversation around him as a cloak against the night.

"Here," he said. "Let me get another pitcher of beer. "We've plenty of time!"

"They'll be closing soon," the man with the guitar said, strumming idly, looking at the remaining beer in his glass.

He signaled the waitress for a refill and she came with it. He reached into his pocket and brought out two quarters and the pennies. He gave one of the quarters to the waitress.

"Keep the change."

"If we're going to the beach, we'd better go. It's getting late."

"Might as well finish this new pitcher," he said. "Here. Here. Let me pour your glasses full. Maybe we'll even have time for another one."

And then he felt foolish, and sank back into his chair, waiting. The girl bent over him to the pitcher and refilled his own glass. "Anyone else?"

The man with the guitar, glancing at the clock, said, "Maybe a last one."

The pitcher was passed over.

He sat back, grateful.

The blonde turned to him and moved her hair with a hand. "You'll come with us to the beach? I've got my car, we can take it, and let them go on."

"Thanks for the invitation," he said. "But really, I don't think I can. But it's been very nice sitting here with you."

"They're about to close," she said. "We'll be leaving in a few minutes."

He could feel the alcohol moving in his thoughts, mellowing them. "I don't drink too much," he said. "I'll be leaving myself in a minute. Just finish this." Still, there was sharp disappointment, and his eyes went to the clock above the bar mirror: 1:40. Perhaps the regained hour of time was nearly passed, and closing time was inevitably upon the tavern.

The others were standing, their chairs making small sounds. The guitar player put away his instrument.

"Oh, come along," the girl said. "I'm not with anybody."

He shook his head, but he found himself standing when she stood, last to leave the table. There was nothing really to keep him any longer. She called to the departing troup: "See you at Malibu!"

At the door, the mist greeted him, and when they moved

outside, he and the girl were suddenly lost together in the swirling whitness, and he was pleased to be thus isolated with her.

"See me to the car, at least," she said.

He took her arm to guide her through the enveloping mist, hearing the sounds of car doors close and laughter and soft talk and motors respond.

"I'm right over here," she said. "Somewhere back here." She stumbled, and he held her for an instant at the waist, consciousness of her body exploding in him, leaving him short of breath and, in a way, frightened.

The car appeared from the mist, a model long out of date.

"It'll be bad driving tonight," she said. "Perhaps I won't go to the beach after all. Want to sit and talk a moment?"

The voice, throaty, and the perfume, came to him out of the mist, her features blurred away. She had opened the door, and he saw it swinging an invitation. "Slip through, under the wheel," she said.

A moment later, surprised at himself, he was surrounded by the darkness of the car and the clean leather smell of the upholstery. Outside was endless isolation. She was beside him, small and comfortable.

Again the fragrance, and he was conscious of her youthful warmth, and again, of the moist smell, perhaps coming from her hair where the mists of the ocean were imprisoned. She started the motor and let it idle, the car heater slowly bringing up the inside temperature with a warm and distant purr.

"You're a very beautiful girl," he said, feeling no particular strangeness sitting here with her, and instead, feeling again as he had felt in the parking lot when he momentarily supported her with an arm at the slender waist, above the softness of the hips. She, too, seemed conscious of the emotion, for she leaned back with a catch in her breath, and he studied her face in the dim light from the dashboard and marveled at the whiteness of her skin and its smooth and pliable youth, noting for the first time the absence of lipstick and any apparent makeup.

"I like this," she said, closing her eyes. "Here in the dark silence. In the warmth here. With the mist out there. Cutting us off from the world, just the two of us. We have a secret world in here. I'm glad you came tonight. I had hoped you

would, when I saw your face out there, in the window. It was as if I was waiting for you."

He wondered what memory of lost and present love he represented for her, what particular formulation of experience unlocked what swelling need for the quiet intimacy here. And with him, there was a sudden, all encompassing sense of nostalgia. He sat back, waiting, knowing what his next move should be and yet unable to take it. And she sat waiting, too, and for a long time there was silence, but for the sound of the heater and the sound of their breathing.

At last she said, "Whatever you're looking for, and you're looking for something, I can't ever give it to you, can I?"

"No," he said.

"I thought I could. This is just some kind of a dream that's real for both of us . . . isn't it?"

"I don't know," he said.

"And what I'm looking for, I'll never find," she said. ". . . There's going to be a war in Europe, and we're going to get involved, and I'm going to lose my future in it." She waved her hand toward the mist swirling outside the car. "This world . . . It's already vanishing. The war talk is in the air. Everybody knows what's coming. We're all just waiting. And nothing will ever be what we expect it to: nothing will ever be . . . the way we find it in the secret dreams we have. . . ."

He did not reply.

"You're sad," she said.

He waited, but there was nothing more to wait for.

"Everybody is sad, little girl, everybody, everywhere. But sometimes it takes a long time to admit it to yourself. Well, thank you for letting me sit in here for a little while. I guess you better go on to join your friends. I'd like to go with you, but I can't. It's late for me, and my wife will be worried."

She reached out to touch him, tears in her eyes, but already he was opening the door. He stood outside the car, looking in, seeing the small figure illuminated by dashlight.

He closed the door to the car and without looking back turned and walked away in the ocean mist. He wondered what time it was.

He walked many blocks before he regained his orientation and located a familiar street. He turned toward home. There was an aching tiredness in the muscles of his legs. In his

memory lingered the flowery taste of beer such as he could not remember since childhood.

And he knew that time is the one problem everybody faces that has no solution. Someday mankind might conquer space and spread itself across all the stars, but time is orders of magnitude more complex than the three-dimensional world, time is in the beginning and will be in the end, fixed and immutable and eternal, and men and women are forever helpless before it. One may search downward through the thousand layers of personality to understand his motives and unsnarl his complicated emotions, but in the end he will come inevitably to the unity which waits for all of us at the bottom of the universe: time.

As he walked, his hand went now and again to his pocket to feel the coins. There was a quarter and the pennies. Over and over again, he tried to will there to be two quarters, not one.

But one, alone, was all there was.

This is one of those rare stories that fully deserve the much-used phrase "haunting fantasy." It's strange, moody and intense, and you're likely to find yourself thinking about it long after you've finished reading it. Which is, of course, one of the things that good fiction is all about.

A QUIET KIND OF MADNESS

David Redd

Two golden eyes were staring at her out of the snowdrift. Maija stopped, stood there at the edge of the forest and gazed at the creature. It was large, about the size of a three-month old calf, and was covered with soft white fur which blended into the snow. Slowly she walked towards it, and the golden eyes followed her movements.

It was very like a polar bear cub, she decided. The muzzle was flatter, giving the white face a strangely human appearance, but on the whole the creature did resemble a bear.

"Who are you?" she asked softly, speaking more to herself than to the animal.

It heard her and half opened its mouth. She glimpsed a broad pink tongue behind two rows of shining white teeth.

Then the creature moved forward: Maija started back, hand on the knife at her belt. But it stumbled, and collapsed the snow at her feet. One of its paws fell across her left snowshoe.

She bent down, very cautiously, and lifted the paw. It was trembling. She pulled off her glove to feel the hairless pad on the underside of the paw. The skin was cold and almost violet in color.

At the touch of her hand the creature's eyelids parted, and she looked into the golden eyes again. All her fear vanished. This creature was cold and shivering, perhaps ill, certainly too weak to stand. The mute appeal in its eyes was only too easy to understand.

Putting her glove back on, she took hold of the creature's body and lifted it out of the snowdrift. It was surprisingly light, and she wondered whether its weakness was due to hunger. It made no attempt to resist. She had no difficulty in draping its limp form around her shoulders—like one of the fur wraps worn by the city ladies—for it allowed her to do what she liked with it. Only a very sick animal would trust her to that extent. She could feel its heart beating, very slowly.

She carried it through the pine forest, where she had made a path by cutting off the lower branches. Twigs brushed against the creature, but it made no protest. It did not even stiffen its muscles.

Maija emerged from the trees and carried on over the frozen lake. Her small timber hut was on the edge of the woods on the far shore. This part of the country was mostly water, with wide, shallow lakes separated by long narrow strips of tree-covered land. Now the waters were under the windswept ice: they would not reappear until the spring.

The hut was old, built entirely of wooden planks, with a turf roof now covered by the snow. Several small birds were fluttering round it as she arrived home. They did not fly away, for they had known her for years. In winter she always threw them the remains of her meals.

Maija unhooked the latch, pushed the door inward with her knees and carried her unprotesting burden inside. Its heartbeat seemed very slow indeed now.

She laid the soft white body on her bed, which was three feet above the floor, being the top of a small cupboard. The creature's back was smoothly curved, and very still. But the eyes were open, watching her.

The animal needed warmth and food, she decided. There was no trace of any injury on its body. She closed the door,

went over to the porcelain stove in the corner and poked some life into the fire. A blast of heat rolled out through the grille into the room, and the white creature lifted its head slightly.

"There, do you like that, my Snow Friend?" she called, seeing the movement.

Stripping off her snowshoes, gloves, anorak and cap, she investigated the corner which served as her larder. At the back of one shelf was a tin of glucose, a relic of her visit to Kurovesi with Timo.

Yes, glucose would be the best thing. Her Snow Friend could hardly cope with solid food in his present condition. Taking a glass from the shelf, she mixed the powdery sugar with warm water from the pan of melted snow on the stove.

The creature was lying flat on its stomach. She lifted up its head, pried open its mouth and let the sweet liquid trickle down its throat. Some of the sugar solution spilled over onto the bed, but the creature swallowed the rest. Maija gave it three glasses before it refused to drink any more.

She stayed by the bed, stroking the smooth fur and trying to think what the animal could be, until she gradually realized it was no longer shivering. The room was much warmer now.

She used up all the remaining water in giving the creature another ration of glucose. This time she made the mixture stronger. When the creature had finished drinking—spilling far less than before—it rested its head between its paws and closed its eyes. Maija stood up, smiling at her sleeping Snow Friend, and put on her anorak again. It was time she found some food for herself.

Dressed for the outdoors again, she collected her fishing tackle from the heap of tools, carvings and other objects in the corner. Her fishing rod was made of some greenish, faintly transparent material which was a kind of glass, or so the rod's previous owner had told her. It was certainly one of the best rods she had ever possessed.

Outside, she sat on a gray rock by the hole she had cut in the ice. She could only walk out to this rock with dry feet in winter: during the summer it was a tiny island surrounded by shallow water. She scattered a handful of grubs into the hole for ground bait—to attract the fish—then

threw in her line and settled down to wait. Her rod was balanced on a short forked stick thrust into a crevice.

Watching her float drifting on the shadowy water, she thought about Snowfriend. She had nursed sick animals back to health before, but Snowfriend was different. There was no way of finding out who he was or where he had come from, and she suspected that not even a city professor could tell her. All she knew was that he existed. She had seen he was male when she pulled him from the snowdrift, and now that she had named him, she was thinking of him as a male person. She always thought of her pets as people, once she got to know them.

His cold paws had ended in stubby fingers, almost hidden by the fur. Maybe he had thumbs as well, but she had not seen them. His teeth, inside his lipless mouth, were capable of tearing as well as biting and chewing. Like a human being, Snowfriend could eat both plants and meat. He resembled a small polar bear, and yet he was not a bear. He was something entirely new in her experience.

Snowfriend was still asleep, curled up into a white furry ball, when Maija returned to the warmth of the hut. She did not disturb him, but settled down to the work of gutting the fish she had caught. She wondered whether Snowfriend ate fish, and whether he preferred them cooked or raw. It would be easy to find out, she thought. Then it occurred to her that she had not heard him make a single sound: Snowfriend had not even grunted when she picked him up. Perhaps he was dumb, like the old man who had lived in this hut until the winters finally killed him.

That evening Maija fed Snowfriend again. He ate two lake trout—cooked—drank the water she gave him and settled back to sleep, without stirring from her bed. Somehow, from the angle of his head and the expression in his golden eyes, she understood that he was grateful. She smoothed the fur on his head and left him to sleep in peace.

As Snowfriend was in the only bed, she would have to spend the night on the floor in front of the ancient porcelain stove. Normally she slept in the old way, sitting up in bed with her back against the wall, and resting stretched out on a level surface would be something new for her. She was still amused by the novelty as she went off to sleep.

In the morning, just before she awoke, she had a dream

and knew that she was dreaming. She was in the land-without-men, a warm and friendly place quite unlike the subjects of her usual dreams. Snowfriend was beside her, guiding her through the glades by the light of a gentle sunset. In this land the animals spoke to each other with soundless voices. Knowing this, Maija was certain Snowfriend was trying to tell her something—

She was awake, and her head was on the floor. For a moment she thought the floor and the wall had changed places in the night, and the huge stove was about to crash down upon her, but she remembered where she was, and why. The room returned to normal.

How was Snowfriend this morning? She went to the bed, put her hands on its wooden side and leaned over, smiling down at Snowfriend. He looked up at her and slowly raised himself until he was standing upright on his two hind legs. He was well again! Maija almost laughed from the relief.

And suddenly her joy turned to terror, for Snowfriend flung his arms around her body like a bear crushing its victim. She had time to think: he's going to kill me after all!

Then Snowfriend had released her and fallen back onto the bed, before she could realize what had happened. His eyes were staring full into hers. He was as shocked as she. A string of jumbled ideas babbled somewhere in her mind: Poor-Snowfriend-I-love-him-he-was-grateful-I-frightened-him-I'm-sorry-I-should-have-known-why-did-I-think-it-Snowfriend-knows-love-and-showed-me-the-land-without-men— She tried to calm herself. Snowfriend knew her thoughts. He did not speak because his kind did not need speech. He had shown her that in their dream together. Had she really shared that dream with Snowfriend?

She looked at him lying on the bed, and was ashamed of her doubts. She caught him in her arms, pressing him to her body, and her confusion was ended. He needed her, so she would help him.

They had their breakfast in front of the stove, and during the meal Snowfriend peered through the metal grille at the peat slowly burning inside. Perhaps he was reassuring himself that the fire would not go out. Watching him, Maija could

see that cold and exhaustion had been the only things wrong with him. He was recovered very quickly.

When the meal was almost over, she offered him the last trout. He nodded, stretched out a paw and pulled it towards himself.

"Did you enjoy that, Snowfriend?" she asked him. This time the shaking of his head was an unmistakable "yes." He was still mute, but he had found a way to reply to her. She had a habit of nodding slightly when she approved of something, and Snowfriend must have realized what she meant. This strange creature was quick to learn.

Snowfriend soon had a chance to use his new ability. Maija now had to provide for two, and she would have to to go fishing again today. She decided where to go and was pulling her rod from the heap in the corner when Snowfriend padded over to her. He stood up on his hind legs and nodded vigorously, looking just like a dog begging for a walk. She started to ask, "Do you want to come with me?" but left the sentence unfinished. Snowfriend was nodding even harder than before, and there could be no mistaking his meaning.

So Maija and Snowfriend set off together through the snow-covered forests. Maija did not normally fish in the lake where she lived, and this morning she was taking Snowfriend to the lake she visited most often. She hoped it would repay him for that dream vision of the land-without-men.

This particular lake had an unusual feature—the rotting hull of an old steamer, a little cargo ship which had made the journey from Teuvasaari to Savonlinna once a week. Now the battered vessel was frozen into the ice near the tree-lined bank, and each year it sank a little further into the mud. Snowfriend happily explored the wooden ruin while Maija got down to the serious business of fishing. Every so often he showed himself to her and then disappeared below the crumbling deck to continue prowling the gloomy cargo holds. These holds had floors of ice, for the water had leaked in through the gaps in the side.

Maija had seated herself on the patch of firm planking in the stern, where she could look out over the lake towards the opposite shore. Except for the small hole she had made, the ice stretched away in a smooth unbroken surface; the snow was piled up in a huge white wall at the eastern end

of the lake. That great snowdrift was the nearest thing to a mountain she had seen in this flat lake country.

Snowfriend hurried up to her, trying to attract her attention. As he came to her, she heard the faint sounds of something brushing aside branches among the trees. She laid her rod on the timber deck and turned towards the near shore, looking for a sign of movement.

A tall, fur-clad man emerged from the forest. Snowfriend bolted and dived through a hole in the deck.

"I thought you would be here," said the hunter.

"Go away!" Maija shouted. It was her friend Timo, but she was in no mood for human company.

"What was that I saw with you—a polar bear? You find the strangest pets!"

"You leave my Snowfriend alone!" After all, Timo was a hunter, and Snowfriend had the most wonderful fur. . . .

"I won't hurt it." Timo was standing on the bank, making no effort to come to the old ship. "You really prefer animals to human beings, don't you?"

"Can you blame me?" And then, because Timo was a good man and had been kind to her that summer in Kurovesi, she asked less harshly, "What do you want?"

"I came to warn you about Igor. He is on his way here."

Igor was the big half-Russian hunter who had tried to rape her six months ago. After she had driven him off, he had sworn to come back, and Maija had not thought he would return so soon.

"Maija, I said Igor is coming."

Still she made no reply. Igor was here again, and now she had Snowfriend to protect. A sick animal with a valuable skin would not live long while Igor had a rifle in his hand.

Timo shrugged and started walking back into the forest. He had delivered his warning: what Maija did next was up to her.

"Timo!" Maija called. He paused and looked at her inquiringly. Some vestige of conscience made her shout "Thank you!" Timo waved in acknowledgment and walked on. Within seconds he had vanished among the shadows.

Snowfriend cautiously poked his head out from his refuge. Seeing that the danger was past, he pulled himself up from the hole and joined Maija in the stern. She picked up her

rod and looked at Snowfriend sadly. "I wish *I* lived in the land-without-men!"

Despite the news brought by Timo, Maija went on fishing for another two hours. She was very conscious of the fact that her only weapon was the knife at her hip. Her guns were back at the hut. But being Maija, she would not hurry home just because Igor was on his way. She would prepare for him, but in her own time. Meanwhile, she continued fishing from the stern.

Her strange calm worried Snowfriend, who sat beside her and kept looking back at the forest behind them. She had no need to explain the situation to him: her thoughts had told him everything.

Maija felt a little less sure of herself when she and Snowfriend started on the journey back to her hut. Igor could be anywhere, in the next strip of woodland or even waiting for her by her own lake. Now she wished she had gone back for a gun at once. Snowfriend seemed tired now, and that was her own fault too. It was less than a day since she had rescued him half-dead from the snowdrift. She should not have taken him so far this early.

Eventually she had to pick him up and carry him the rest of the way. So, once again, the small birds which lived under the eaves of her hut saw her bearing Snowfriend over the frozen lake.

The snow around her hut was undisturbed save for the footprints of a wild duck. Igor had not arrived.

Maija went straight in and laid Snowfriend on the bed. He rolled over and curled himself into a ball again. It occurred to Maija that Snowfriend was not well adapted to life in temperatures below freezing. His resemblance to a polar bear was deceptive. Perhaps she could make him something to wear outdoors—he would understand what clothes were for.

While Snowfriend slept through the afternoon, Maija went out again to see whether there was any sign of Igor. She was armed with the light air rifle which was her favorite hunting weapon, and if she had seen Igor she would have used it. But he was not to be found, and she returned to the hut.

Snowfriend was awake when she came back. He was sniffing around in the untidy corner where most of her be-

longings were piled. Plainly he was wondering what all these things were. So she carefully explained their uses to him—he could hear her thoughts, even if he could not understand her words. She also showed him things which had no use at all, things she kept because she liked them. There was a burnished shield of bog-iron, and a dull silver ring she had dug up from an old burial mound. Nailed to the timber wall was the wooden ship's wheel of the old steamer she and Snowfriend had visited that morning. Beside the wheel on the wall was a life-size wooden relief of a duck in flight, a picture carved by the deaf-and-dumb man who had built the hut many years ago.

The last of her treasures was a transparent colorless jewel which she and Timo had found in an old ruined house near Kurovesi. The house had once belonged to a famous professor, but it had been empty for many years. Timo, who was very clever and could pass for a townsman if he wore the right clothes, had shown her how to hold the jewel in front of a lamp so that lines of bright rainbow light danced across the opposite wall. Snowfriend quickly grasped the idea when she demonstrated it, but his little fingers could not hold the jewel without blocking out the lamplight from it. After three or four failures he allowed Maija to retrieve the jewel.

That night, in her dreams of the land-without-men, Snowfriend walked beside her as tall as a man. In each hand he held a jewel which flashed rainbow fire through the forest.

Then the vision faded, and she was left with only an unbearable knowledge of Snowfriend's love—love for Maija, love for his fellow creatures, love for the land which was his home. The feeling of love was so overpowering that she was sobbing with joy. Gradually she felt dampness on her face, and realized that she was crying in her sleep. She opened her eyes and raised her head.

She was still in her hut. In the dim ghostly moonlight she saw all her old familiar possessions and knew that the land-without-men was very far away. Now she was sobbing for a different reason. Presently the emotion passed, and she grew quiet. After a while she was asleep again.

This time the dream was clearer. Snowfriend could tell her his thoughts more easily than on the first night. Once again he guided her through the land-without-men, introduc-

ing her to all the animals, showing her the landscape of his home. The woods were full of broad-leafed southern trees, not the evergreen pines of her own country. Several times he showed her the furry white creatures which were his own kind. The fluffy white cubs were playing in a large glade in the soft evening light, watched over by their parents. Seeing the small red sun low on the horizon, Maija realized that it was always evening in the land-without-men. The discovery only increased her delight; of all the times of the day, Maija loved the evening best.

Snowfriend led her through the forest, along a narrow, well-trodden path. She could hear the sound of falling water nearby. Then the path curved over to the side of the stream, and as she walked, she saw the swift water bubbling between the banks and swirling away behind her. A fish darted out of the dark water-weed and disappeared downstream.

"Just a little further," Snowfriend seemed to be saying. Maija followed him upstream along the bank. The trees were thinner here, with less undergrowth between them. Looking ahead, she saw something huge and dark behind the trees, like a great black wall of shadow. The noise of falling water was much louder now. In another moment she and Snowfriend came out of the trees into the small open space in front of the waterfall. The stream came tumbling down twenty feet from the top of the rock face before them. It was like the inland cliffs she had seen at Isolahti, thought Maija. In the shadow of the cliff, little trees and shrubs grew in the thin soil. Ferns and moss grew on the damp rocks where the water came down, and on the cracks and ledges in the cliff face. The sound of the waterfall was like music.

Snowfriend went up to the waterfall, and she saw a darker shadow behind the spray. She hurried after him and found herself in a cave. There was a carpet of hay over a floor of small rounded pebbles.

"This is my home," said Snowfriend.

"It's wonderful!" She came further in, bending to avoid the low roof. She settled down beside him on the hay. They could see the water cascading down outside.

This cave led right into the cliff, Snowfriend explained. Maija looked back, her eyes growing accustomed to the

darkness, and saw that the cave was much longer than she had imagined. She could not see where it ended.

"It goes right through to your country," said Snowfriend.

He had been exploring the cave system for years, he told her. One day he went along a new passage and traveled further into the rock than ever before. Eventually he saw light ahead, and soon emerged into a country totally unlike his homeland. The snow and ice he saw were completely new to him. He wandered about, exploring the strange frozen country, until he suddenly realized he was lost. He frantically searched for the cave entrance, growing weaker all the time, but without success. Finally he had collapsed in the snowdrift.

And that was how Snowfriend had come into her life. She called him her Snow Friend, but he was not a creature of the snow at all. He had come up through the dark tunnels from this gentle land where winter was unknown.

Maija thought about how it would be to live here in this cave forever, with Snowfriend beside her. In the land-without-men there would be no hunters coming to intrude upon her life. She remembered seeing the cubs playing in the glade and the soft sleepy smell of the woods she had walked through. In her happiness she clung tightly to Snowfriend, hugging him and loving him for showing her all this.

Morning came, and Maija awoke. She remembered her dreams vividly. She looked around her hut, comparing her existence here to life in the land-without-men. There was no question which she would prefer, if she had the choice. But she did have the choice! Somewhere near here was the entrance to the land-without-men. If Snowfriend could give her a mental picture of the scene she would surely recognize it.

All she needed was a few more minutes of dreaming with Snowfriend. She closed her eyes and tried to sleep. But sleep refused to come, no matter how hard she tried. Finally she gave up. She would not learn the location of the cave today. By now she was too wide awake to dream again, and Snowfriend only spoke to her in dreams.

If she had only slept a little longer, she would have known where to find the entrance. Then, this morning, she could have gone there with Snowfriend and left the world of

men forever. Now she would have to wait another day until sleep came again, and she might not have the time. Somewhere beyond her walls, Igor was marching across the snow towards her. She did not doubt that he would come straight to her hut. Well, she would face up to him. In this land the people did not run away from their problems.

Perhaps she could intercept Igor before he came to the hut, she thought. She had to keep him away from Snowfriend, for Igor was a hunter and he would shoot Snowfriend for his fur.

When she looked outside, she saw that more snow had fallen during the night. All the old tracks had been covered, and the air was cold and clean. This made things easier. If she saw any footprints now, she could be sure they were only a few hours old. After breakfast, she and Snowfriend sat on the floor by the stove to think out the strategy for the day.

But she was interrupted in the middle of her planning. There were two heavy thumps on the door, and a deep voice called, "Maija!"

Igor was here! She scrambled to her feet and snatched up her air rifle. *Snowfriend must hide,* she thought, and as he darted for the corner, she pulled a blanket from her bed and flung the brown cloth over him. Now he was safe.

She swung the door open and confronted Igor, aiming the rifle at his chest. He stood in her doorway unmoving. She had forgotten that a man could be so big. In his winter furs he seemed larger than ever. His eyes were huge and black.

"I wish to speak with you, Maija. Will you let me come in?" His voice was slow, neither gruff nor gentle, easy to listen to.

"No!" Let him into her hut? Six months ago she had seen him stumbling away into the forest, bleeding from the knife thrust that had just missed his heart. That knife was at her belt now. "We can talk here."

He swung the heavy pack from his shoulders, dropped it on the snow and sat down on it. "Very well, we shall talk here. I want you, Maija."

"I can shoot you now." Looking at him, she wished she had brought the shotgun. An air rifle could hardly deal with

this giant. "And if I did not shoot, my knife still likes your blood."

"Do not talk like that, Maija. I mean you no harm. I only want to have you and be with you."

"I would kill you first." She stroked the trigger of her rifle. She knew what this man was. He had spread his hands in a gesture of honesty, but his face was blank.

"Igor, go away and leave me in peace. I want nothing from you, nothing. If you stay I'll kill you."

She thought of Snowfriend cowering under the blanket. Igor would kill him if he saw that fur.

"You have grown hard, Maija. You should not live alone."

"I am not alone. I have my friends!"

"Your pets—the animals that you nurse in your bed?" His great dark eyes were staring into hers. "Maija, do you remember what it is like to live with a man?"

"I remember *you!*"

"Maija, then I was hasty, I did not understand you. I know better now."

"And I know better than to trust you again."

Somehow her rifle had slanted downwards while she talked. She raised it again. It seemed as though only she and Igor existed in the world, and the land was a white blur around them. Somewhere beyond the world a bird was singing.

"Believe me, I do not wish to hurt you." His hands were still spread open: they had not moved since he sat down.

"You don't want to hurt me? Then why did you—why did you do what you did?"

"I thought you wanted me, Maija, just as I wanted you." And still there was no expression on his face. Only his eyes were alive.

"You were wrong, Igor. Now go! Don't come here again!" Her voice sounded strained even to herself.

Igor stood up, his dark form massive against the snow. Maija nearly fired in panic at his sudden movement, but she controlled herself in time.

"Maija. has any other person come to you this year?"

"I have allowed no man in my hut since you left."

"So." Igor picked up his pack and settled it on his shoulders, slipping his arms through the straps. She could never have lifted such a weight, but Igor could carry it all day.

"Maija, I shall not go far. I shall stay near here and wait until you change your mind."

"You will wait forever," said Maija.

She watched him walk away into the trees. Was he really leaving? She must follow him. But she must have something more powerful than the air rifle.

Inside the hut, she remembered Snowfriend and swept the blanket aside. He had curled himself into a white ball again. He jumped up and brushed against her, standing on two legs like a man. She was too busy to do more than quickly ruffle the fur on his head.

"You stay here, Snowfriend. I'm going after Igor." She closed the door on him, knowing he would be safe enough in the hut.

Maija followed Igor until he started to cross the next lake, and there she stopped. If she followed him out over the ice he would only have to look back to see her. And this lake was so long and wide that a direct route was the only reasonable way of crossing it. From the cover of the trees she watched him reach the opposite bank. She waited for nearly half an hour, but he did not reappear. She dare not go on now that she had lost sight of him, for he might be waiting in ambush somewhere. Disappointed, she made her way back to her hut.

In the bleak afternoon there was no wind and no sun. The featureless cloud covered the sky, its color matching the ice below. Maija lay on the gray stone like a seal resting on an island beach, Snowfriend at her feet. She liked to fish from this rock, but she was not fishing now. She was not even seeing the lake, although her eyes were open.

"Wherever Igor is, he hasn't gone far," she said, and Snowfriend nodded his agreement. "But I hate having people near me, and he's worse than any of them. I must do something! I can either go out and look for him, or I can stay here and wait for him to come to me."

She had to settle the problem of Igor before she and Snowfriend went off to the cave entrance. She could not bear to think of Igor following them into the land-without-men.

"So, my Snow Friend, I must decide. And when I see him again, what shall I do? I wanted to kill him, but I

didn't think of it when I could have shot him easily; he would have let me get close to him."

Her gloved hand was gently pawing at a small crack in the stone, she discovered. Rather surprised, she made it stop. "That hand could have killed Igor this morning, Snowfriend. Why didn't it?"

She was only whispering, but her voice seemed very loud.

"I didn't want to kill him. He hasn't behaved like an enemy at all! He came to me, said what he wanted to say and went away. Now he's waiting for me to do something. This time yesterday I hated him, and this morning, but now it's all gone, as if it happened to some other person."

Her wandering eyes focused on Snowfriend, his white fur so much brighter than the dull winter colors around him. "At least you haven't changed, Snowfriend. You're still yourself. Can you advise me, Snowfriend?"

And he nodded!

"Should I search for Igor, or should I stay here and wait until he comes? If I go, I'll have to leave you in the hut again—Igor lives by taking furs. Well, Snowfriend, should I go?"

He nodded, almost imperceptibly.

"Should I stay?"

He did not move his head at all.

"I shall go!" Maija shouted. "I shall find him, wherever he is!"

She felt a cold breath against her cheek. It was the afternoon breeze, coming to clear the pall of cloud from the sky. Maija stood, her feet on the highest point of the rock, and gazed upwards. For a moment the clouds above her thinned, and in that instant she saw the pale disc of the sun. It was an omen.

There was a thin line of clear sky on the horizon as Maija set out on Igor's trail. There would be no snow tonight, but the frost would be heavier than usual. She wondered where Igor was going to spend the night.

She followed his footprints until there was no longer any uncertainty about his destination. He was making for the old wooden steamship frozen into its last harbor. She had shown it to him when they were still friends, and he had not forgotten.

Igor, at her best fishing lake, living in the ship she re-

garded as her own. The thought made her walk more swiftly, and now she was beginning to hate him again.

She reached the ship and hauled herself up onto the deck, which was about four feet above the level of the ice. She went along the thin strip of safe planking to the stern. Impressions in the thin layer of snow showed that Igor had wandered all over the old vessel. However, he was not here now.

In the stern, she seated herself on the wooden block. She had been fishing from here when Timo told her about Igor's return. Timo had come out from those trees. . . .

She saw Igor, his massive figure black against the white background, coming towards her from the head of the lake. He was about a quarter of a mile away, moving rapidly across the ice. Maija nodded to herself and aimed the shotgun at him, but her finger was not on thetrigger.

Maija, Maija, what will you do to him?

The killing would be to no purpose. She no longer hated him. She sighed, and laid the gun down, and waited for him to come aboard.

"It is good to see you again so soon," he said, and now his deep voice had warmth.

"Perhaps. Do not think I have changed my mind, Igor."

"Then why have you come?"

"I have to know what you are doing."

"I am hunting!" He reached into the sack he was carrying —she noticed his pack was missing—and brought out a wild duck. "I must have food in my little home here, Maija."

"Your home? What do you mean?"

"I shall show you. Look."

Returning the duck to his sack, Igor walked along to a large hole at the side of the deck. The hole was square and must have been covered by a hatch when the ship was in use. From it, a little wooden staircase led down into the dark empty space which had been the engine room. Metal seekers had removed all the fittings years ago.

Igor went down the stairway. Maija paused, picked up the gun and followed him with her hand on her knife. The inside of the ship lit up as she descended.

"For you, Maija, I light the candle." Igor was kneeling and setting a thick white candle down on the ice floor. The ceiling, the wooden deck, was only a few inches above

his head. Maija bent down and went over to him. She could see his few belongings neatly spread out on some planking in a corner—that explained where his pack had gone to.

"Will you live here?" she asked, kneeling in front of him.

"Yes, Maija. There is nowhere else I can stay." He looked very solemn in the yellow candlelight.

She looked round the old engine room. Except for this corner, there was nothing but the ice and the ancient timber to be seen. She saw the pale daylight coming through countless holes in the sides and deck. She thought of her hut, with the peat burning in the stove and Snowfriend waiting for her to come home. She would have pitied Igor if she had thought this was the only home he had. But he had chosen this for himself.

Maija stood up as best she could. "You need not waste any more of your candle, Igor." She went up the little stairway.

The breeze had died down a little, although the clouds were still being driven from the sky. Maija could see the pale white moon rising over the great snowdrift to the east.

"Maija."

She turned to face him.

"Why did you come?"

Again his size was overwhelming. Igor was a giant, not a man. She said, "You are here, in my country. I have to keep watch on you, to know what you are doing."

"You told me that before, Maija. I think you believe it."

"Don't try to make me doubt myself, Igor. It won't work. I know what I'm saying." She knew it had been a mistake to come here. It would only encourage Igor.

"I hope you will stay here for a while," said Igor. "Will you share a meal with me? I—"

"No! Igor, I cannot eat your food."

"Maija, you ate with me before. Have I changed so much?"

"Do you remember what you did to me, and what I did to you?" She tapped the hilt of her knife. "Has your wound healed yet?"

"Has yours, Maija? I thought I understood you, and I was wrong. I paid for it, in blood and time. Maija! We were happy then, and we could be happy again. Why should we be apart like this?"

"Why don't you take me now, instead of waiting for me to give myself to you?"

"You have taught me restraint, Maija. I shall not force myself on you again."

"Then go away, leave me in peace and stay away from my lakes. I don't want you here!"

"Maija, I never abandon anything I want. I shall live here, waiting for you, until you come to me. You are alone now, but one day you will change your mind."

I am not alone, she thought, *I have Snowfriend.* Yet Snowfriend was different. She could talk to him, but he could not talk back. It was not the same as being with Timo . . . or with Igor.

Am I sufficient in myself, or am I incomplete without another? Her thoughts were taking strange paths these days. This giant before her, it was his doing.

"You have a picture of me in your mind," said Igor. "It has been changing under your hatred, as your memories become what you want them to become. It is not me at all. The picture is one you have made yourself, a picture of the enemy you think I should be. Maija, now that I am here, do you not remember what I am?"

"Stop it! Leave me alone!"

"I am not touching you, Maija. The thing you fear is something inside you."

"That's enough!" She had to get away from him. "I'm going back. Don't try to come after me!"

He was still talking as she jumped down from the ship onto the snow. "Maija! I shall be here, until you come again!"

She ran for the shelter of the path. She found the path and stumbled along it, hardly knowing where she was going. Somehow she sped through the trees to the shore of the next lake, and there she slowed down crossing the ice. She went on homewards at a more normal pace.

Presently she realized why she had fled from Igor. She had not been frightened. She had been ashamed.

The journey back to her hut was endless. Time itself had become frozen. At last she reached her lake and saw the old familiar timber dwelling before her. She could imagine Snowfriend curled up asleep in front of the oven.

The door was open! She remembered shutting it, yet it was open. She went up to the hut, her gun ready to fire.

"Who's there?" she called. "Come out!"

There was no sound. Perhaps the hut was empty. If so, where was Snowfriend? Maija was about to look inside when she saw a movement in the snow to her left.

Snowfriend dashed towards her, bounding along the bank like a fat round dog. She stared at him, glanced back at the open door, and laughed. Snowfriend had got tired of being kept in the hut. In the past Maija had owned several cats which could operate the latch from inside—and Snowfriend was more intelligent than any cat.

She caught him up in her arms and carried him inside. She supposed he had been lonely on his own. Well, she had neglected him today, but that was because of Igor. She would not neglect him again. And, if all went well, soon they would be in the land-without-men together.

In her dreams she could see the land-without-men already. There were no tears in her sleep tonight. She forgot Igor complately, and let Snowfriend take her into the country of endless evening, where the trees whispered in the soft breeze and the waterfall sang outside the cave. That waterfall fascinated her. In winter, when everything was frozen, she always longed for the water to come alive again. Life was so much better in the land-without-men, she thought in her dream. And in the closing minutes before she awoke, Snowfriend showed her the cave entrance. She awoke knowing the way into the land-without-men—and knowing too that only she must go that way. She dared not let any man find the tunnel into Snowfriend's country.

Timo had thought Snowfriend was a polar bear. Probably he wondered what a bear was doing down in this area. But he must not learn the truth any more than Igor. Maija knew what either of the hunters would do in the land-without-men. Timo would leave her alone, she was sure, but Igor might follow her. She had to make certain that he did not come after her. She could kill him, but somehow she no longer wanted to do that. Perhaps she could find some other way to deal with him.

This morning there was a chill east wind. The sun would not be out for long, Maija thought as she looked up at the

sky. After breakfast, she stood outside the door and wondered what to do next. She could not go to the tunnel, that was certain. She wondered whether she should try to persuade Igor to go away. She was still wondering when she heard the shots.

The noise was faint but recognizable. At first she thought it was Igor hunting—the sound came from the right direction. Then she heard another shot, sharper and not so deep. It seemed to be a different weapon. She listened intently. A minute or two later, both guns fired at once.

Snowfriend, who had been sitting in the doorway, came out and stood beside her. She patted his shoulders.

"Perhaps I'm wrong, Snowfriend, but I think I recognize those guns. Igor and Timo."

That raised another question. "If it's Timo, what's he doing here?" She patted Snowfriend again. "I'll have to find out, Snowfriend. I must go and see what's happening."

His expression said clearly, "Am I going to be left in the hut again?"

"I can't let you come with me. I know I promised not to go off again, but it wouldn't be safe for you."

The men were probably shooting at each other. Neither man would fire at her, except by accident, but Snowfriend was something else. They might kill him for the sake of killing if they failed to kill each other.

She started to lead Snowfriend back inside, and then she remembered. There was no way of making him stay in the hut. He had learned how to open the catch, and she could not bolt the door from outside. She wondered about keeping him in the little peat shed, but that did not even have a bolt. Besides, it was not a nice place to put him.

She could not waste time here while the shooting was still going on. She went back inside and hastily prepared for the journey. Anorak, snowshoes, gloves, cap, knife, gun. . . .

Snowfriend would not come in for her. She had to carry him into the hut, telling him why he had to stay behind yet again. Maija was sure he understood, but not so sure he would obey. She closed the door on him and walked away, expecting him to come panting after her at any moment. To her relief, the door did not open, and each time she looked back it was still firmly shut.

Eventually she arrived at the lake where Igor was living.

Peering from the edge of the trees, she saw that the old wooden ship was deserted. The shooting was taking place at the east end of the lake, by the huge snowdrift.

It was no ordinary snowdrift. There had been buildings here once, tall solid buildings made of brick—a strange thing in this land where nearly all houses were made of timber. Now the buildings were ruined and empty, reduced to broken walls and piles of rubble. The blizzards had covered them with whiteness, filling up the hollows and the gaps between the walls, and the snow had drifted against the tallest of the ruins to form a great white hill. The huge snowdrift lay on the little plain between the head of the lake and the surrounding forests. On the lakeward side of the drift was the maze of ridges and hummocks, where the true surface of the ground was completely hidden. One step might sink an inch onto a mound of rubble, the next might sink six feet into a snow-filled passage. It was a perfect place for two men to stalk each other.

Maija could see them from where she stood. The two black dots seemed very small. One of them must be Igor—she fancied one of them larger than the other—but was the second man Timo? It had to be. He was in the area, and he knew Igor had returned.

She had to make sure. It meant going right up to them and seeing for herself. She went through the woods and returned to the small lake she had just crossed. Her plan was to walk along to the east end of this lake, then circle round to the back of the snowdrift on the larger lake. This way she would have the forest between her and the men until the very end.

The shots continued as she went down the side of the small lake. She would reach Igor's opponent without any trouble, provided the men stayed where they were. The top of the snowdrift, just visible ahead, came nearer and nearer. Soon she was level with it, and then she reached the place where a little stream connected the two lakes.

She had not heard a shot for some time, she realized with a start. Perhaps the battle was over! She hurried through the trees, over the frozen stream, right up to the smooth white slope of the eastern face of the snowdrift. She went past the slope and round to the far side, passing the row of snow-covered chimney tops sticking up out of the drift

like a series of bizarre sculptures. There was nobody in sight, but that meant nothing. The men could be anywhere in this chaos by now. Here the snow had swirled around the ruined walls and created a wilderness of little round hummocks and shapeless ridges. In several places the ridges were wide and high, as if an ancient giant was buried beneath the snow.

As she surveyed the strange landscape before her, Maija saw a man come into view from behind a mound of snow. It was Timo.

He saw her at once, and motioned her to stay quiet. He crawled over the snow to join her.

"Don't let Igor see you," Timo whispered. "Stay behind cover. Let's get away from here."

Her questions would have to wait. She followed Timo into the trees, along a path which led them through an unusually large area of woodland. Timo did not stop until they were through the forest and standing by a tiny lake which was no more than a pond.

"Is this far enough?" Maija asked.

"Yes, for the moment," said Timo. "I don't think Igor will come after us. Now, what are you doing here?"

"I heard the shots. I knew Igor was up here, and I wanted to find out whom he was fighting—and why."

"You should not be so curious about your neighbors—it only leads to trouble. One of us might have shot you by mistake, and then where would you be?"

"I might have shot one of you," she said. "Igor is living in the old ship now, did you know that?"

"Yes. I suppose he means to move to your hut soon."

"I won't let him. Timo, why did you and Igor stop shooting at each other?" She did not ask why they had started.

"I'm almost out of ammunition. I'm going up to my supply dump for more bullets, and when I come back I'll finish the job."

"Will you? How many bullets did you waste without hitting him, Timo?"

"Too many. But sooner or later he would have stood up just a little too long." He shook his head, probably remembering the near misses. "Maija, I must be going—it isn't far, but if I take too long I may lose Igor."

He vanished into the trees. Maija watched him go, then

turned and went back along the path. She had better leave the men to their duel and return when it was over.

This was spoiling her winter. As she walked on through the pine woods, she thought about this invasion of her country. It had been so peaceful until the men had come to disturb everything. It was a good thing she had the land-without-men to go to, now that the two hunters had spoiled her own land. Yet she could not hate either of them for it, not even Igor. The giant hunter had been right when he spoke to her yesterday: they had been happy together. She could think about him now without feeling a surge of anger. She could remember all the things she had forgotten in her hatred of him.

"Maija!"

And Igor was waiting for her by the great snowdrift, as if her thoughts had called him to her. He seemed dark and huge against the snow. He must have come to see why Timo had stopped shooting.

His eyes were on the forest behind her. "Where is Timo?"

"He's gone to get more bullets. He'll be back."

"Good. I did not like to think of him fleeing."

Quite naturally, Maija found herself walking round the snow mountain with him. She was not sure how it had happened, but she accepted it.

"You were talking with Timo," said Igor. "Did he tell you what bad marksmen we both are?"

"Yes, he said he had wasted too many bullets. How could you miss each other so often?"

Igor pointed to the white confusion of snow and ice piled on the lake side of the snowdrift. "We were both moving about, using the old walls as cover. I have never seen a place like it."

Maija imagined him jumping up, firing, dropping down and twisting aside as a bullet tore through the snow six inches away. If she went over and looked, she would probably see traces of the duel in this hunter's nightmare. They crossed over to the firm surface of the frozen lake as soon as they could.

Maija could see the old wooden steamer in the distance ahead. There, two days ago, Timo had told her that Igor was coming. She and Snowfriend had been fishing happily, unaware that an enemy was on his way. Now she was walk-

ing towards the ship with that same enemy, and she was not even afraid.

You are with a man who may die today, said a voice in her head, the voice which whispered at moments such as this. Igor was persistent, but Timo was ruthless.

"What did you do while you were away, Igor?" she asked, to silence the unwelcome thoughts.

"You would like to know what I did?" He sounded hesitant.

"Yes. You must have gone somewhere—where?"

"I went down to the coast, where they are building the new roads. I worked there after I recovered."

And all the while he was thinking of the woman who had nearly killed him. She asked, "Did you like it there?"

"It is nice, but it is not like the lakes. It was a good life, though."

He spoke to her, this giant who said little to other people, and he told her about his season with the construction gangs taking the road even further into the forest. His words gave her a picture of a gray stone ribbon stretching along the ground into a green jungle, with sweating men laboring at its head, felling the trees, spreading rubble over the dark earth. She found it oddly relaxing to hear his deep voice with its leisurely tales of summer.

Eventually they reached the old steamship, and she followed Igor up into the deck. The hunter began to descend the little stairway to the empty engine room. His footsteps were loud on the planks.

Suddenly a small white form popped up out of a hole in the deck and leaped over the side. Snowfriend! He must have escaped and followed her!

Igor swung up his rifle and aimed at the creature dashing away over the ice. Maija gasped and cried "No!" as he fired.

Snowfriend went on running, but there were spots of red on the ice behind him.

"Why did you shout, Maija? I almost missed the animal."

She knocked down his rifle as he aimed again. "That's my Snow Friend! You shot him!"

Igor was staring at her. "Maija—"

She had to go after Snowfriend. She jumped down from

the ship onto the ice as fast as she could along the lake's edge. "Snowfriend! Stop!"

But the fugitive went on, drawing away from her. He was heading straight for the great snowdrift she and Igor had come from. If he turned aside into the trees she would lose him at once. She heard sounds behind her and knew that Igor was chasing her—or chasing Snowfriend. The thought gave her more speed, and the old rage was back, hot and bubbling under her skin. She could have killed Igor a dozen times over if he had been within reach, but she had to catch Snowfriend. If she lost him now, she might lose him forever.

He was beginning to slow down, but he was still far ahead. He had almost reached the snowdrift, with its bewildering maze of ancient snow-covered walls. Maija was still fifty feet behind Snowfriend when he dashed into the white wilderness and disappeared. She glimpsed him scrambling over an ice-covered ridge, and she plunged after him.

Maija had once visited a coastal beach where the cliffs had fallen and strewn the shore with boulders. Climbing over those great rocks had been bad enough, but at least she had had solid surfaces for her feet. Here, nothing was solid. She kept sinking into the snow, and she could not take her eyes from ground level for a second. Beneath the thin snow there might be a pile of solid brick, or only another drop into a passage full of soft snow. Even when she found a firm ridge the old wall started collapsing as she stepped on it.

She managed to keep her balance on the crumbling vantage point and looked around for Snowfriend. There was no sign of him. The ridges and hollows in the snow were still and quiet. She called his name, and watched the drifts for a movement, but she saw nothing. He was gone. She might still visit the land-without-men, but now she would be alone there as well. She had lost Snowfriend.

Slowly, very slowly, she turned. The mixture of snow and crumbling bricks shifted under her feet.

Igor had followed her. And now his size did not overawe her. Deliberately she brought up her rifle, aiming at the man who had shot Snowfriend.

"Maija, listen to me—"

He threw himself aside as she fired. Before she could

get in a second shot the snow slid away beneath her, and she tumbled sideways into a snow-filled hollow.

She lay there for a moment, looking up at the gray sky, then got to her feet and stood up to search for Igor. He must have taken cover somewhere—she knew her shot had missed. She held her rifle ready and waited for him to show himself.

His head appeared briefly. She fired as he ducked down again, and the bullet buried itself in the snow above him.

"Maija," he cried, "I did not know the animal was one of your pets!"

Now she had his position. If he appeared for even a fraction of a second, she would shoot.

"Maija, you know I would never hurt a creature of yours. If you had told me, I would have left him alone!"

The rage within her could not be stilled by words. Snowfriend was lost in the winter forests, wounded, perhaps dying, and this time there was no Maija passing by to rescue him. She would go and search for him, of course, although she knew it to be hopeless. But first she would kill this man.

"Come out, Igor! Show yourself!"

There was no response to her challenge. Seized with the thought that Igor might escape, Maija advanced across the treacherous surface. Twice she slipped and fell up to her waist in unexpectedly deep drifts.

When she reached the spot where Igor had been, she found only the mark of her bullet. The trail in the snow showed that he had crawled away round one of the taller walls. He was retreating from her.

So she followed him, and in the chill timeless morning, her rage slowly gave way to a cold determination. She went after him methodically, forcing him back towards the forests. Whenever she saw him, she fired. Snowfriend existed only as an ancient memory: most of the time she could not remember why she was hunting Igor.

Presently she became aware that he was firing back at her. The shock awakened her from her dream-like state. Igor was behind a low mound which had accumulated round an isolated heap of bricks, the remains of a smaller side building. He must be lying flat on the snow. She saw that he could retreat no further without exposing himself.

Between Igor and the forest was a wide stretch of flat, open ground. If he left his present cover, he would have nowhere to go. Maija would have shot him before he had run five yards.

His first shots had gone wide—he must still be reluctant to kill her. She wondered if a bullet could go right through the mound. Probably it would be stopped by the bricks within the hummock.

"Maija!" Igor was calling to her again. She had heard him shouting several times before, but she had paid no attention. "Maija, how could you change like this? We walked across the lake together! I did not know the animal was yours!"

He had been saying the same things all through the hunt, repeating them over and over. Now, at the end of it all, she found herself answering him.

"I drove you out once before, Igor. I did not ask you to come back. You knew the welcome which awaited you."

"I had to return, Maija. I had to see you again."

"Am I so different from your other women?"

"You are, Maija. Your face is like an evil spirit, haunting me wherever I go. What else could I do but return?"

"You could stay away," she said. She came out from behind her hummock and stood facing his refuge. "You could stay away and forget you ever knew me."

There was a path of smooth flat snow between herself and Igor. Nothing blocked her view of the mound he was sheltering behind. She started moving towards him walking beside the line of footprints he had left.

"No, Maija. I tried to forget you, but it was impossible."

He must have heard some slight sound of her approach, for he suddenly rose up from behind the mound and stood before her. Once more he seemed a giant.

"You see, Maija, I—love you."

She shook her head. There was no room for sympathy in her heart now. She aimed the rifle.

Igor fired first. His bullet smashed into her right arm, the sudden stinging pain merging with the sound of the shot.

Her gun fell to the snow. Igor moved forward to pick it up. Maija, clutching her arm, did not think of using her knife. The fierce passion of the hunt had gone, leaving a

strange absence of purpose in her body. The knowledge that Igor had shot her was worse than the actual pain.

He moved towards her slowly, a curious expression on his face.

"Igor!"

A tall grim hunter stood on the edge of the wood, gun in hand. Timo had returned.

Maija stared at him. She had been alone with Igor for so long that she had forgotten there were other people in the world.

Everything around them was silent, waiting. Igor breathed heavily. "So. I must face you both." He dropped Maija's gun and jerked up his own—but Timo fired before he could shoot. Igor staggered, tried vainly to fire at Timo, and collapsed onto the snow.

Maija gazed at the still body, her mind empty of emotion. Igor was dead.

Timo was coming towards her. She backed away. "Don't touch me!"

He halted a few feet from her. "Maija, let me look at your arm."

It was a command. He was not asking her to let him approach, he was ordering her to obey him. He had saved her from Igor, but he was still a man. She picked up her rifle with her left hand.

"Stay there, Timo! Don't follow me!" She circled round him, heading towards the forest behind him. His head turned to watch her, but she dared not look at his face. When she was between him and the woods, she turned and ran for the sanctuary of the trees. She did not stop until she was deep in the shadowy maze of the pines, leaning her trembling body against the sweet-smelling bark.

Nothing was real any more. Her world had changed too much in too short a time. Igor was dead, Timo was different, and Snowfriend was lost. If only she and Snowfriend could have gone to the land-without-men yesterday, before all this happened. . . .

Snowfriend! Now that her rage was past she knew how to find him again. Snowfriend had run from the lake into the icy wilderness of the snowdrift. He must have crossed the snowdrift and gone into the trees long ago. She could walk along the smooth snow on the eastern side of the great

drift, find his trail and follow the footprints until she found Snowfriend himself. If Igor had not been there to distract her, she could have followed Snowfriend from the beginning.

Maija ignored her broken arm. Timo was right, it needed attention, but it would have to wait. Snowfriend was more important. She had a purpose again.

She emerged cautiously from the trees, well away from the spot where she had left Timo and Igor's body. There was nothing moving in sight. Satisfied that Timo was not here, she began her search. Here the snow was smooth, and she could see little footprints and claw marks on the powdery surface. Most of the prints had been made by the wild ducks.

At last she found Snowfriend's trail, with little red spots along the double line of round marks leading into the forest. Those prints could belong to no other creature. A little way along the trail, she came upon a familiar white form collapsed on the snow at the foot of a pine tree.

"Snowfriend," she said softly, stroking his head. "Wake up. It's Maija."

He made no response. He was even worse than he had been on the day she first saw him. She could only just detect his breathing, and Igor's bullet had made a great ugly wound in his side. The stain of red blood stood out vividly against his white fur.

"I'll take you home," said Maija. "You'll be safe there, Snowfriend."

Getting him onto her shoulders was almost impossible with her right arm useless. He seemed far heavier than before. After a long struggle she managed to haul him onto her back. She stood up shakily, holding him in position with her good hand.

"It's all right, Snowfriend, we're going home." She started walking slowly back along the way she had come, her body bent under her burden. The feeling had gradually gone out of her broken arm, leaving it numb. It had stopped bleeding some time ago.

She knew where to find the hidden entrance to the land-without-men. This was the way.

She went on talking, speaking her thoughts aloud, although she knew he could not hear her. "It's over now,

Snowfriend. I'll get you home and there won't be any more men around. They won't follow us."

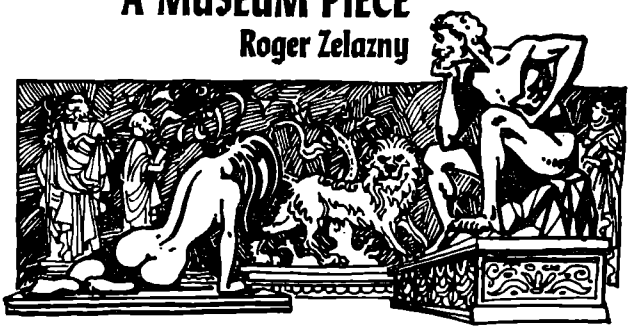
She was walking unsteadily under his weight, but she kept moving. She would reach that tunnel no matter how hard the journey was. "We'll be all alone there, Snowfriend. We'll stay there in your cave and watch the waterfall together. Nobody else at all, Snowfriend. Just you and me together in the evening. Just you and me."

She stumbled on across the snow.

Sometimes even the best of writers begin to wonder if the world that judges them is worth bothering with. Would it be better to retire to a monastery or become a statue in a museum? Roger Zelazny, considering such matters, wrote this typically ornate satirical whimsy, and who knows, maybe he's right.

A MUSEUM PIECE

Roger Zelazny



Forced to admit that his art was going unnoticed in a frivolous world, Jay Smith decided to get out of that world. The four dollars and ninety-eight cents he spent for a mail order course entitled *Yoga—The Path to Freedom* did not, however, help to free him. Rather, it served to accentuate his humanity, in that it reduced his ability to purchase food by four dollars and ninety-eight cents.

Seated in a padmasana, Smith contemplated little but the fact that his navel drew slightly closer to his backbone with each day that passed. While nirvana is a reasonably esthetic concept, suicide assuredly is not, particularly if you haven't the stomach for it. So he dismissed the fatalistic notion quite reasonably:

"How simply one could take one's own life in ideal surroundings!" he sighed (tossing his golden locks which, for

obvious reasons, had achieved classically impressive lengths). "The fat stoic in his bath, fanned by slave girls and sipping his wine, as a faithful Greek leech opens his veins, eyes downcast! One delicate Circassian," he sighed again, "*there* perhaps, plucking upon a lyre as he dictates his funeral oration—the latter to be read by a faithful countryman, eyes all a-blink. How easily *he* might do it! But the fallen artist —nay! Born yesterday and scorned today he goes, like the elephant to his graveyard, alone and secret!"

He rose to his full height of six feet, one and a half inches, and swung to face the mirror. Regarding his skin, pallid as marble, and his straight nose, broad forehead, and wide-spaced eyes, he decided that if one could not live by creating art, then one might do worse than turn the thing the other way about, so to speak.

He flexed those thews which had earned him half-tuition as a halfback for the four years in which he had stoked the stithy of his soul to the forging out of a movement all his own: two-dimensional painted sculpture.

"Viewed in the round," one crabbed critic had noted, "Mister Smith's offerings are either frescoes without walls or vertical lines. The Etruscans excelled in the former form because they knew where it belonged; kindergartens inculcate a mastery of the latter in all five year olds."

Cleverness! Mere cleverness! Bah! He was sick of those Johnsons who laid down the law at someone else's dinner table!

He noted with satisfaction that his month-long ascetic regime had reduced his weight by thirty pounds to a mere two twenty-five. He decided that he could pass as a Beaten Gladiator, post-Hellenic.

"It is settled," he pronounced. "I'll *be* art."

Later that afternoon a lone figure entered the Museum of Art, a bundle beneath his arm.

Spiritually haggard (although clean-shaven to the armpits), Smith loitered about the Greek Period until it was emptied of all but himself and marble.

He selected a dark corner and unwrapped his pedestal. He secreted the various personal items necessary for a showcase existence, including most of his clothing, in its hollow bottom.

"Goodbye, world," he renounced, "you should treat your artists better," and mounted the pedestal.

His food money had not been completely wasted, for the techniques he had mastered for four ninety-eight while on the Path to Freedom had given him a muscular control such as allowed him perfect, motionless statuity whenever the wispy, middle-aged woman, followed by forty-four children under age nine, left her chartered bus at the curb and passed through the Greek Period, as she did every Tuesday and Thursday between 9:35 and 9:40 in the morning. Fortunately, he had selected a seated posture.

Before the week passed he had also timed the watchman's movements to an alternate *tick* of the huge clock in the adjacent gallery (a delicate Eighteenth Century timepiece, all of gold leaf, enamel, and small angels who chased one another in circles). He should have hated being reported stolen during the first week of his career, with nothing to face then but the prospect of second-rate galleries or an uneasy role in the cheerless private collections of cheerless and private collectors. Therefore, he moved judiciously when raiding staples from the stores in the downstairs lunch room, and strove to work out a sympathetic bond with the racing angels. The directors had never seen fit to secure the refrigerator or pantry from depredations by the exhibits, and he applauded their lack of imagination. He nibbled at boiled ham and pumpernickel (light), and munched ice cream bars by the dozen. After a month he was forced to take calisthenics (heavy) in the Bronze Age.

"Oh, lost!" he reflected amidst the Neos, surveying the kingdom he had once staked out as his own. He wept over the statue of Achilles Fallen as though it were his own. It was.

As in a mirror, he regarded himself in a handy collage of bolts and nutshells. "If you had not sold out," he accused, "if *you* had hung on a little longer—like these, the simplest of Art's creatures. . . . But no! It could not be!

"Could it?" he addressed a particularly symmetrical mobile overhead. "*Could* it?"

"Perhaps," came an answer from somewhere, which sent him flying back to his pedestal.

But little came of it. The watchman had been taking guilty delight in a buxom Rubens on the other side of the

building and had not overheard the colloquy. Smith decided that the reply signified his accidental nearing of Dharana. He returned to the Path, redoubling his efforts toward negation and looking Beaten.

In the days that followed he heard occasional chuckling and whispering, which he at first dismissed as the chortlings of the children of Mara and Maya, intent upon his distraction. Later, he was less certain, but by then he had decided upon a classical attitude of passive inquisitiveness.

And one spring day, as green and golden as a poem by Dylan Thomas, a girl entered the Greek Period and looked about, furtively. He found it difficult to maintain his marbly placidity, for lo! she began to disrobe!

And a square parcel on the floor, in a plain wrapper. It could only mean . . .

Competition!

He coughed politely, softly, classically. . . .

She jerked to an amazing attention, reminding him of a women's underwear ad having to do with Thermopylae. Her hair was the correct color for the undertaking—that palest shade of Parian manageable—and her gray eyes glittered with the icy-orbed intentness of Athene.

She surveyed the room minutely, guiltily, attractively. . . .

"Surely stone is not susceptible to virus infections," she decided. " 'Tis but my guilty conscience that cleared its throat. Conscience, thus do I cast thee off!"

And she proceeded to become Hecuba Lamenting, diagonally across from the Beaten Gladiator and, fortunately, not facing in his direction. She handled it pretty well, too, he grudgingly admitted. Soon she achieved an esthetic immobility. After a professional appraisal he decided that Athens was indeed mother of all the arts; she simply could not have carried it as Renaissance nor Romanesque. This made him feel rather good.

When the great doors finally swung shut and the alarms had been set she heaved a sigh and sprang to the floor.

"Not yet," he cautioned, "the watchman will pass through in ninety-three seconds."

She had presence of mind sufficient to stifle her scream, a delicate hand with which to do it, and eighty-seven seconds in which to become Hecuba Lamenting once more.

This she did, and he admired her delicate hand and her presence of mind for the next eighty-seven seconds.

The watchman came, was nigh, was gone, flashlight and beard bobbing in musty will-o'-the-wispfulness through the gloom.

"Goodness!" she expelled her breath. "I had thought I was alone!"

"And correctly so," he replied. " 'Naked and alone we come into exile . . . Among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost. . . . Oh, lost—' "

"Thomas Wolfe," she stated.

"Yes," he sulked. "Let's go have supper."

"Supper?" she inquired, arching her eyebrows. "Where? I had brought some K-Rations, which I purchased at an Army Surplus Store—"

"Obviously," he retorted, "you have a short-timer's attitude. I believe that chicken figured prominently on the menu for today. Follow me!"

They made their way through the T'ang Dynasty, to the stairs.

"Others might find it chilly in here after hours," he began, "but I daresay you have thoroughly mastered the techniques of breath control?"

"Indeed," she replied, "my fiancé was no mere Zen faddist. He followed the more rugged path of Lhasa. Once he wrote a modern version of the Ramayana, full of topical allusions and advice to modern society."

"And what did modern society think of it?"

"Alas! Modern society never saw it. My parents bought him a one-way ticket to Rome, first-class, and several hundred dollars worth of Travellers' Checks. He has been gone ever since. That is why I have retired from the world."

"I take it your parents did not approve of Art?"

"No, and I believe they must have threatened him also." He nodded.

"Such is the way of society with genius. I, too, in my small way, have worked for its betterment and received but scorn for my labors."

"Really?"

"Yes. If we stop in the Modern Period on the way back, you can see my Achilles Fallen."

A very dry chuckle halted them.

"Who is there?" he inquired, cautiously.

No reply. They stood in the Glory of Rome, and the stone senators were still.

"*Someone* laughed," she observed.

"We are not alone," he stated, shrugging. "There've been other indications of such, but whoever they are, they're as talkative as Trappists—which is good.

"Remember, thou art stone," he called gaily, and they continued on to the cafeteria.

One night they sat together at dinner in the Modern Period.

"Had you a name, in life?" he asked.

"Gloria," she whispered. "And yours?"

"Smith, Jay."

"What prompted you to become a statue, Smith—if it is not too bold of me to ask?"

"Not at all," he smiled, invisibly. "Some are born to obscurity and others only achieve it through diligent effort. I am one of the latter. Being an artistic failure, and broke, I decided to become my own monument. It's warm in here, and there's food below. The environment is congenial, and I'll never be found out because no one ever looks at anything standing around museums."

"No one?"

"Not a soul, as you must have noticed. Children come here against their wills, young people come to flirt with one another, and when one develops sufficient sensibility to look at anything," he lectured bitterly, "he is either myopic or subject to hallucinations. In the former case he would not notice, in the latter he would not talk. The parade passes."

"Then what good are museums?"

"My dear girl! That the former affianced of a true artist should speak in such a manner indicates that your relationship was but brief—"

"Really!" she interrupted. "The proper word is 'companionship.' "

"Very well," he amended, " 'companionship.' But museums mirror the past, which is dead, the present, which never notices, and transmit the race's cultural heritage to the

future, which is not yet born. In this, they are near to being temples of religion."

"I never thought of it that way," she mused. "Rather a beautiful thought, too. You should really be a teacher."

"It doesn't pay well enough, but the thought consoles me. Come, let us raid the icebox again."

They nibbled their final ice cream bars and discussed Achilles Fallen, seated beneath a great mobile which resembled a starved octopus. He told her of his other great projects and of the nasty reviewers, crabbed and bloodless, who lurked in Sunday editions and hated life. She, in turn, told him of her parents, who knew Art and also knew why she shouldn't like him, and of her parents' vast fortunes, equally distributed in timber, real estate, and petroleum. He, in turn, patted her arm and she, in turn, blinked heavily and smiled Hellenically.

"You know," he said, finally, "as I sat upon my pedestal, day after day, I often thought of myself: Perhaps I should return and make one more effort to pierce the cataract in the eye of the public—perhaps if I were secure and at ease in all things material—perhaps, if I could find the proper woman—but nay! There is no such a one!"

"Continue! Pray continue!" cried she. "I, too, have, over the past days, thought that, perhaps, another artist could remove the sting. Perhaps the poison of loneliness could be drawn by a creator of beauty— If we—"

At this point a small and ugly man in a toga cleared his throat.

"It is as I feared," he announced.

Lean, wrinkled, and grubby was he; a man of ulcerous bowel and much spleen. He pointed an accusing finger.

"It is as I feared," he repeated.

"Wh-who are you?" asked Gloria.

"Cassius," he replied, "Cassius Fitzmullen—art critic, retired, for the Dalton *Times*. You are planning to defect."

"And what concern is it of yours if we leave?" asked Smith, flexing his Beaten Gladiator halfback muscles.

Cassius shook his head.

"Concern? It would threaten a way of life for you to leave now. If you go, you will doubtless become an artist or a teacher of art—and sooner or later, by word or by

gesture, by sign or by unconscious indication, you will communicate what you have suspected all along. I have listened to your conversations over the past weeks. You know, for certain now, that this is where all art critics finally come, to spend their remaining days mocking the things they have hated. It accounts for the increase of Roman Senators in recent years."

"I have often suspected it, but never was sure."

"The suspicion is enough. It is lethal. You must be judged."

He clapped his hands.

"Judgment!" he called.

Other ancient Romans entered slowly, a procession of bent candles. They encircled the two lovers. Smelling of dust and yellow newsprint and bile and time, the old reviewers hovered.

"They wish to return to humanity," announced Cassius. "They wish to leave and take their knowledge with them."

"We would not tell," said Gloria, tearfully.

"It is too late," replied one dark figure. "You are already entered into the Catalog. See here!" He produced a copy and read: " 'Number 28, Hecuba Lamenting. Number 32, The Beaten Gladiator.' No! It is too late. There would be an investigation."

"Judgment!" repeated Cassius.

Slowly, the Senators turned their thumbs down.

"You *cannot* leave."

Smith chuckled and seized Cassius' tunic in a powerful sculptor's grip.

"Little man," he said, "how do you propose stopping us? One scream by Gloria would bring the watchman, who would sound an alarm. One blow by me would render you unconscious for a week."

"We shut off the guard's hearing aid as he slept," smiled Cassius. "Critics are not without imagination, I assure you. Release me, or you will suffer."

Smith tightened his grip.

"Try *anything.*"

"Judgment," smiled Cassius.

"He is modern," said one.

"Therefore, his tastes are catholic," said another.

"To the lions with the Christians!" announced a third, clapping his hands.

And Smith sprang back in panic at what he thought he saw moving in the shadows. Cassius pulled free.

"You cannot do this!" cried Gloria, covering her face. "We are from the Greek Period!"

"When in Greece, do as the Romans do," chuckled Cossius.

The odor of cats came to their nostrils.

"How could you—here . . . ? A lion . . . ?" asked Smith.

"A form of hypnosis privy to the profession," observed Cassius. "We keep the beast paralyzed most of the time. Have you not wondered why there has never been a theft from this museum? Oh, it has been tried, all right! We protect our interests."

The lean, albino lion which generally slept beside the main entrance padded slowly from the shadows and growled —once, and loudly.

Smith pushed Gloria behind him as the cat began its stalking. He glanced toward the Forum, which proved to be vacant. A sound, like the flapping of wings by a flock of leather pigeons, diminished in the distance.

"We are alone," noted Gloria.

"Run," ordered Smith, "and I'll try to delay him. Get out, if you can."

"And desert you? Never, my dear! Together! Now, and always!"

"Gloria!"

"Jay Smith!"

At that moment the beast conceived the notion to launch into a spring, which it promptly did.

"Goodbye, my lovely."

"Farewell. One kiss before dying, pray."

The lion was high in the air, uttering healthy coughs, eyes greenly aglow.

"Very well."

They embraced.

Moon hacked in the shape of cat, that palest of beasts hung overhead—hung high, hung menacingly, hung long. . . .

It began to writhe and claw about wildly in that middle space between floor and ceiling for which architecture possesses no specific noun.

"Mm! Another kiss?"

"Why not? Life is sweet."

A minute ran by on noiseless feet; another pursued it.

"I say, what's holding up that lion?"

"I am," answered the mobile. "You humans aren't the only ones to seek umbrage amidst the relics of your dead past."

The voice was thin, fragile, like that of a particularly busy Aeolian Harp.

"I do not wish to seem inquisitive," said Smith, "but who are you?"

"I am an alien life form," it tinkled back, digesting the lion. "My ship suffered an accident on the way to Arcturus. I soon discovered that my appearance was against me on your planet, except in the museums, where I am greatly admired. Being a member of a rather delicate and, if I do say it, somewhat narcissistic race—" He paused to belch daintily, and continued, "—I rather enjoy it here—'among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder [belch], lost.' "

"I see," said Smith. "Thanks for eating the lion."

"Don't mention it—but it wasn't *wholly* advisable. You see, I'm going to have to divide now. Can the other me go with you?"

"Of course. You saved our lives, and we're going to need something to hang in the living room, when we have one.

"Good."

He divided, in a flurry of hemidemisemiquavers, and dropped to the floor beside them.

"Goodbye, me," he called upward.

"Goodbye," from above.

They walked proudly from the Modern, through the Greek, and past the Roman Period, with much hauteur and a wholly quiet dignity. Beaten Gladiator, Hecuba Lamenting, and Xena ex Machina no longer, they lifted the sleeping watchman's key and walked out the door, down the stairs, and into the night, on youthful legs and drop-lines.

This story is very largely autobiographical. The background is real; I did spend my early childhood in a place in Oregon's mountains just like the one described here. The people are real, too, though their names are changed. As for the Old Man of the Mountains himself . . . well, he was very real to me once, and he became real again as I wrote this story.

Terry Carr

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS

When Ernie Tompkins returned to Oregon at the age of twenty-two he found only the mountains the same. They loomed in the distance like monolithic gray-blue clouds in the heat of the July noon. He could smell them in the air as he drove—pine, cedar, birch, oak and manzanita, a fresh crisp smell in the wind that mingled with the richer odor of the sawdust smoke from the lumber mills.

In the valley, everything was changing. The highway between Gold Hill and Rogue River paralleled the river itself, but the waters seemed lower this year than he remembered them from his boyhood; out in the center of the channel he could occasionally see the rocky white bottom emerging dry in the sun. In Medford, which to him had always been a lumber town, he had passed new supermarkets. And here, all along the river, were recently-built green and brown

tourist motels. RIVEREDGE; RIPPLING WATERS, ROOMS; ON-THE-ROGUE . . . they were all new. Further down the river, by Grants Pass, he had heard that there was water-skiing in the summer.

It was only when the valley narrowed and the mountains walked right down to the riverside that Ernie began to feel at home again. The store at the Foot's Creek junction was unchanged: a gas pump in the shade, a wooden porch and a screen door led in to a dark interior. He swung the car off the highway onto the access road back into the hills, and as the shadow of the mountains fell across the windshield he relaxed and let the years come back to him.

These were Uncle Dan's mountains, dark and green and steep. When he had lived here his uncle had shown them to him, as you must show things to a boy who has been so familiar with them since he was born that he's never noticed them. Uncle Dan had interpreted these mountains for him—the animal trails, the raucous birds who set up a commotion in the trees, and the shadows in the underbrush. The physical details of these hills were directly and personally real to him even now: here was the old Morrison place, looking dark and tired, its roof recently covered with fresh tarpaper; here was the Stamfords' mailbox, or whoever had bought them out. Up ahead was the cutoff to the East Fork, and the small bridge where he and Uncle Dan had sat for hours at a time watching the water skippers darting randomly on the face of the shallow creek, the shadows of their insect-feet on the clear water following them on the muddy bed.

Almost every day, it seemed, they had gone walking out through the brush and trees, Uncle Dan with his hand-carved walking cane, whistling to Patsy, a mongrel-shepherd who romped ahead and snuffled around the base of manzanita or pine. Sometimes Uncle Dan brought along his .22 and shot a squirrel for dinner (and sometimes he missed), but usually those walks were for exercise and for talk.

Uncle Dan had loved to talk. He'd tell you that if you peeled the crinkling manzanita bark off carefully enough you could use it for paper, and about how he'd left many a note on that bark in tree-holes for the Old Man of the Mountains. He'd tell you about the moss on trees, and where to look for mushrooms, and about the time he was out

walking and sat down to rest on a rock-ledge that turned out to be practically pure gold, only by the time he'd hurried back to get his shovel and pan he'd forgotten just where the place was. (And how often had those walks of theirs been ostensibly for the purpose of looking for that ledge of gold? Ernie wondered as the pavement of the road ended and the tires rolled on over gravel, throwing it up in a spray inside the fenders.)

But most of all Ernie had always wanted Uncle Dan to talk about the Old Man of the Mountains. "Well now, boy, he don't often come down from way up top there," he'd say, pointing with his cane to the highest mountain around. "He don't take to people much. Nossir, it's all I can do to get a civil word out of him myself, and I guess I'm the closest friend he's got in the world. And the only one."

"Why's that?"

"Well, I told you. He don't like people . . . they get in his way. He's kind of an on'ry cuss, now that's the truth. Just as ugly as you please, too, but I got used to that. Sits up there all by himself, year in year out, just thinkin' mean thoughts I guess. Never know for sure what he's up to."

And Ernie, at four, had asked, "Does he have a dog?"

"Ohhh, sure," Uncle Dan had said, squinting his eyes at the sun. "Meanest damn dog you ever saw, too. Big black thing, slobbers and growls to beat anything. He keeps him locked up most o' the time, feeds him jackrabbits and field-mice."

"Why does he keep him? I wouldn't have a dog like that."

"Well, the Old Man gets along with him, that's all I know. He ain't ever been bit yet. I guess that ole dog just knows somebody meaner than him when he sees him."

The Old Man of the Mountains had filled Ernie's thoughts. Sometimes he had gone out by himself, walking down to the creek or up to the high barn where the cows were, and every time he'd kept an eye out for the Old Man. And once he'd been sure he'd seen that mean old black dog of his, and he'd run all the way back to report the sighting to Uncle Dan, who'd sat whittling on another cane and said, "Yep, yep, that was him all right. Prob'ly out huntin' for baby squirrels to eat. Damn dog never eats fullgrown

animals, always looks for the babies. Meanest dog in creation."

The Old Man of the Mountains had become the closest thing to the devil that Ernie had ever believed in. When some of the chickens disappeared it was the Old Man's doing, and when the creek was low it was just another of his tricks. One night there was a commotion up at the barn, right in the middle of a rainstorm, and everybody had gone up there to quiet down the animals. Right down the back of the barn had been a black scorched line, and Uncle Dan had said yep, that's his mark. Of course it had been lightning, but Ernie hadn't known that then.

Well, Uncle Dan had died a couple of years ago, while Ernie was in California, so he wouldn't be seeing him on this trip. But he had a feeling, as he turned off the road onto the dirt-rutted driveway leading through overhanging trees to the house, that he'd be keeping an eye open for the Old Man anyway, while he was here. The lower branches of the trees brushed against the sides of the car, and after one of them had slapped across his face through the open window on his side Ernie rolled it up. Hello, Old Man.

When he pulled across the bridge over the creek and up over a steep rise, out of the trees into the sun, old Bolger greeted him with the most godawful barking and bellering he'd heard from a dog since the last time he'd been here ten years before. Bolger had been an ungainly pup then, but he'd already weighed over thirty pounds; his bark hadn't changed much with the years, Ernie noticed. He drove slowly up to the porch of the lower house and braked the car.

"Goddammit, get down!" he laughed out the window at the dog, who was standing up against the car with his nose smearing the window. Ernie shook him off when he opened the door, and Bolger gave one great "WROOF!" and bounded away. Marth had come out onto the porch, and she shook a broom at the dog.

"That cussed dog's a pain in the neck sometimes," she said as she led him into the house. "Don't get too friendly with him, Ernie; he gets so excited he'll knock you down every time. He just wants affection, but he ain't got good sense. Well, sit down and I'll get you a beer."

Ernie sat, picking a chair by the electric fan which was going full-blast. Marth, who was his cousin by marriage but was fifteen years older, brought a half-quart can frosty from the refrigerator. "The men are off to the logging camp during the week," she said. "Ought to be back tonight. Your Aunt Dodo's up to her house; if she heard your car she'll be down. Drink your beer. How are you?"

Ernie drank gratefully; once off the highway, the heat of the summer was more pressing. "I'm fine," he said. "When'd you get the electricity in? We used to use the well in back for a refrigerator; we'd hang bottles down into it on cords."

"They strung electric lines up here couple of years ago. I'm afraid your country cousins aren't so quaint as we used to be. Television's in there." She waved a hand back at the living room.

"I'll be damned," he said. "No more Bob Hope on the radio at night? You know, I haven't read an Andy Gump strip in the papers for years; they don't have it in Los Angeles."

"Well, he keeps goin' on up here, if you can stand him. Bob Hope's on television sometimes."

"Ah, it's not the same, Marth." He took another long swallow of the beer. "I'll bet you even have an electric stove now—you should've known I was looking forward to chopping firewood."

"I guess we've lost some of our native simplicity," she said. "But you can go out an' plow the south forty this afternoon if you want."

Ernie looked up and saw her grinning at him. At thirty-eight Marth looked a bit tired, but when she grinned at him he saw that most of the lines around her eyes were laugh-wrinkles.

"We never had a south forty here and if we did it would be overgrown with trees anyway," he said. "Don't you go making fun of us citified people."

"I wouldn' dream," she said, her eyes still mocking him. Ernie sat back in the chair, feeling the fan ruffling his hair at the back, and relaxed.

Aunt Dodo came in a few minutes later, and they spent a few hours getting up to date on each other. Dodo had been Uncle Dan's wife, and she was getting on in years. When the late afternoon sun cast leaf-mottled shadows across

the table Ernie said he wanted to take a walk and look around.

"Well, don't get in my vegetables out back," Marth said. "I've got enough trouble keepin' Bolger out."

Ernie went out onto the porch, where Bolger, as usual, was sitting on his hip. The dog opened one red-rimmed eye to look at him, snuffed, and went back to sleep. Ernie stepped down into the summer dust of the driveway and walked across to the ravine over the creek. He bent and dug a few rocks out of the dirt, peered out and located the tall pine he'd used for a target years ago. Then he took careful aim and threw the rocks one after another, missing with each one. Well, he was out of shape. He went on down the trail to the creek and made his way up the other side into the trees.

After half an hour he decided he should have changed out of his slacks; they were getting as dusty as his shoes. He was walking through underbrush now, using his arms to hold back the branches as he passed. Somewhere out in here, he seemed to remember, was one of the trees in which Uncle Dan had left his manzanita notes for the Old Man.

Ernie remembered that once he'd left a note there himself, carefully written out with the stub of a pencil by Uncle Dan. It was right after Patsy had disappeared; she'd been gone for two days and Ernie had told Uncle Dan that he bet that Old Man had got her. He probably had her locked up somewhere and was feeding her baby jackrabbits, trying to make her as mean as his dog. So Uncle Dan had written a note to the Old Man and told him to set their dog free or he'd come up and take a cane to him, and the next morning Patsy had come back, her fur matted with burrs and her tongue hanging out. Ernie had spent most of that day cleaning her coat, and Uncle Dan had had to remove a tick from her ear.

Ernie almost missed the tree when he came to it. The hole near the base of the trunk was overgrown with dark green grass and weeds, and it was only when he recognized the big oak next to it that he realized he'd found it. He stooped and looked into the hole to see if one of those notes might still be there, but there were only a few leaves and ground-insects. He stood up and stretched, standing in the shade of a tree.

Behind him a voice said, "What in hell're you doin' there?"

Ernie jerked his head around and saw a man in a dirty deer-hide jacket standing next to the oak tree. The man was a good six and a half feet tall, and heavily built, with dark gray hair falling down over his forehead and spraying out over his ears. His face was a mass of dirty wrinkles in skin that was almost like leather itself; his eyes held Ernie's fiercely.

Ernie grinned at the man, a nonsensical civilized reflex which he immediately regretted. "I was looking at the tree," he said.

"I can see what you were doin'," the man said. "Now what were you lookin' there for?"

Ernie shrugged, feeling foolish. Had he wandered onto somebody else's property? Nobody had worried about private property when he'd lived in these hills, but obviously things were different around here now. At any rate, he wasn't about to say that he was looking to see if he could find a note to a childhood bogey-man.

"I thought I saw something move there," he said. "Could have been a lizard."

The man drew his lips back disgustedly, and spat tobacco-juice from the side of his mouth. "If it'd been anything, might've been a rattler. You make a habit of pokin' 'round rattlers?"

Ernie shrugged again, feeling even more foolish. "I was just out for a walk," he said.

"You a city boy?" the man said, frowning darkly at him. He was leaning on a huge, smooth-polished wood cane with a head large enough for a club.

"Well, I'm from here originally," Ernie said. "Is this your property?"

The man spat again, and continued chewing with his mouth open. "Damn right it is, boy. Damn right. Now why don't you jus' walk somewheres else?" He turned with an abrupt motion of dismissal and started to walk away, leaning with both hands on his cane. Ernie noticed then that one of his legs was shorter than the other.

Just before the man had got out of sight, Ernie called after him, "Did you ever know a man named Dan Harrison?"

The brawny dark man stopped and turned slowly around

to look suspiciously at Ernie. "He's dead. What'd you have to do with him?"

"He was my uncle," Ernie said.

The big man continued to look at him from under dark brows for several seconds, then said, "Well, he's dead."

"When I was a kid we used to go for walks together," Ernie said. "Every time we'd go by that tree he'd stop and leave a note for a friend of his—or at least that was what he told me."

The dark old man leaned heavily on his staff, looking sullenly at him. "Did, eh?" he said.

"Uncle Dan always called him the Old Man of the Mountains," Ernie said. "He said he was the meanest man in the world."

The man spat at the base of the oak tree. "And the ugliest, too," he said. "Damned right."

Ernie watched the old man closely, but got nothing from the other's sullen gaze. "Whenever anything went wrong around the place," Ernie said, "Uncle Dan claimed it was the Old Man's fault. He said he had supernatural powers . . . magic ones."

The leathery gray man grunted. "Killed chickens and turned water bad, I suppose," he said.

"Things like that," Ernie nodded. "And Uncle Dan said once that he had one leg shorter than the other."

The old man straightened up, raised the walking cane and flexed it in his powerful grip, one heavy eyebrow raised. "Your uncle talked a lot," he said in a low voice. Then he looked up, directly into Ernie's eyes. "You're the kid sent me that letter 'bout the dog."

Ernie grinned. "Yes, and she came back the next day, too."

The Old Man shook his cane at him. "I didn't have a damn thing to do with that dog of yours," he said. "Minute a dog goes off to chase squirrels or . . . maybe to lift his leg somewheres, folks say it's me that's got him. If I did everything 'round here I'm s'posed to I'd never get any sleep nights."

"Well, she did come back pretty quick, though," Ernie said.

"You shoulda counted your stars, then," said the Old Man. "Kids 'round here got better things t' do than worry 'bout me."

"What *do* you do?" said Ernie. He sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. "Do you hunt?"

The Old Man spat a quick stream of juice at a butterfly that passed too close to him; he missed and the butterfly zigzagged quickly away. "Yeah, I hunt sometimes. Coyote, sometimes, or deer."

"And you never come down out of the mountains," Ernie said. "Except maybe sometimes."

"Can't stand people," the Old Man muttered. "Can't stand you much either, boy. You talk almost as much as your uncle."

"You aren't so ugly," Ernie said. "He said you were the most ugly man on earth, but that isn't true."

The Old Man fixed him with a sudden piercing stare. "I'm as ugly as anybody *you're* ever likely to see, boy," he said. "Don't you know folks say I can curdle milk just by lookin' at it?"

"Well, I don't think that's true," Ernie said. "You know Uncle Dan himself was no beauty. He was nobody to be talking."

"Boy, you better get yourself home!" the Old Man said, raising his cane, which was nearly the size of a tree-limb. "I don't believe you even got any respect for the dead, an' that's somethin' even *I* got. A little, anyways. Wouldn't bother me none to just split your skull, boy."

Ernie stood up quickly and backed away from the advancing Old Man. Short-legged or not, that man looked like he had the muscles and the meanness to do anything he said. "I was beginning to get tired walking anyway," Ernie said. "But I'll say this, you probably *are* about the *meanest* one man I ever met. You know, I'll bet you hate people so much because you think you're so ugly nobody could stand you."

The Old Man shook his cane at him menacingly. "And I claim I can't stand 'em because they don't mind their own business! I'm warnin' you, boy, clear out!"

Ernie turned and walked quickly away from the Old Man. But after a few steps he turned again. He watched the man walking off the other way, leaning tiredly on his cane now that he thought he was not being watched. A huge, ugly, dirty-gray haired man, leaning on his cane.

"Do you use a gun when you go hunting?" he called after him.

The Old Man stopped and looked around at him over one hide-covered shoulder. "Sometimes, boy, sometimes," he said. "And sometimes I just run after 'em and kick 'em in the butt!" He laughed deeply and prodigiously, and walked off up the mountain.

When Ernie got back to the house he didn't say anything about meeting the Old Man. It was nightfall by then, and Brad and Harry drove up the road. They laughed and joked while Marth fixed dinner, and Ernie sat reading the Grants Pass paper under the television lamp. Judging from the ads in the paper, Grants Pass too was growing up. There were ads for department stores and supermarkets, and drive-in movies. Ernie grinned at himself, put the paper down and joined the others at the supper table.

"The beer isn't cold," Marth said. "The refrigerator went on the blink this afternoon."

"Well, that's a problem we never had when I was here," Ernie said. "Civilization has its drawbacks."

"There are always problems," Marth said. "Things go wrong."

After dinner they all sat watching television until the picture started rolling so much that they had to turn it off. Ernie got a book from his suitcase and sat reading it, thinking of the refrigerator and the bad tv reception. Things were pretty much the same, really. Hello, Old Man.

This is a story about a man whose head has fallen from his body, and of his efforts to get himself together again. It may remind you a bit of *Gulliver's Travels;* it has a similarly deadpan satiric feeling. You can take a number of "meanings" from it, but its title suggests the story should be regarded more as a simple slice of life. Well . . .

EN PASSANT

Britt Schweitzer

My head struck the ground with a dull thud, then rolled eight or nine feet into a small cluster of weeds. It is difficult to describe the dizzy blur of colors and shapes I witnessed as this event took place, but the discomfort I experienced can be readily imagined. The impact upon striking the ground was so severe that I remained in a dazed, semi-conscious state for a considerable time therefater.

I do not know, in fact, how long it was before my senses were again fully operative. My first clear impression was of some insect roaming aimlessly over the side of my face—a tormentor against whom I seemed quite helpless until it made the error of crawling too close to my mouth; whereupon, with a shudder, I spat him away.

This encounter was sufficient to revive me to full consciousness. I became aware of a throbbing pain on the left side of my head—a little above and to the right of the ear

—which brought the memory of my unfortunate topple into grim focus, and led me to an awareness of the difficult situation in which, as a result, I found myself.

I gazed around and saw only earth and sky. I listened intently for several moments, but heard nothing. Looking again at my surroundings, I noticed in the extreme corner of my limited view, the presence of a shadow. Inasmuch as my visual angle to the ground was extremely awkward, I was unable to make out the details, but it seemed to be a figure of some kind—perhaps human.

I tried to shift my position in such a way that the figure would come into view. After some experimentation, I found that I was able to pivot my head around by careful movement of the jaws. Soon there emerged into sight the figure of a man, standing in frozen stride. With relief, I called out, but he made no sound or motion in response. I examined the still figure more closely, and noticed, with a sudden start, that it was headless. I was watching my own body!

After recovering from the initial surprise, I became fascinated with the idea of viewing my figure from such an unusual aspect. I examined it with interest for several minutes before my thoughts returned again to the gravity of my predicament. It was good, certainly, that my entire being was now accounted for, but there was still the problem of reuniting the parts.

I called out again to the motionless figure, but there was no response. I shouted several times, hoping to stir it to action in its own behalf, but soon realized that any attempt at communication would prove futile. I paused to study the body again, and it occurred to me that I had never before been able to view myself from such a convenient angle, and with complete objectivity, as if examining the figure of another person.

My mind returned abruptly, however, to the serious problem with which I was confronted. Being myself altogether immobile, any hope of restoration seemed to lie in gaining assistance from a second party. I began to shout very loudly for help, but my efforts were useless. A sense of panic swept over me as I began to contemplate my helplessness. As there was no other living thing in view it appeared that I might be destined to remain thus, in repose, for some considerable

time. I assured myself, however, that someone would eventually happen to pass by, and seeing the situation, offer assistance. I decided to wait.

I waited for several days. During that time I spent many hours absorbed in study of my torso. As the sun moved through its daily course, varying patterns of light would fall on the figure, thus presenting a marvelous panorama of shadow and flesh. I came to know the contour of every muscle, every misshape, every blemish. I was disappointed to realize that, in honest appraisal, my form was rather unexceptional—no worse than average, to be sure, but hardly statuesque. It presented, nevertheless, a remarkable image from which could be studied the rhythmic action of each muscle poised in the arrested motion of a single instant.

I eventually began to lose hope that anyone would ever pass that particular place, and it seemed for a moment that I might be fated to spend eternity in visual contemplation of my headless body. It seemed curious that not one person should have passed after so long a time, and the thought occurred to me that the same fate which had struck me to immobility might have befallen every living thing; perhaps the world was now populated by countless heads scattered at isolated intervals, each in contemplation of its own detached body—each vainly hoping for the chance passing of another. Perhaps this was the way the universe was to end, with its living things, so tirelessly and meticulously developed, now cast into a pattern of helpless absurdity.

Having finally abandoned all hope of rescue, I began to consider a plan whereby I might improve my own situation. I had discovered during the days of waiting that I was not altogether incapable of movement; that with proper action of my jaws I could propel myself somewhat in the manner of a snake. The motion was slow—almost imperceptible—but it seemed to offer the only faint hope of altering my situation.

In this manner, I set out to bring head and body closer together. I soon discovered that the task was extraordinarily difficult. Movement was slow, and by no means easy to control. Indeed, it was quite difficult to avoid an aimless zigzag path, and it was several days before I became certain that definite progress was being made. Moreover, the effort

was quite exhausting, and my muscles soon began to ache unbearably.

Although I made no attempt to keep track of time, it was many days before I had covered even half the distance, and I was by then near a state of collapse. The sight of my figure began to infuriate me, fresh and vigorous looking as it was, yet not contributing one iota in the struggle for its own preservation. At one point, in fact, in an almost delirious rage, I found myself cursing at it violently: "You foolish ass! Why don't you do something to help?"

When I had at last reached a position directly under my body, I began to wonder whether my arduous labors would prove to be of any practical use. It was reassuring to finally touch its flesh after such a lengthy separation, but I found that I was not able to stir it in the least; it remained quite unmoved even when bitten vigorously. Moreover, I was unable to topple it with the most streuous exertion.

I rested for several days in order to recover my strength, and at the same time attempted to work out a solution to my awkward problem. Gradually I conceived the details of a fantastic plan whereby, if successful, I might be eventually on my way again in one piece. My scheme was simply to gain a firm grip on one of my legs and slowly work my way upwards, by means of lateral movements of the jaw. When this thought first occurred to me, I dismissed it as absurdly impractical, but ultimately decided that it must be tried as no other possibility remained. My experiences in ground propulsion already forewarned me that such an endeavor would require every ounce of stamina and strength I could muster and would necessarily have to be planned with great care if there was to be any hope of success.

Having carefully surveyed the terrain of flesh and determined a feasible route, I began, with considerable trepidation, my upward journey. I started at the heel of my left foot and soon developed a workable technique by means of which I was able to gain ascent. My method consisted in clamping my jaws firmly around the flesh to obtain support, sliding the lower jaw upwards a slight distance, then moving the upper jaw to a position adjoining it. Since it was necessary to maintain a secure grip at every instant in order to continuously support the weight of my head, I could not avoid inflicting injury to my body along the path of travel.

As I felt the skin being sheared beneath my clamped jaws, and occasionally tasted a warm trickle of blood, I was rather thankful that nervous communication to that portion of my anatomy was, for the time being, severed.

It was imperative to proceed relentlessly and without pause once the endeavor had begun, since the mere act of support consumed precious energy even when my head was not in motion. My initial progress was greater than I had originally anticipated, and I managed to reach a position just below the rear knee joint in about five hours. At this point, I became overly confident, however, and failed to judge properly the narrowing path of flesh in this area. My grip loosened for a split second, and my head toppled once again to earth. My first attempt had failed.

My initial trial gave me a degree of confidence, however, and after a day of rest I began a second journey, determined this time to succeed at all costs. I debated for some while the choice of route for my second try; the previous path had been a good one, but I hesitated to inflict further damage on those areas of flesh which had already been severely lacerated. I decided, finally, to begin at the right leg. I was able, in my second effort, to reach the buttocks after one day of travel. My jaws were by that time tired and numb, and I feared I might lose control over their movements. Yet I had no choice but to continue as long as any vestige of strength remained.

I had planned, as an intermediate objective, to reach a point just above my slightly extended left forearm. Working my way up behind the ribs, I endeavored to arrive at a position in which the weight of my head would be supported in a fork formed by the arm and lower chest. I was in a state of near collapse when I finally managed to work my way securely into this refuge. The relief I felt as I relaxed my jaws for the first time in two days is impossible to describe. As I dozed off in a sound sleep with my head tucked firmly under my arm, I could not help chuckling slightly at the thought of the absurd spectacle I must have then presented.

Taking full advantage of the opportunity, I rested in that spot for several days. When my aching jaws finally began to regain their strength, I contemplated the final lap of my journey. I elected to continue by way of a path up the

right front of my body, keeping close to the side until I neared the shoulder. It was considerably more difficult than before to maintain a firm grip, owing to the lack of ample flesh around my upper rib cage. Several times the thought struck me that I might again topple, with my objective so close at hand, and I doubted whether I could muster the courage to begin a third time, should this happen.

Ultimately I reached shoulder level, and with some relief began traveling across towards the neck. My collar bone provided a convenient ledge on which to gain a grip and I reached the throat with little difficulty. I was then confronted by what proved to be the most difficult task of the entire project—that of rejoining my head at the proper position without losing my support in the process.

Maintaining a tenacious grip on my own throat, I began to determine the effect of various movements of my jaw and facial muscles. I was extremely discouraged at first to realize that even with the most strenuous exertion I was unable to orient my head at more than half the angle required for proper reinstatement; though I twisted and turned it every conceivable direction, all efforts seemed futile. A sense of despair swept over me as it began to appear that, after all my labors, final success was to be denied.

I found that matters could be improved considerably, however, by moving around to the side of the neck and forcing its upper surface to tilt slightly by severe compression of its flesh between my teeth. It was with some regret that I performed this maneuver, as I was apprehensive of the possibility that the wounds I was inflicting might prove mortal. Yet this procedure, despite its grave risk, seemed to offer the only hope of eventual success. Straining every available muscle to the utmost, I was able to force the severed surfaces gradually nearer and nearer to one another.

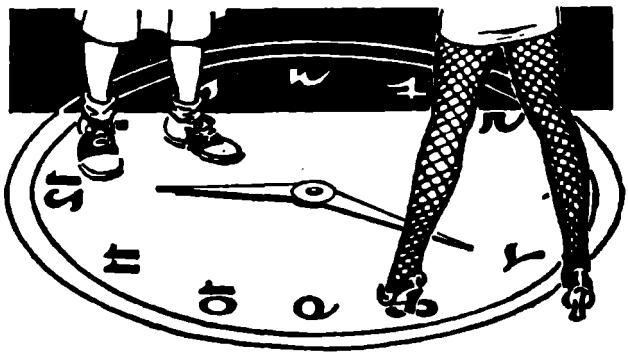
When contact was finally achieved, the pain of all the horrible lacerations which I had been forced to inflict on myself shot through me in an excruciating rage. The thrill of feeling myself again whole, however, made this suffering seem inconsequential. As I caused my limbs to move for the first time in many weeks, I discovered with sudden shock that my head was on backwards. This fact proved to be less serious than amusing, however; with arms now at my

control, it was a simple matter to reach up and twist it to the right position. Having done this, I paused for an instant to breathe a sigh of relief now that this extraordinary incident in my life had come to a close. Then, with renewed vigor, I continued my interrupted journey—determined, henceforth, to remain indoors on windy days.

Wilmar H. Shiras is well remembered among sf aficionados for her classic novelette *In Hiding,* which became the first third of her book *Children of the Atom.* The story below, an original for this volume, is her first appearance in the field since then, and it embodies much the same understanding of the problems of growing up that we remember.

Wilmar H. Shiras

BACKWARD, TURN BACKWARD



"After all," I said banally, "you're young only once."

My neighbor, Mrs. Tokkin, looked at me over the rim of her tea-cup.

"Is that so?" she said gravely.

"Well—it's generally conceded to be so," I replied.

My children were whooping it up outside; their racket had occasioned my remark. For a moment, my neighbor said nothing; she helped herself carefully to another cookie.

"Perhaps my case was a little exceptional," said Mrs. Tokkin, and she took another sip of tea. "Because of knowing the Professor," she added, apologetically.

It happened (said Mrs. Tokkin) when I was thirty. That was a good many years ago. My children were young then—about the ages of yours, my dear—and I had all the usual troubles with them. You can't put an old head on young shoulders. "If youth but knew, if age but could," the French saying is awkwardly translated. At any rate, I realized for the first time why my grandparents and my teachers had so often been annoyed with me.

One day I said to the Professor, "If I could go back and live my life over, knowing what I do now, how different it would be! I wouldn't sit and frown at my books for half an hour when I had lessons to do, or dawdle about my work; I'd get at it and get it done, and have time to play or read. If children only knew how much happier and easier life is, and what reasons there are for doing what they should." And I said much more to the same purpose, as many others have said before me, no doubt.

The Professor said very little at first, but then he said, "You really think so?" and when I said I did—as indeed I did at the moment—he looked at me thoughtfully for a while and then said, "Something might be arranged."

He brought me a small glass of what I thought was wine, and when I had drunk it, he fixed his eyes on mine and began to talk. I thought the wine must have been very strong, as I could not seem to attend to what he was saying, and began to feel very giddy and drowsy.

And would you believe it, my dear, when I woke up I was in the bedroom I had occupied as a girl, in my grandmother's house!

I stared around me and sat up. There was no mistake. The heavy old-fashioned furniture, the pictures on the walls, everything was as it had been. I lay down again and shut my eyes, expecting that I would wake up properly very soon. Instead, the door opened softly and I heard my grandfather's voice saying in a loud whisper, "Time to get up, girl." I opened my eyes at once, hoping to see him before the dream should break. It was something to see him again, the dear man, even in a dream.

"You're awake? That's good," he said.

I sat up, seizing the shining opportunity.

"Kiss me," I demanded.

He seemed surprised, but came over to the bed and kissed

me. It was as good as real; I had that much, I thought, for I had been very fond of him.

"Get right up, now, do," he urged, and went downstairs. The treads creaked, and I could hear my grandmother rattling dishes. Perhaps, I thought, if I got right up and went downstairs, I could see her too. I always have such vivid dreams—quite long ones, sometimes. So I jumped out of bed, and for the first time realized how cold it was. I ran to the register in the corner of the room, and, standing on the metal grating, with the warm air coming up around my legs, I pulled off my pajamas and reached for my clothes. Long woolies, my dear! It made me laugh, but I got into them with all haste.

When I went to wash, I got quite a shock to see myself in the mirror. I looked so much younger, and my hair was braided in two hateful braids. I washed my face and hands, and ran downstairs, hoping against hope that my grandparents would still be there, for in dreams, you know, things have a way of vanishing or changing into something else. I think I first realized it wasn't a dream when I saw my grandfather there at the kitchen table, spooning up cereal.

I stopped in the doorway and looked at him. He turned slowly around, and winked at me.

"I said you'd be right down," he chuckled. "I told grandma you were awake."

"For a wonder," said my grandmother. "This is the first chance you've had to eat breakfast before school for months."

"It's too cold to get up early," I said. I was still so sleepy that I couldn't remember much of anything, least of all the Professor and my little talk with him. I sat down in my own place, and grandpa shoved the milk-pitcher my way.

"What would you eat?" grandma asked, rather helplessly.

"Oh, cereal, I guess," I said.

"I didn't suppose you'd want any," said grandma, scraping the pot. She came across the kitchen and set the bowl before me. "Pour your milk."

I poured the milk into my glass; but the calendar on the wall caught my eye, and staring at it I kept on pouring until a sharp cry from my grandmother brought me to myself.

"Clumsy!" she said, scurrying to the sink for a rag. I pushed back my chair as the milk ran over the table. She

mopped up the milk, scolding all the time. I paid no attention; I was still staring at the calendar. The figures did not shift and change as figures almost invariably do in dreams. The calender was very plain and clear, and it said, and kept on saying, that it was November, 1922!

And what was grandma muttering?

"A great girl fifteen years old, and can't so much as pour milk without pouring it all over the table!"

I didn't say anything. There was nothing to say. I was fifteen years old; I had gone back fifteen years in time; and I hadn't the least idea how it had happened.

I had to ask what day of the week it was. All the rest I needed to know was written on the front page of my school notebook—my studies, and the hours the classes met, and the rooms I should go to, and all that. And there are things you never forget; I knew where to look for my school-bag. I got off for school as fast as I could, and sat through the day in a daze. I hardly heard a word of what was going on, and when called upon to recite, I shook my head and said, "I don't know."

Elsie came up after class and said, "You look as if you might faint any minute. Ask old Furry to excuse you and let you go home, why don't you?"

But it seemed easier to stay where I was. My grandmother always made such a fuss when I was not well, and I didn't want to be questioned.

After school, I went upstairs with my books and said I was going to study. That usually meant I was going to read story-books, but at any rate I escaped comment. I got a book, too, from my bedroom—one of Edgar Rice Burroughs' it was, and I hadn't read it since my marriage. Oddly enough, reading it interested me a little and relaxed my nerves. The one thing I felt sure of was that I must not lose my grip. By then I knew it was not a dream, and I would have to be careful, or I would be locked up for a lunatic; and that wouldn't help matters any.

When I had finished the book I began to think matters over. I had no doubt at all about Paul and the children and California and everything that had happened since I was fifteen. I could remember hundreds of things without half trying. I could remember what teachers I had had in my last year at high school, and the year I spent in college, and

how I met Paul, and all sorts of things. I took a pencil and drew a floor plan of the house we lived in, in California. I knew what newspapers we took, and what the electricity bill had been, and my husband's age and his birthday, and what his parents looked like. I could remember the births of my children, and all sorts of things a woman knows when she is thirty and has been married for years and has borne children, that no amount of reading in books can ever give you. I could remember these things with my body—if you understand me, my dear—childbirth and nursing and waking up for the two A.M. feeding. These things were real and they had happened. But it was also real that I was a girl of fifteen and it was 1922.

I tried to remember all I could about Time and the Fourth Dimension, and finally I came to the conclusion that I must have slipped through somehow and had really gone back. I was trying to pray about it, in a sort of wordless howl, when I heard the front door open downstairs, and my grandfather's voice saying, "Where's the girl?"

That was the way he always said it, when he came in. He wouldn't more than get the door open, before he'd be asking for me.

I didn't have Paul and the children, but at least I did have my grandparents, and my old friends and schoolmates and teachers. I might be able to live it all over again, and get back to where I had been. For the Professor had vanished from my memory entirely. I believe I remembered everything else perfectly.

I resolved, therefore, to live the fifteen years all over again if I had to, and hope that it would be the same—that I would meet Paul and marry him, and so on.

So I went downstairs and tried to read the paper. I have never been much interested in day-by-day news, and you have no idea how dull a newspaper can be, fifteen years after the event; especially when one's mind is all in a whirl.

Supper was soon ready, and we ate it in silence. Then my grandmother started to clear the table.

"I'll help," I said.

"You'd better get on with your lessons," my grandmother said—as she always had.

"I've done them," I said. Surely, I thought, I must know them—only high school lessons. And having had to do so

many dishes in my married life, I thought for the first time in my life that it was too bad I had never helped my grandmother do them.

I didn't know where things went; I never had known. But I got the table cleared finally and started the dishes. There were no detergents, of course, in those days. We used scraps of soap in a wire soap-shaker. Grandma insisted on drying the dishes as I washed them, and she put them away.

"I guess I'll go to the library and get some books," I said, for *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* had occurred to me as almost too relevant to my situation, and I wanted to re-read it.

Nobody said anything.

So I started to hunt for some library books or a library card. It was quite a hunt. I didn't know whether I had any books out or not.

"Your library card is on the sideboard, if that's what you are hunting for," grandma said after a while.

"Thanks," I said, and took it, and started off.

The cold November air did me good. It even helped me to remember that the book I was thinking of hadn't come out yet. I walked up and down the dark streets, thinking. There was such a book; Paul and I had read it. It had come out just after we were married, and Paul had said the first part was wonderful but it was too bad that HG hadn't known when to stop. It had been a long while ago that I had read the book; but I had read it—and it was not yet written.

My card said I had no books out. That was funny. I'd have to get some—I'd have to get a lot. Whenever panic started to rise I'd have to read it down. Escape into books, that was the way.

I went straight to the card index; but when I went toward the stacks, a woman rose from behind the desk and headed for me. She marched me straight out of the grown-up side of the library and over to the children's section!

"There are the books on the high school list," she said.

I couldn't help laughing. Dear old Boston. I couldn't read adult fiction, or even non-fiction, until I was sixteen and had an adult card. I could read only what was hand-picked and put on the high school list.

I chose a couple of books—*A Friend of Caesar* and *A Tale*

of Two Cities—and went out. There was a change purse in my pocket, so I went to the drug store and had a college ice, as we then called them. And when I got home, my grandmother sent me to bed.

After I got into bed I tried to think carefully what to do. I wanted to change, to do better in many ways; and I also wanted, of course, to get back eventually to the point I had left life at the night before—fifteen years in the future. I could safely do better in many small ways—study harder, help at home more—but I must be careful not to do anything very different, because that might change my life so I would never meet Paul, or never marry him. And of course, my dear, I could never marry anyone else, without knowing myself to be a bigamist.

You have read the Dunsany play, *If*, perhaps? Rather far-fetched, isn't it? I tried to believe that no such trifle as a train missed or a train caught would so alter my whole life. Meanwhile, I could do a little better in some ways.

I was taking French, Latin, English, chemistry, and plane and solid geometry. When I looked over my books the next morning, frankly, I was appalled! You have no idea how much one can forget in fifteen years! But I hoped it would come back to me. I had a study period the first hour in school, and as I had Latin the second period, I tried to translate the twenty-three lines of Cicero that I was supposed to prepare. You'd think it could be done, with notes and vocabulary and all to help me, if I really put my mind to it; but I got thoroughly lost in a maze of clauses and phrases, and went into class as much scared as I had ever been in my life.

I was not called on for translation; but I was called on for a rule we had been set to learn the week before.

Fifteen years and a week before—and in all probability I had never tried to learn it at all.

"Give the rule for memini," said Furry. That was what we called our Latin teacher; I never knew why. Her hair was rather bushy; pehaps that was the reason. She had to ask me a second time; I was thinking about her nickname. When I was a schoolgirl, it seemed impossible to refer to a teacher by her name.

I got up and began, "Memini—er—ah—"

"Accusative," whispered Elsie, behind me.

"—takes the accusative case," I said.

"Well, really!" said the teacher sarcastically.

It did sound silly, when I began to think it over. Most verbs did take the accusative case, didn't they? It was the case of the direct object; I was still sure of that much. Some verbs took the dative, but there wasn't a separate rule for each one of them. There must be something peculiar about memini, to have a rule all to itself.

"What does memini mean?" asked the teacher.

"Recall," whispered Elsie.

I repeated it.

"Let us have the whole rule, please," said Furry, with an air of exaggerated patience which I recalled only too well. It usually boded ill for someone.

"Memini, to recall, takes the accusative case," I said.

"So far, so good," said the teacher pointedly. "Memini, to remember or to recall, takes the accusative case, especially—"

She paused, and I went on staring at her, stretching my ear for Elsie. I began to remember, or recall, that Elsie had usually prompted me when I got stuck in Latin recitation, although we considered it dishonorable to help one another in written work. I suppose the idea is that being grilled orally subjects a pupil to public humiliation and therefore help is permissable. I got to thinking about this, and Elsie had to whisper even more loudly, believing I had not heard her the first time.

"Miss Simmons, I did not call upon you," said Furry acidly. "Miss Brown, you must have heard your friend if I did. Please let us hear the rule from your lips."

I repeated, "—especially of neuter pronouns and adjectives."

"Go on, Miss Brown," said Furry. I dared not look toward Elsie or hope for further help. It was very galling to be treated like a child, after years of remembered adult life in which the vagaries of memini and other horrible verbs had had their proper place—oblivion.

"I don't know it," I said, and sat down.

"Miss Simmons seems to know the rule. Please give it, Miss Simmons, for Miss Brown's special benefit."

Elsie got up and said, with an apologetic glance my

way, that when memini meant to remember or to be mindful of, it took the genitive case.

"Now, Miss Brown, let us see whether you can repeat the rule."

Perhaps she was called Furry because she was feline and inclined to scratch, I was thinking. Or was it some obscure joke so old that it had been forgotten?

I got to my feet and began, "Memini, to remember, to recall takes the accusative case, especially—especially—"

"Neuter," muttered Elsie.

"—in the case of neuter nouns and pronouns."

"No!" snapped the teacher.

"Neuter—ah—adjectives and pronouns. Memini, to remember, to—to—" Heavens, I thought, what's that other one? They both sounded alike to me.

"Be mindful of," whispered Elsie.

"To be mindful of, takes the—the dative."

"Guess again," said the teacher, with a wry smile.

Oh, me! To think that I had ever, as an adult, regretted that I did not apply myself to this ghastly language when I had the chance!

"The genitive," I said.

"You understand the distinction, Miss Brown?"

All I could think of was that the genitive was the second case and the dative the third. I didn't dare say that, and my mind wandered off as I tried to recall what the last case was. The room was very still. Then I remembered, recalled, or called to mind, the last case.

"Ablative," I said triumphantly, and Furry collapsed with a groan.

"Genitive was right, Miss Brown," she said at last, much too patiently. "What is the difference between the two meanings of memini?"

"Well—they both mean to remember," I said. "I don't see the difference."

"Then you would not, even if you remembered the rule, know how to apply it?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Does 'recall' mean exactly the same as 'to be mindful of'?"

"Perhaps not precisely," I said, "but the distinction is difficult."

"Take your time," said Furry.

The fate of nations did not seem to hang on the distinction, but I was an A student in English, and I was trying to think what the difference could be, when the bell saved me. Furry merely looked at me and waved her hand to dismiss us all.

The next class was solid geometry. I had always liked geometry and had been an A student in that too, and I was horrified to find that I had forgotten it even more thoroughly than I had forgotten Latin, in which I had always been a poor student—C at best. I realized that I would have to learn these things all over again, only, in all probability, to forget them again also. I didn't grudge the work in the first lifetime because all I had ever learned about straight thinking I had learned in the geometry class; but it wasn't much use going over it again. I could think as straight as I'd ever be able to.

Tall Sam Bauer was sent to the blackboard, and as I watched him, remembering how good he had always been in math and, the next year, in physics, and how he had been killed in an automobile accident the week before graduation, my eyes filled with tears. He was so young and strong, such a fine fellow too, and with so little life span left to him.

Perhaps that won't happen, this time, I hoped.

And then the awful thought came to me that, for all I knew, nothing would be the same at all.

I had to harden my heart about Sam. Things were, I hoped, going to be just the same. Meanwhile, I had to follow the math; and I did so, and began to remember some of it.

In chemistry, too, I had usually got A's; but when I opened my book confidently, I came upon a sea of formulas and equations and experiments of all sorts. It was quite a shock to realize that I had not the least idea how to make such substances as sodium peroxide, phosphorus pentroxide, potassium chloride and potassium chlorate. I had even forgotten the difference between an -ate and an -ide. I tried to write the formulas, and had no idea what the valence of iron was. I began to study with all my night. If I didn't do well in math and in chemistry, where I had always done well, people would know something was wrong. In French

and in history, as in Latin, it would be safe to be stupid, if I hadn't time to study everything in this second living.

After I got home, I poured it all down on to paper, like a diary, feeling that I had to speak or burst; and I took what I had written up into the attic and hid it under a loose board near the eaves. After that, I did the same thing every day. It eased my mind quite a bit to write it down—made it more objective, you see, like a story instead of what was really happening.

The first night, after I had written what had happened during the day, and how, doing my homework, I had spent a whole hour trying to find the area of an equilateral triangle of which each side was three inches long, and got eight different answers, and was nearly ready to weep with vexation; and how I was to have a test in chemistry the next day and must study very hard for it if I hoped to pass, I ended up by saying, "I must stop remembering things that are going to happen, or that did happen the other time I lived, and get to work remembering what I knew fifteen years ago. I must remember and recall and be mindful of what I need to know here and now, today and tomorrow. That horrible verb memini has dominated my whole day."

In math the next day Collins, the boy beside Louise, passed her a little sketch of a nude girl. Louise turned pink to the back of her neck, and handed it back. Then Collins tried to pass it to me, and I refused to take it. So he handed it to Sue, who had considerable strength of character and was not easily fussed, and she did the right thing straight off, and tore the sketch up. The sketch was harmless enough really, but it was his intent to embarrass us, and so the girls were angry, and sputtered about it after class.

"I ought to know better than to take anything he passes to me," said Louise. "He's always doing things like that."

"It wasn't anything really," I said. "There are Greek statues on every landing."

"That isn't the point," Louise said.

It was funny wasn't it? I was a matron of thirty, with three gray hairs. It was a long time since anyone had tried to embarrass me in any such fashion. I had even taken a course in life drawing, two or three years before. It would

take much more than Collins' little sketch to make me turn pink to the back of my neck.

I thought I would change the subject.

"I'm scared about the chem test," I said.

"You needn't be. You got an A last time."

"That was last time. I don't know *this* stuff."

Louise sniffed. "Don't you remember what J.B. said last time when he gave back the papers? He said your answer to the first question was enough to give you an A for the year. You were absent that day, but someone must have told you."

"I've forgotten what the first question was."

"It was, 'Why is the formula for ammonia NH_3? Prove it is.' "

"Oh, yes," I said meekly.

That evening I went over all my chemistry and tried to refresh my memory as much as possible. Concentrating on my studies, I found, was a great help; it kept me from worrying so much about the past or the future.

In French class the next day, my mind kept wandering. Maddle was the teacher—a corruption of Mademoiselle, I suppose. I did not expect to be called on, because she had called on me the day before. My so-called thoughts wandered from French to German, and then to Germany and Hitler. I wondered what would happen if I could get over to Germany and find that obscure paper-hanger and shoot him while he was still unknown. It was 1937, then, you know, and we were all troubled about Hitler. I thought how noble it would be to sacrifice myself to save the world. I would be executed for the crime, and never see Paul; but I wouldn't mind so much, in such a good cause. I felt very queer to think that nobody but me knew what was going to happen, and I was almost ready to start off for Germany, when I remembered that I was a child of fifteen, and could no more go to Germany than I could fly to the moon. So I began to day-dream about a refugee child, and wondered if what little remained of my college German would be any help in talking to a refugee child if Paul and I could take one. While the rest of the pupils were struggling with the English-into-French sentences in the grammar, I began to try putting them into German. The first was, "I'm sorry I was late." I began, mentally, "Ich bin—" but what was

"sorry"? No use, I couldn't be sorry in German. The next was, "I thought I had seen you somewhere."

Bill poked me in the back and I realized that my name had been called. I jumped up and started, "Ich denke, dass ich dich habe gesehen—"

And then I realized there was a great silence in the room, just as it was broken by a gust of wild laughter.

I stared at the teacher and my jaw dropped. I gripped the book and waited for lightning to strike. But Maddle was laughing as hard as anyone. Then I began to blush, and I could feel the red lapping over on the back of my neck. To think I had been so sure, the day before, that nothing could make me blush! Probably my German was all wrong, but the worst of it was that I wasn't supposed to know a word of German. It was bad enough to talk German in a French class, to talk atrocious German was worse yet, but what really scared me was that I had dared to speak most of a sentence in a language I could not possibly have studied.

"Excellent, Miss Brown," said Maddle, wiping her eyes. "I have not heard such excellent French in years. But you have lost your place. Try the ninth sentence."

Pulling together what wits I had, I tackled the ninth sentence, and, as I had prepared the lesson, I made only one mistake, which Maddle corrected, her lips still twitching.

"I wish to speak to you after class," she said when I had finished; but when the time came, instead of going up to the desk, I scuttled out of the door while she was still explaining to Steve Jenkins that his last examination paper, which she had just returned to him, was the worst she had seen in twenty years of teaching.

I didn't know what to say to my schoolmates, either, so I laughed and tried to look mysterious. Elsie, my best friend, had to be given some explanation, and by the time she asked me I had thought of one.

"My cousin at Harvard takes German," I said, "and the last time I saw him he turned the first few sentences of that lesson into German for me. I was trying to remember that one when Maddle called on me."

"I don't see how you remembered it at all," marveled Elsie.

"I didn't. I must have got it all wrong. Or she wouldn't have laughed so."

"I was dying to see what she would say to you. And then you skipped out. Won't she give you fits?"

"I don't see what was so awfully bad about it," I said. "And she does love a big laugh."

That evening I heard my grandmother saying to my grandfather, "I don't know what's come over the child. This week she has washed more dishes than she has in her whole life before. I wonder what's in her mind."

Grandpa grunted noncomittally.

"She put on her rubbers yesterday without being told. It's the first time in her whole life."

"She's older than she was," said grandpa.

If he only knew, I thought!

After breakfast on Saturday, I cleaned my room. There was no vacuum cleaner, but there was a carpet sweeper, a dustpan and a broom, and a mop. When I asked for a dustcloth, I thought my grandmother would faint. I had meant to help her clean the rest of the house, but I realized it would be *too* startling, and I did not dare risk it. After so much schoolwork, it was a relief to do something easy and pleasant, like sweeping.

That evening grandpa called up the stairs to ask me if I wanted to go to the movies. I said no; but afterwards I wished I had gone. Just imagine seeing one of those old silent films again. I suppose you have never seen one in your life, have you, my dear?

On Sunday, my cousin at Harvard came and spent the afternoon.

When I was fifteen, I was madly in love with him, and it seemed very odd to be with him again, and to wonder what I had ever seen in him. He was a nice enough boy, though, in his way. And that evening I had a hard time writing my weekly composition for English. Fortunately, I was supposed to be fifteen, not ten, or seven! At fifteen one is practically adult except in experience and the things experience brings. It is not impossible to weed out experience and thin it down, in a composition. What I didn't weed out I could always lay to "something I read, I forget where," I thought.

I had spent Saturday afternoon wandering about the city.

I walked across the Common and down to the big library. Then I walked around the corner to the college where I had gone for a year, two years later. It was closed, of course. I thought of going there some weekday, when I could go in, and see the professors, and check on my memories of them. Surely I could not have such clear memories of my college year if I had not lived through it. At fifteen, in fact, I hadn't even known there was a college around the corner from the main library, let alone that I would ever go there. But, I thought, what if some of the professors should remember *me*? They could not know I would be coming there two years later! These thoughts alarmed me, and I went home as fast as I could.

On Monday I failed in Latin again, and Furry took me outside the door after class and scolded me.

"Life is not a bed of roses," she said. "You haven't lived this long without learning that."

I almost smiled, and very nearly answered, "You don't know the half of it."

The worst was yet to come. When I entered my English class I found, to my utter amazement, that I was marked up on the bulletin board to give an oral composition. One Monday a month was given up to oral compositions and the names had been posted since the first week of school. I had no idea I was supposed to speak, and not the remotest idea what to say. I got up and went to the front of the room, teeth chattering and knees knocking. It is amazing how short a time it takes to get back to schoolgirl psychology. And then, of course, I was extremely anxious to do as I should do, and to avoid attracting attention. One simply does not say that one forgot all about having to give a talk.

But a few days before all these things had begun to happen, my husband had given me an article to read. He often gave me interesting technical articles on chemistry and the like, because he knew I had been interested in such subjects, and, although I didn't get as much out of them as I let him think—at least I always read them and got something out of them. I remembered this article. I had been going over it in bed the night before, trying to recall it, because it reassured me to remember and think about things

from the life I should be living. I opened my mouth and began to talk.

I told them everything I remembered about the article I had read, whether I remembered correctly or not. How helium is liquefied by compression, and how the things cannot be greased, and the lubrication is provided by means of a slight leakage of the gas itself; and how there are two kinds of liquid helium, with a lambda-point marking the spot of change, and how liquid helium will go up the side of a beaker and fill it; and that it has no viscosity and is without fluid friction, and that it does not obey Newtonian mechanics, but Einstein-Bose mechanics, which is a part of quantum-mechanics, and that they have no hope of making solid helium although they had got within a thousandth of a degree of absolute zero.

Then I sat down, and nobody asked any questions, doubtless because none of them knew in the least what I was talking about.

But when I got into math class I found my fame had preceded me, and at lunch hour I was all but mobbed with questions and jests. My classmates seemed to think I had made up a lot of extreme nonsense in the mischievous intent of fooling our English teacher, who, presumably, knew nothing of science. (I can't imagine why they should think she knew nothing except English. But young people seem to forget that their teachers went through college and had at least some contact with all fields of knowledge.) When I got to chemistry class, J.B. was waiting for me, and he pounced. What was this he was hearing? Would I mind giving the same talk again to the chemistry class and giving my references? We hadn't reached helium yet, but he would gladly anticipate that part of the work in order to let his classes hear what I had to say.

I tried to stammer that it wasn't anything really, and that I could not remember it again, and I don't know what all. But he had heard too much about it, and was even able to quote some of the things I had said. Several of the boys and girls in my chemistry class were in my English class. Some of the boys had even read more than they were expected to have done. They took turns quoting me and arguing about what I had said, and I was really quite worn out before the period ended. The more they all fired ques-

tions at me, the less I remembered. One thing I remembered clearly was the beaker which, set into Helium II about an inch, with three inches of beaker above the surface, is filled with the liquid, which runs up the side and over the edge and into the beaker until the level of the liquid is the same inside and outside. And, of course, I had not been able to remember any explanation the article may have given.

"Have you any explanation of why it does that?" asked J.B.

"I don't think they know yet. Unless it's osmosis or surface tension, and how could it be?" I said shakily.

Nobody in the class knew what I was talking about except J.B. and he was too excited to care.

"You haven't told us where you learned all this," he said.

"My cousin at Harvard," I managed faintly.

"Really! And were these experiments performed at Harvard?"

"I think in Holland," I said.

"I must ask some of the professors the next time I am at Harvard," said J.B., seeing he had pumped me dry. "Really, I had not realized how far behind the times I am getting. I hadn't heard a word of all this. Dear me!" and he smiled at the class.

I had not realized that teachers have lives outside of school, that they were capable of going to Harvard and talking to professors there! For one wild moment I was tempted to break down and sob that I had made it all up, every word of it. Then I realized that, far from helping the situation, it would only make it all much worse. A schoolgirl of fifteen doesn't make up a whole string of things about triple-points and Einstein-Bose mechanics and all the like of that. And all of the work I had told them about had not been new when I read it; some of it might be more than fifteen years old. None of it was anything that I could have made up.

"He didn't learn it at Harvard," I said. "It was something he read, he was telling me about."

That might help as far as Harvard was concerned.

"Ah! I would like to meet your cousin and hear about it, then. Or at least learn what publication he was reading."

"You might find it in *Chemical Abstracts*," I offered, and then remembered that I could scarcely have known such a periodical existed.

The bell rang then, and I picked up my schoolbag and fled, although J.B. called to me to wait. I might have escaped, but I ran full tilt into the physics teacher, Mr. Morris, who had heard something from his pupils about my now-famous speech and had come to catch me where they told him I would be.

"That's all I know," I gasped, when they both began to talk to me at once. "I don't understand it. I just said what he told me. Maybe I got it all wrong. I forgot all about my comp, and I had to talk quick, and that's all I could think of. You know, Mr. Morris, how slow I am—" And then I realized that it was not until the next year that I had been in his class, one of the two girls taking college-prep physics (so long ago, my dear—many girls take it now) and that, when I was fifteen, I had never seen Mr. Morris at all, much less given him a chance to learn how far behind the boys I was in mechanical knowledge.

And then I went into a fit of first-class hysterics. If I had had any sense I should have done so long before. Instantly I realized I had hit on the only possible means of escape. J.B. patted my shoulder and said soothing things, while Morrie ran and got Maddle, who happened to be going up the corridor. He whispered to her and she led me away.

Maddle took me to the teachers' lounge, and made me lie down. The English teacher, whom we called Shakes because she was so fond of Shakespeare, was there at the time, and she sat beside me and made shushing noises to everyone who came in. I shut my eyes and pretended I was faint, but I was really only very much alarmed. Maddle went off to talk to the men, and pretty soon she came back and began to talk softly to Shakes about it.

"Really, it's the strangest thing," she said.

"I could hardly believe my ears when I heard her talking," Shakes agreed. "She certainly sounded as if she knew all about it."

"That's what J.B. said," concurred Maddle. "He said she gave the most amazing answers; he really forgot she was a child. He says he doesn't see how it could have been something she heard an older student talking about. She gave opinions as if they were her own, and when she answered the same question a second time, she worded it differently. And such a background of the subject as she showed—

you'd think she knew a great deal more about chemistry than she can have learned in only six weeks. And physics also, which she had not studied at all."

Apparently I remembered more in connection with this article which, you know, I had read only a few days before, than I did about the lessons the class was doing at the time.

"I was talking to Mr. Morris about it," Shakes said, "thinking he would be interested, and he said it was impossible that she could have the background to remember all that."

"J.B. said much the same thing," said Maddle. "He said it would be extraordinary if a girl her age could even remember all the words. Of course, she is a bright girl. Perhaps her cousin did explain it to her."

"I have asked other girls about her cousin," said Shakes. "They all told me he is in the Business School, a graduate student there, and that she grumbles because he refuses to take the least interest in chemistry. I don't see how he could or would have told her all this and explained it so carefully that she was able to give a talk on it, when she had entirely forgotten she was to talk at all."

"If she had prepared a talk, would she have chosen that subject?"

"I think it unlikely in the highest degree. She could have prepared a literary talk without the least difficulty, and, in fact, would have known it would be much more suitable. I think she is telling the truth when she says she forgot the talk and that this subject came into her head and she was unable to think of anything else."

"Did I tell you," said my French teacher thoughtfully, "how she burst into German in my class?"

She told about it, while I lay shivering.

"Bright children sometimes do break out with unexpected knowledge," said Shakes. "Perhaps her cousin did teach her a little German. She may have been reading up on the sciences."

"I have heard she takes a great interest in chemistry. The men say it is very strange that she should be able to—but she did break down under questioning."

"Just like a man," said Shakes indignantly, "to pester the poor child into hysterics. None of the other pupils will ever

dare to show an interest in anything, after this experience."

They bent over me and spoke to me gently, and asked how I felt. I remembered that if I were late home I would be questioned, so I knew I'd have to leave school soon, and I opened my eyes and said I felt all right, I guessed, but my head ached awfully. Shakes said she would walk part way with me, and she took me to the corner drug store, gave me two aspirins and a chocolate soda, and said I need not worry about it at all.

"I positively guarantee that nobody will ever mention this again to you," she said.

I went upstairs as soon as I got home, and wrote it all down and hid it under the loose board in the attic. After supper I did some studying in Latin and in math, although I had lost my taste for chemistry, somehow. I made all sorts of resolutions for the future and fell into a sound sleep.

Then someone was calling my name. I was so sleepy. I could not seem to move or speak. Someone called me again, and I tried to wake up. It was Paul—Paul and the Professor. Do you know, my dear, I had been out like a light for a whole week and they had tried everything to revive me. The Professor had sent me into the past, after hypnotizing me so that I should lose all memory of him, and then he had a great deal of trouble getting me back. Poor man, he was frantic—I think he suffered more than Paul and I did. May I have another cup of tea?

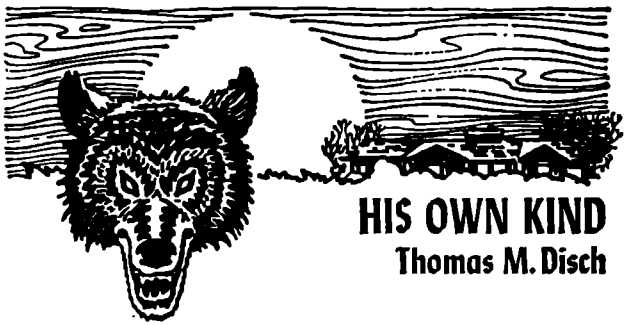
"I'll make some fresh," I said. "This is too cool by now. What an interesting adventure! But of course you dreamed it all?"

"No," said Mrs. Tokkin gravely. "When my grandmother died, twelve years later, Paul went back to settle the estate and all that, and he went up into the attic, and looked under the loose board, and brought back the diary I had kept while I was back there. Wasn't it lucky, nobody had found it. And one of my cousins met him, and she asked how I was. She said it was very queer, but one time I had somehow lost a whole week out of my memory, and she wondered whether I had had any such lapse again. Of course that week was the one I wasn't to live until fifteen years later. I read the jottings over a few days ago; that is how I remember them so well today."

"But why did the Professor make you forget all about him?"

"Well, if I had remembered him, of course I would have known exactly what had happened, and that he would soon have me back to my proper time. He said he thought it would be more educational if I did not remember him. No doubt he was right. Paul really should not have hit him so hard when he said so."

I first read this story shortly after Tom Disch wrote it, about 1963; I liked it immediately and was never able to understand why no one would buy it. When I began putting together the present volume of NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY I asked him if I could see the story again. The manuscript arrived, I reread it and again enjoyed it. So here it is: a pastoral and cultured story about a werewolf; you don't find many like this anymore.



HIS OWN KIND

Thomas M. Disch

Being neither a wolf nor a man, I am perhaps uniquely qualified to speak of Ares Pelagian, and—possessing myself a double nature—I am able to sympathize with certain aspects of his story which might escape the merely human narrator. Besides I knew him intimately—knew both of him—and that is reason enough for me to tell his story.

My name is Daphne. That is not my real name, of course. The modern habit of revealing one's true name to whomever one meets is, in my opinion, vulgar and not a little dangerous. Daphne is a nice name, suitable to what will probably be regarded in any case as a fiction, and indicative of my situation—I am a hamadryad. An English hamadryad.

The general reader may feel a certain prejudice against hamadryads narrating a story. He will suspect the prose to

be spread thick with the treacle of whimsey—a tale of inconsequence. This may have been true at one time, but the transplanatation of so many of us to England at the time of the Neo-Classic revival has done much to raise the intellectual tone of woodnymphs. One simply cannot weather the English winter without doing a little reading.

Enough introductions!—let me tell you about Ares.

He was born on Christmas Eve (as you might have guessed yourself if you are at all familiar with these matters) to George and Lydia Pelagian, whose cottage, set in a cozy Wiltshire valley, lay conveniently open to my view. George was the gamekeeper on the estate of Lord Edmund Hamilton, since deceased, and young Ares could expect to succeed to his father's position, for this all happened at a time when the father's profession was part of the son's patrimony. I hate to think what that says about my age.

Young Ares was a healthy, vigorous child, given to an almost pantheistic love of the outdoors. His father, no less than I, adored him, and his mother, as mothers will, mothered him. I remember one day in the spring of his sixth year—he was sitting in the speckled shade of my budding branches and playing upon panpipes that his father had taught him to make. I am inordinately fond of music and Ares played so well, even then, that I must confess to having cast a small enchantment on him. He returned, every day in good weather, to play his songs for me. I was already beginning to anticipate his coming-of-age—it had been such a long time since I had manifested myself to anyone; not, in fact, since my unfortunate experience with Sir Miles Eliot during the Restoration—but that is another story.

But to portray Ares, even at the age of six, as a rosy-cheeked, pacific lover of nature, a putti playing in the choir of some Baroque church, would be misleading. Ares was no milk-toast bird-watcher or botanist. (How I loathe botanists!) He was a little animal: merciless to other animals, to frogs and snakes, a trapper of squirrels and rabbits, and an expert tracker (though not yet allowed a gun) of the stags that Lord Edmund maintained on his estate. I could not estimate how many robins, thrushes and larks fell from my branches alone, the victims of Ares' slingshot. He was altogether his father's son.

Well—not altogether. I'm sure his father would have been

distressed to see what I saw one autumn day: Ares bent over the still living body of a rabbit he had trapped, holding back its screaming mouth as he sank his baby-teeth into its downy throat. It warmed the ancestral memory-traces at the core of my trunk: Youthful, pagan exuberance, I thought with approbation.

The next year there was a rare coincidence of seven and nine year cycles, an occasion which had been universally observed in my youth (It is always at this time that the Divine Sacrifice was consummated—the ritual slaying of the King or his substitute. Thomas Becket, for instance, was slain in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, another point of intersection of the two cycles. Where does the time all go to?), but which has since fallen into popular disuse. Men may ignore the laws of magic, but Nature cannot. That year, on Good Friday afternoon, Ares Pelagian metamorphosed into a wolf.

He had been returning home from Good Friday devotion at the chapel, trudging through a morass of mud and freshly thawed snow on a path circling the base of the hill on which I stand. I saw him fall onto his hands and supposed that he had slipped. He made no effort to rise but lay on the muddy path thrashing for several minutes. Finally I saw that it was no longer Ares—or at least not the seven-year-old human-boy Ares—but a wolf cub that was tangled in a net of winter clothing. The cub made his way out of the snowsuit by ripping a hole down the front and came bounding up the hill toward me. When I realized that little Ares was a werewolf, I was terribly unhappy. A hamadryad could legitimately manifest herself to a human—but to a werewolf? It was unthinkable; a wolfman may resort to wolves or men for company but never to another demi-being.

The cub dashed out of sight into the preserve, and I returned to my reading—a volume of Gibbon which I had filched from Lord Edmund's manorhouse on one of the rare occasions in the past few years when I had materialized into even as much as a wraithe. But my attention is unsteady at the best of times; I could not, under the circumstances, think of anything but the little wolf that Ares had become—and who came back out of the woods now, a

freshly killed rabbit in his jaws. Ares' trap was still clamped on the rabbit's forepaw.

After my initial disappointment, I found myself regarding the new Ares (he *was* still Ares, after all, though somewhat changed) in a kinder light. There were not many wolves left in England—in the century previous I had seen only two—but I judged Ares to be as excellent a wolf-cub as he was a boy-child: healthy and vigorous, not ruddy perhaps, but possessing a fine, glossy fur. He devoured the rabbit with relish, buried the bones beside one of my roots (where they have since decayed) and began in his high-pitched puppy voice to practice wolf-calls. I began to feel sorry for him. As a boy he would be happy enough—as much as boys in England ever can be happy—but as a wolf I feared that he would find himself alone, unappreciated, an outcast.

At sunset of Good Friday, Ares, the boy, woke naked and shivering, huddled against my trunk. At the same moment his father stepped out of his cottage down in the valley and set along the path circling my hill. He was calling his son's name. Indiscreetly, I broke the silence I had always maintained in Ares' presence: "Your clothes, on the footpath, by the birch tree, quickly." He was too upset by his predicament to notice anything unusual in being spoken to by a tree (and, after all, it is *not* that unusual except to the most pedestrian of minds) and followed my advice. He was dressed again before his father found him, still shivering, with the mud caked into his winter clothing and his jacket badly torn from his last, inept undressing. No doubt he was punished severely that night and the next day, but on Easter Sunday I was gratified to see the entire family—George, Lydia (in a new and, I thought, rather tasteless hat), and Ares—set off together for Easter services at the chapel. I wondered idly what story Ares had invented to explain his condition last Friday to his parents; I wondered how he had explained it to himself. Oh, I wondered many things—if you are not a Christian, Sundays can be a terrible bore.

Apparently he understood what had happened. For, with the natural sagacity of childhood, Ares avoided further embarrassing scenes rising out of his lycanthropy. (An ugly word, but English is so poor in expressions for supernatural

occurrences. Lycanthropy, indeed! It sounds like a disease. Hamadryad, however, is a word that I have always liked.) On nights when there was a full moon, Ares would climb naked from the window of his room and run into the wood, from which he would emerge minutes later in his other form, a wolf. Thoughtfully, he always came to visit me, once he had captured his prey. Wolf or boy, he hunted well, so that the greater part of those evenings we spent together: I, rustling quietly, and Ares baying childishly at the moon, from whom, had he given it any thought, he could expect nothing but trouble.

The years passed—or rather the months, since I had come to measure time, as Ares did, by the phases of the moon—and Ares matured into a handsome young man and a strong, elegant wolf. The distinction was superficial. When Ares was eighteen, George Pelagian succumbed to a bronchial infection and was buried, far from my view, in the parish churchyard. After the funeral, Ares came to pay me a visit. Lately, the force of my enchantment had been failing and I had seen very little of Ares, the man.

"He's dead now," Ares told me, and he was crying.

"You are the new gamekeeper," I said softly—so softly that I feared he might not have heard me.

But he heard me. "Now I am the gamekeeper," he said.

After that day, Ares came to see me more often, but no longer by himself. Linda Wheelwright, youngest daughter of one of Lord Edmund's tenant-farmers, accompanied him. I am not jealous by nature, but I must confess that I thought Linda was beneath Ares. Oh, she was attractive in a rough sort of way, and lively in the first flush of her womanhood, and, quite evidently, she was in love with Ares, and he with her. He proposed to her under my branches! I loathe the idea of matrimony, but that may be just the hamadryad in me. The next time they returned I discovered that Ares had not been entirely subdued by the deadly forces of convention—nor Linda either, when assisted. Passion is a lovely thing, and I gave the couple—since couple they were determined to be—my blessing, conceding graciously my own claim on Ares' affections. Their engagement was announced that night to Linda's parents, who, being English, set the date of the wedding a year off. Just to be sure! Ares' opinion on this matter, which he confided to me private-

ly, agreed largely with my own, although he expressed it more eloquently. English does have fine words for that sort of thing. I advised him to be patient.

At the same time that Ares was courting Linda, Ares—the other Ares, whom I saw nocturnally once a month—had also discovered a helpmate. His baying had finally proven of some use. Where she had come from, or how far, I had no idea. They, too, loved each other passionately, although there was no mention of marriage. Wolves, I suppose, are more irregular in their arrangements. In any case, being perhaps the only she-wolf in all of England outside of a zoo, she did not need the guarantee of fidelity that Linda required. In June of the next year, Ares became the father of four fine cubs. In September, Ares and Linda were wed.

During the decade and more that Ares had roamed the Wiltshire downs as a wolf, he had been able successfully to escape the attention of his human neighbors by confining his depredations to rabbits, pheasants, and other small game. He was, it is true, seen occasionally, at a distance, by late wanderers, under the summer's full moon, but they had always supposed him to be a stray dog, wolves being a rare commodity in Southern England. The presence of a family of six, however, could not so easily escape notice. Ares had hunted one night every month; his mate had to hunt every night—for herself and the four cubs. Strange dogs were sighted more frequently; his mate's lonesome baying at the un-full moon was a subject of much speculation at the manorhouse and beyond, though in the gamekeeper's cottage it was never referred to. Often, after accompanying Linda home to her father late at night, Ares would stalk the woods to glimpse his lupine bride or one of their four offspring, grown now to adolescent proportions (so quickly!), as they followed her, learning the rules of the hunt and how to break them. By some obscure instinct, his mate had followed Ares' example and never attacked either the domestic animals at the nearby farms—sheeps and poultry—or Lord Edmund's stags, but her sons, lazier or perhaps just hungry and out of luck, developed a pronounced taste for mutton. Soon, Ares' neighbors were speaking wolves.

"Wolves!" Ares said scornfully. "There are no wolves in Wiltshire."

"Wolves, all right," Ares said unhappily when the sheep's scant carcasses were brought to him.

"You'll have to do something, darling. Everyone is talking about it," Linda counseled one evening, as the couple relaxed under my branches.

"Soon."

"They're talking about getting up a party themselves. You'd be disgraced if one of the farmers were to kill the wolf, while you were sitting at home, polishing your guns."

Ares stared at the moon, which had almost waxed full. "Soon," was all that he would say.

On the night of the full moon, a party of determined farmers, well-equipped with shotguns and rifles and led by Mr. Wheelwright, Ares' new father-in-law, visited the gamekeeper's cottage. Linda explained that her husband had left the house to hunt the wolf, and they went into the woods, their thunder stolen, to find Ares—or, if they could, the wolf.

Ares, meanwhile, was consorting with his mate at his favorite trysting place. She was complaining, as usual, in her own inarticulate way, that he came so seldom to see her, and he was trying to persuade her to speak to their sons on the subject of mutton. The stillness of the night was broken by a shotgun blast. The two wolves pricked up their ears. In only a few moments the objects of their concern emerged from the preserve, shaken but smug, and smelling only too evidently of lamb. The four young wolves loped up the moonlit hill to join their parents.

Ares had no time to remonstrate with them—not, he began to suspect, that it would do any good. His sons were wild and undisciplined; they had never paid their father a proper respect. But there was no time, for that instant another blast ripped through the night air and he felt a fierce pain stab through his left haunch. When he licked at his wound, he found it already healed; the pellet had passed through his flesh without leaving even a scar. There are advantages in being a werewolf.

The six wolves dashed from my hill into the dark woods. I heard many more shots that evening, but I saw nothing more of Ares, his wife, or his children until the hunt had ended, a failure.

The next day Ares met with Linda in the shadow of my

foliage, which, due to the season, was rapidly departing from me. Linda was in a bad temper, and Ares was glum.

"My own father!" she kept repeating. "My own father! And where were you?"

"I told you—I was out hunting too."

"Then how is it that I found your rifle in the woodshed?"

"That's an old rifle I don't use anymore."

"You don't expect me to believe that. I'll tell you where you were—with that new barmaid at the The Red Robin Inn."

"——!"

"Don't talk that way to *me,* my dear darling. Will you think of it!—my own father!"

"He wasn't hurt."

"Wasn't hurt!" she crowed. "Knocked over by a wolf, and he wasn't hurt!"

Ares smiled. "That's a likely story, isn't it? He pumps a wolf full of buckshot—three cartridges, he says—and that wolf jumps on him and knocks him on his behind, and doesn't do a thing else. Tell me another."

"Are you calling my father a liar?"

"I'm saying that maybe he visited The Red Robin before he went hunting. Farmers have no business hunting, anyhow."

"Well, you'd better start making it *your* business, or I'm going back to live with my father—and that's all I'll say."

"I told you—I'm going out tonight again."

"My father will come with you."

"Damn your father!"

"He's your father now, too, so watch how you talk about him."

"——!"

Linda shook her head in mock horror. Actually, she was quite used to such language—from her father.

Before carrying this tale to its tragic conclusion, I should like to make a point about Ares' behavior, which, though it may already be obvious, I hope the reader will give some consideration. Up to this point, Ares, both as a wolf and as a man, had behaved in a most exemplary and English manner. He had never run amuck, as do so many werewolves one hears about. He preyed only upon such animals as he had perfect warrant to prey upon, as gamekeeper.

With the slight exception of his father-in-law, whom he had not hurt in the least, he had never attacked a single human being. It was society—the society of men *and* the society of wolves—which had brought about this seemingly irresolvable dilemma: that Ares the man had to hunt the family of Ares the wolf. I have always been thankful that, being, as it were, rooted to one spot, I have never felt any need of social intercourse. Mobility is (one cannot say the root) the source of many evils.

That evening then, under the waning but still bright moon, in the company of Wheelwright and a few other farmers, Ares set out on a wolf hunt. Usually Ares was in high spirits when he hunted, but tonight his face was drawn, his steps sluggish, and his manner careless. Wheelwright insisted that the party go to the top of the hill from which the wolves had been routed yester-evening, and Ares could offer no effective opposition to this plan.

She had waited there, his mate. Not waited exactly: it was simply her habit to be there with me, wishing to be with him. They saw each other at the same moment. She recognized him.

"Shoot, man!" Wheelwright cried.

She came toward him at a relaxed gait, distrustful of the others, confiding her safety to his presence, as she had confided it the evening before, at the last hunt. I saw a tear in his eye as he raised the rifle. She had advanced now to within a few yards.

"Shoot, man!"

"No!" I cried, but he didn't hear me, or, if he did, ignored me.

The rifle discharged; his aim had been, as ever, good. Her body jerked into the air and fell to the ground, lifeless. Ares rushed to the corpse of his sometimes mate, heedless of the farmer's warning cries or the shots that rang out into the heavy air.

As Ares keened his sorrow in a voice in which the human element was only faintly discernible, the cubs—but they were no longer cubs, they were nearly full-grown—who had witnessed all this, rushed toward their mother's murderer, slowed down very little by the rain of bullets and buckshot that hit them and passed through their bodies woundlessly, rushed toward Ares, and leaped—the first at his

throat, the others, wherever they could purchase a hold, ripped at the human flesh that had fathered them, tore at the unmetamorposed limbs. The farmers had fled from the scene, and I alone was left to behold it: the four young wolves departing; the two dead bodies upon which I shed leaves of pity; the moonlight over all.

Forgive me if I bring this story to a conclusion with a moral. I am told that a good story needs none, but it is my old-fashioned way to reflect upon my experiences and look for principles in the raw material of life. When two natures contest in a single being, the worse will dominate the better; it is the invariable tragedy of a werewolf that he will destroy, and, at last, be destroyed by, his own kind.

Katherine MacLean has a gift for economical, to-the-point story telling, as she demonstrated with *The Other* in the first volume of NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY. Here's another precision-engraved fantasy vignette.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Katherine MacLean

He decided it was time to return.

And awoke stiffly in a body that was shaking with chill, feeling weak and mechanical, walking down a usual street to the usual train, to go to the usual job.

Houses that he passed looked empty, with dusty windows and curtains askew. There was a sick faint smell in the air that he recognized as the stench of decaying meat. He could not remember getting up or dressing, and he was not sure it was morning, but he kept on walking.

Grass trimmed neatly on each square lawn. Bits of a doll across one lawn which had perhaps been run over by the lawn mower. Hedges trimmed square and low. One hedge finished at a slant, a constantly descending height that cut the roots of the last bush in the line.

A dog ran by in a lope that was low to the ground, head low and flat, like a wild thing. It threw him an indifferent, yellow-eyed glance as it passed, then circled him at the same speed, then suddenly changed and happy, tailwagging and timid the dog approached him to be petted, frantically signaling joy and submission.

Charles stroked its head and looked around. Across the

street Harold Stevenson was walking briskly along in his usual style to catch the same train. There was something wrong about the cut of his suit. It hung on him, with too much extra material. Charles looked at his hand that was patting the dog. It had a narrow, skinny wrist with bones showing through pale skin.

Harold walked nearer and was opposite him, swinging his briefcase briskly, looking sharp angled and neat, a man drawn from straight lines. He always had been precise and meticulous, a man of efficient habits.

"Hi, Harold," Charlie called to him, moved by a hesitating impulse.

"Hi, Charlie. See you at the station." Harold waved stiffly and kept moving; he circled to pass a man sitting on the sidewalk, and went on. The form on the sidewalk sat crosslegged in a yogi pose with its eyes open and did not move. It was fully clothed, but its face was skeletal.

Charlie looked down again to see the dog under his petting hand, but the dog had run off silently. Charlie straightened, put his unused hand in his pocket and walked along toward the railway station, swinging his briefcase. He began to be impatient with the monotony.

He went with his body as far as the railway station, sat down on a waiting bench, unfolded a newspaper he found in his pocket and held it before his face to pretend to be reading. Others sat separately along the benches, holding reading material in front of their faces, not moving or turning pages.

Charlie returned inside his head to the other country. Mellow warm winds across his naked skin suddenly, braced on top of a peaked hill, leaning into the wind almost with a feeling of a bird about to take off. He leaned further forward, feeling his feet grip the rock and hard dry dirt, then with a burst of effortless bounding speed he ran down the slope and arrived at a wet sand beach still running. He swerved, making S-shaped deep tracks of his running feet as he slowed then stopped with a hop in front of two men crouched over a surfboard painting a design.

"The pattern of a symbol shapes our thoughts and our thoughts shape the curl of the beach," said one to the other.

Charlie put his hand on a tanned shoulder, half feeling

the contact. It was warm, but far away and long ago, as if he could not fully return to where they were. "Jim," he said. "Jim, important."

Jim rose and faced him, a wide expanse of sun tanned chest, sun lightened blond hair. Behind him in the distance on the sand lay the long legged girl that was his, who was probably his fat wife at home in the suburb. "What . . . ?"

"Jim, everyone must wake up and go back to business, and make it move. It's all stopping. Our bodies are dying. We can't leave them alone like that."

"Our bodies are in fine shape," Jim said, looking down at his own sleek oiled expanse of chest. "We brought them with us." He was wearing blue swim trunks.

"But it's not real. We have to return to reality."

"What's reality?" Jim said. He pinched his bicep and grinned. "See," said his receding voice, becoming distant. "It hurts. The pattern we paint shapes the line of the picture, like the fate line in the palm or your cloud road to the sky." The distant voice faded out.

Charlie awoke to find himself on the train. The train was stopped between stations. He looked out of the window and saw green weeds growing alongside the railway tracks and up a steep embankment like a sloped gravel garden beside the train.

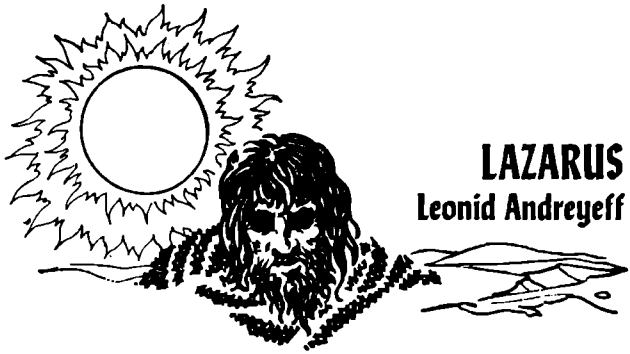
The direction of the sun reminded him of afternoon. He called to a man reading on the seat across the aisle and noticed that there were few people in the train, not the crowds he remembered.

"Where are we?" Charlie asked.

"Inefficient service," the man said seriously. "High taxes. Too much crookedness." He tapped his newspaper. "Investigation." He began again to read. His glasses had fingerprint marks fogging them and the paper was yellowing and folded with many crease marks.

A conductor came through. "Slight delay in service," he said in a singsong voice. "Slight delay in service."

I haven't managed to track down the original publication of this story by a noted Russian writer in the early part of this century. A translation was published in *Weird Tales* in the late 20s, and Robert Lowndes brought it to light again a couple of years ago. The story doesn't deserve obscurity; it's offbeat, fascinating and powerful.



LAZARUS

Leonid Andreyeff

I

When Lazarus left the grave, where for three days and three nights he had been under the enigmatical sway of death, and returned alive to his dwelling, for a long time no one noticed in him those sinister things which made his name a terror as time went on. Gladdened by the sight of him who had returned to life, those near to him made much of him, and satisfied their burning desire to serve him, in solicitude for his food and drink and garments. They dressed him gorgeously, and when, like a bridegroom in his bridal clothes, he sat again among them at the table and ate and drank, they wept with tenderness. And they summoned the neighbors to look at him who had risen miraculously from the dead. These came and shared the joy of the hosts. Strangers from far-off towns and hamlets came and adored

the miracle in tempestuous words. The house of Mary and Martha was like a beehive.

Whatever was found new in Lazarus' face and gestures was thought to be some trace of a grave illness and of the shocks recently experienced. Evidently the destruction wrought by death on the corpse was only arrested by the miraculous power, but its effects were still apparent; and what death had succeeded in doing with Lazarus' face and body was like an artist's unfinished sketch seen under thin glass. On Lazarus' temples, under his eyes and in the hollows of his cheeks, lay a deep and cadaverous blueness; cadaverously blue also were his long fingers, and around his fingernails, grown long in the grave, the blue had become purple and dark. On his lips, swollen in the grave the skin had burst in places, and thin reddish cracks were formed, shining as though covered with transparent mica. And he had grown stout. His body, puffed up in the grave, retained its monstrous size and showed those frightful swellings in which one sensed the presence of the rank liquid of decomposition. But the heavy corpselike odor which penetrated Lazarus' grave-clothes and, it seemed, his very body, soon entirely disappeared, the blue spots on his face and hands grew paler, and the reddish cracks closed up, although they never disappeared altogether. That is how Lazarus looked when he appeared before people, in his second life, but his face looked natural to those who had seen him in the coffin.

In addition to the changes in his appearance, Lazarus' temper seemed to have undergone a transformation, but this had attracted no attention. Before his death Lazarus had always been cheerful and carefree, fond of laughter and a merry joke. It was because of this brightness and cheerfulness, with not a touch of malice and darkness, that the Master had grown so fond of him. But now Lazarus had grown grave and taciturn, he never jested, nor responded with laughter to other people's jokes; and the words which he very infrequently uttered were the plainest, most ordinary and necessary words, as deprived of depth and significance as those sounds with which animals express pain and pleasure, thirst and hunger. They were the words that one can say all one's life, and yet they give no indication of what pains and gladdens the depths of the soul.

Thus, with the face of a corpse which for three days had been under the heavy sway of death, dark and taciturn, already appallingly transformed, but still unrecognized by anyone in his new self, he was sitting at the feast-table among friends and relatives, and his gorgeous nuptial garments glittered with yellow gold and bloody scarlet. Broad waves of jubilation, now soft, now tempestuously sonorous, surged around him; warm glances of love were reaching out for his face, still cold with the coldness of the grave; and a friend's warm palm caressed his blue, heavy hand. Music played—the tympanum and the pipe, the cithara and the harp. It was as though bees hummed, grasshoppers chirped and birds warbled over the happy house of Mary and Martha.

2

One of the guests incautiously lifted the veil. By a thoughtless word he broke the serene charm and uncovered the truth in all its naked ugliness. Ere the thought formed itself in his mind, his lips uttered with a smile: "Why do you not tell us what happened yonder?"

All grew silent, startled by the question. It was as if it occurred to them only now that for three days Lazarus had been dead, and they looked at him, anxiously awaiting his answer. But Lazarus kept silence.

"You do not wish to tell us," wondered the man; "is it so terrible yonder?"

And again his thought came after his words. Had it been otherwise, he would not have asked this question, which at that very moment oppressed his heart with its insufferable horror. Uneasiness seized all present, and with a feeling of heavy weariness they awaited Lazarus' words, but he was sternly and coldly silent, and his eyes were lowered. As if for the first time, they noticed the frightful blueness of his face and his repulsive obesity. On the table, as if forgotten by Lazarus, rested his bluish-purple wrist, and to this all eyes turned, as if it were from it that the awaited answer was to come. The musicians were still playing, but now the silence reached them too, and even as water extinguishes scattered embers, so were their merry tunes extinguished in

the silence. The pipe grew silent; the voices of the sonorous tympanum and the murmuring harp died away; and as if the strings had burst, the cithara answered with a tremulous, broken note. Silence.

"You do not wish to say?" repeated the guest, unable to check his chattering tongue. But the stillness remained unbroken, and the bluish purple hand rested motionless. And then he stirred slightly and everyone felt relieved. He lifted up his eyes, and lo! straightway embracing everything in one heavy glance, fraught with weariness and horror, he looked at them—Lazarus who had arisen from the dead.

It was the third day since Lazarus had left the grave. Ever since then many had experienced the pernicious power of his eye, but neither those who were crushed by it forever, nor those who found the strength to resist in it the primordial sources of life, which is as mysterious as death, never could they explain the horror which lay motionless in the depth of his black pupils. Lazarus looked calmly and simply with no desire to conceal anything, but also with no intention to say anything; he looked coldly, as one who is infinitely indifferent to those alive. Many carefree people came close to him without noticing him, and only later did they learn with astonishment and fear who that calm stout man was that walked slowly by, almost touching them with his gorgeous and dazzling garments. The sun did not cease shining when he was looking nor did the fountain hush its murmur, and the sky overhead remained cloudless and blue. But the man under the spell of his enigmatical look heard no more the fountain and saw not the sky overhead. Sometimes he wept bitterly, sometimes he tore his hair and in a frenzy called for help; but more often it came to pass that apathetically and quietly he began to die, and so he languished many years, wasted away, before everybody's eyes, colorless, flabby, dull, like a tree silently drying up in a stony soil. And of those who gazed at him, the one who wept madly sometimes felt again the stir of life; the others never.

"So you do not wish to tell us what you have seen yonder?" repeated the man. But now his voice was impassive and dull, and deadly gray weariness showed in Lazarus' eyes. And deadly gray weariness covered like dust all the faces, and with dull amazement the guests stared at each other

and did not understand wherefore they had gathered here and sat at the rich table. The talk ceased. They thought it was time to go home, but could not overcome the weariness which glued their muscles, and they kept on sitting there, yet apart and torn away from each other, like pale fires scattered over a dark field.

But the musicians were paid to play, and again they took their instruments, and again tunes full of studied mirth and studied sorrow began to flow and to rise. They unfolded the customary melody, but the guests harkened in dull amazement. Already they knew not why it is necessary, and why it is well, that people should pluck strings, inflate their cheeks, blow in thin pipes, and produce a bizarre, many-voiced noise.

"What bad music!" said someone.

The musicians took offense and left. Following them, the guests left one after another, for night was already come. And when placid darkness encircled them and they began to breathe with more ease, suddenly Lazarus' image loomed up before each one in formidable radiance: the blue face of a corpse, grave clothes gorgeous and resplendent, a cold look in the depths of which lay motionless as unknown horror. As though petrified, they were standing far apart, and darkness envloped them, but in the darkness blazed brighter and brighter the supernatural vision of him who for three days had been under the enigmatical sway of death. For three days had he been dead: thrice had the sun risen and set, but he had been dead. And now he is again among them, touches them, looks at them, and through the black disks of his pupils, as through darkened glass, stares the unknowable Yonder.

3

No one was taking care of Lazarus, for no friends, no relatives were left to him, and the great desert, which encircled the holy city, came near the very threshold of his dwelling. And the desert entered his house, and stretched on his couch, like a wife, and extinguished the fires. No one was taking care of Lazarus. One after the other, his sisters—Mary and Martha—forsook him. For a long while Martha

was loath to abandon him, for she knew not who would feed him and pity him. She wept and prayed. But one night, when the wind was roaring in the desert and with a hissing sound the cypresses were bending over the roof, she dressed noiselessly, and secretly left the house. Lazarus probably heard the door slam; it banged against the side-post under the gusts of the desert wind, but he did not rise to go out and look at her that was abandoning him. All the night long the cypresses hissed over his head and plaintively thumped the door, letting in the cold, greedy desert.

Like a leper he was shunned by everyone, and it was proposed to tie a bell to his neck, as is done with lepers, to warn people against sudden meetings. But someone remarked, growing frightfully pale, that it would be too horrible if by night the moaning of Lazarus' bell were suddenly heard under the pillows, and so the project was abandoned.

And since he did not take care of himself, he would probably have starved to death, had not the neighbors brought him food in fear of something that they sensed but vaguely. The food was brought to him by children; they were not afraid of Lazarus, nor did they mock him with naive cruelty, as children are wont to do with the wretched and miserable. They were indifferent to him, and Lazarus answered them with the same coldness; he had no desire to caress the black little curls, and to look into their innocent shining eyes. Given to Time and to the desert, his house was crumbling down, and long since had his famishing goats wandered away to the neighboring pastures. His bridal garments became threadbare. Ever since that happy day when the musicians played, he had worn them unaware of the difference of the new and the worn. The bright colors grew dull and faded; vicious dogs and the sharp thorns of the desert turned the tender fabric into rags.

By day, when the merciless sun slew all things alive, and even scorpions sought shelter under stones and writhed there in a mad desire to sting, he sat motionless under the sun's rays, his blue face and the uncouth, bushy beard lifted up, bathing in the fiery flood.

When people still talked to him, he was once asked: "Poor Lazarus, does it please you to sit thus and to stare at the sun?"

And he answered: "Yes, it does."

So strong, it seemed, was the cold of his three days' grave, so deep the darkness, that there was no heat on earth to warm Lazarus, nor a splendor that could brighten the darkness of his eyes. That is what came to the mind of those who spoke to Lazarus, and with a sigh they left him.

And when the scarlet, flattened globe would lower, Lazarus would set out for the desert and walk straight toward the sun, as if striving to reach it. He always walked straight toward the sun, and those who tried to follow him and to spy upon what he was doing at night in the desert retained in their memory the black silhouette of a tall stout man against the red background of an enormous flattened disk. Night pursued them with her horrors, and so they did not learn of Lazarus' doings in the desert, but the vision of the black on red was forever branded on their brains. Just as a beast with a splinter in its eye furiously rubs its muzzle with its paws, so they too foolishly rubbed their eyes, but what Lazarus had given was indelible, and Death alone could efface it.

But there were people who lived far away, who never saw Lazarus and knew of him only by report. With daring curiosity, which is stronger than fear and feeds upon it, with hidden mockery, they would come to Lazarus who was sitting in the sun and enter into conversation with him. By this time Lazarus' appearance had changed for the better and was not so terrible. The first minute they snapped their fingers and thought of how stupid the inhabitants of the holy city were; but when the short talk was over and they started homeward, their looks were such that the inhabitants of the holy city recognized them at once and said: "Look, there is one more fool on whom Lazarus has set his eyes"; and they shook their heads regretfully, and lifted up their arms.

There came brave, intrepid warriors, with tinkling weapons; happy youths came with laughter and song; busy tradesmen, jingling their money, ran in for a moment, and haughty priests leaned their crosiers against Lazarus' door, and they were all strangely changed as they came back. The same terrible shadow swooped down upon their souls and gave a new appearance to the old familiar world.

Those who still had the desire to speak expressed their feelings thus:

"All things tangible and visible grew hollow, light and

transparent, similar to lightsome shadows in the darkness of night;

"For that great darkness, which holds the whole cosmos, was dispersed neither by the sun nor by the moon and the stars, but like an immense black shroud enveloped the earth and like a mother embraced it;

"It penetrated all the bodies, iron and stone, and the particles of the bodies, having lost their ties, grew lonely; and it penetrated into the depth of the particles, and the particles of particles became lonely;

"For that great void, which encircles the cosmos, was not filled by things visible, neither by the sun, nor by the moon and stars, but reigned unrestrained, penetrating, everywhere, severing body from body, particle from particle;

"In the void, hollow trees spread hollow roots threatening a fantastic fall; temples, palaces and houses loomed up and they were hollow; and in the void men moved about restlessly, but they were light and hollow like shadows;

"For time was no more, and the beginning of all things came near their end: the building was still being built, and builders were still hammering away, and its ruins were already seen and the void in its place; the man was still being born, but already funeral candles were burning at his head, and now they were extinguished, and there was the void in place of the man and of the funeral candles;

"And wrapped by void and darkness the man in despair trembled in the face of the horror of the infinite."

Thus spake the men who still a desire to speak. But, surely, much more could those have told who wished not to speak, and died in silence.

4

At that time there lived in Rome a renowned sculptor. In clay, marble and bronze he wrought bodies of gods and men, and such was their beauty that people called them immortal. But he himself was discontented and asserted that there was something even more beautiful that he could not embody either in marble or in bronze. "I have not yet gathered the glimmers of the moon, nor have I my fill of sunshine," he was wont to say, "and there is no soul in my

marble, no life in my beautiful bronze." And when on moonlight nights he slowly walked along the road, crossing the black shadows of cypresses, his white tunic glittering in the moonshine, those who met him would laugh in a friendly way and say:

"Are you going to gather moonshine, Aurelius? Why then did you not fetch baskets?"

And he would answer, laughing and pointing to his eyes:

"Here are the baskets wherein I gather the sheen of the moon and the glimmer of the sun."

And so it was: the moon glimmered in his eyes and the sun sparkled therein. But he could not translate them into marble, and therein lay the serene tragedy of his life.

He was descended from an ancient patrician race, had a good wife and children, and suffered from no want.

When the obscure rumor about Lazarus reached him, he consulted his wife and friends and undertook the far journey to Judea to see him who had miraculously risen from the dead. He was somewhat weary in those days and he hoped that the road would sharpen his blunted senses. What was said of Lazarus did not frighten him: he had pondered much over Death, did not like it, but he disliked also those who confused it with life. "In this life are life and beauty," thought he; "beyond is Death, and enigmatical; and there is no better thing for a man to do than to delight in life and in the beauty of all things living." He had even a vainglorious desire to convince Lazarus of the truth of his own view and restore his soul to life, as his body had been restored. This seemed so much easier because the rumors, shy and strange, did not render the whole truth about Lazarus and but vaguely warned against something frightful.

Lazarus had just risen from the stone in order to follow the sun which was setting in the desert, when a rich Roman, attended by an armed slave, approached him and addressed him in a sonorous voice: "Lazarus!"

And Lazarus beheld a superb face, lit with glory, and arrayed in fine clothes, and precious stones sparkling in the sun. The red light lent to the Roman's face and head the appearance of gleaming bronze: that also Lazarus noticed. He resumed obediently his place and lowered his weary eyes.

"Yes, you are ugly, my poor Lazarus," quietly said the Roman, playing with his golden chain; "you are even horrible, my poor friend; and Death was not lazy that day when you fell so heedlessly into his hands. But you are stout, and, as the great Caesar used to say, fat people are not ill-tempered; to tell the truth, I don't understand why men fear you. Permit me to spend the night in your house; the hour is late, and I have no shelter."

Never had anyone asked Lazarus' hospitality.

"I have no bed," said he.

"I am somewhat of a solider and I can sleep sitting," the Roman answered. "We shall build a fire."

"I have no fire."

"Then we shall have our talk in the darkness, like two friends. I think you will find a bottle of wine."

"I have no wine."

The Roman laughed.

"Now I see why you are so somber and dislike your second life. No wine! Why, then we shall do without it: there are words that make the head go round better than the Falernian."

By a sign he dismissed the slave, and they remained alone. And again the sculptor started speaking, but it was as if, together with the setting sun, life had left his words; and they grew pale and hollow, as if they staggered on unsteady feet, as if they slipped and fell down, drunk with the heavy lees of weariness and despair. And black chasms grew up between the worlds, like far-off hints of the great void and the great darkness.

"Now I am your guest, and you will not be unkind to me, Lazarus!" said he. "Hospitality is the duty even of those who for three days were dead. Three days, I was told, you rested in the grave. There it must be cold . . . and thence comes your ill habit of going without fire and wine. As to me, I like fire; it grows dark here so rapidly. . . . The lines of your eyebrows and forehead are quite, quite interesting: they are like ruins of strange palaces, buried in ashes after an earthquake. But why do you wear such ugly and queer garments? I have seen bridegrooms in your country, and they wear such clothes—are they not funny?—and terrible?— . . . But are you a bridegroom?"

The sun had already disappeared, a monstrous black

shadow came running from the east, it was as if gigantic bare feet began rumbling on the sand, and the wind sent a cold wave along the backbone.

"In the darkness you seem still larger, Lazarus, as if you have grown stouter in these moments. Do you feed on darkness, Lazarus? I would fain have a little fire—at least a little fire, a little fire. I feel somewhat chilly, your nights are so barbarously cold. Were it not so dark I should say that you were looking at me, Lazarus. Yes, it seems to me you are looking. . . . Why, you are looking at me, I feel it—but there you are smiling."

Night came, and filled the air with heavy blackness.

"How well it will be, when the sun will rise tomorrow, anew. . . . I am a great sculptor, you know; that is how my friends call me. I create. Yes, that is the word . . . but I need daylight. I give life to the cold marble, I melt sonorous bronze in fire, in bright hot fire. . . . Why did you touch me with your hand?"

"Come," said Lazarus. "You are my guest."

They went to the house. And a long night enveloped the earth.

The slave, seeing that his master did not come, went to seek him, when the sun was already high in the sky. And he beheld his master side by side with Lazarus: in profound silence they were sitting right under the dazzling and scorching rays of the sun and looking upward. The slave began to weep and cried out: "My master, what has befallen you, master?"

The very same day the sculptor left for Rome. On the way Aurelius was pensive and taciturn, staring attentively at everything—the men, the ship, the sea, as if trying to retain something. On the high sea a storm burst upon them, and all through it Aurelius stayed on the deck and eagerly scanned the seas looming near and sinking with a dull boom.

At home his friends were frightened at the change which had taken place in Aurelius, but he calmed them, saying meaningly: "I have found it."

And without changing the dusty clothes he wore on his journey, he fell to work, and the marble obediently resounded under his sonorous hammer. Long and eagerly he worked, admitting no one, until one morning he announced

that the work was ready and ordered his friends to be summoned, severe critics and connoisseurs of art. And to meet them he put on bright and gorgeous garments, that glittered with yellow gold—and scarlet byssus.

"Here is my work," said he thoughtfully.

His friends glanced, and a shadow of profound sorrow covered their faces. It was something monstrous, deprived of all the lines and shapes familiar to the eye, but not without a hint at some new, strange image.

On a thin, crooked twig, or rather on an ugly likeness of a twig, rested askew a blind, ugly, shapeless, outspread mass of something utterly and inconceivably distorted, a mad heap of wild and bizarre fragments, all feebly and vainly striving to part from one another. And, as if by chance, beneath one of the wildly-rent salients a butterfly was chiseled with divine skill, all airy loveliness, delicacy and beauty with transparent wings, which seemed to tremble with an impotent desire to take flight.

"Wherefore this wonderful butterfly, Aurelius?" said somebody falteringly.

But it was necessary to tell the truth, and one of his friends who loved him best said firmly: "This is ugly, my poor friend. It must be destroyed. Give me the hammer."

And with two strokes he broke the monstrous man into pieces, leaving only the infinitely delicate butterfly untouched.

From that time on Aurelius created nothing. With profound indifference he looked at marble and bronze, and on his former divine works, where everlasting beauty rested. With the purpose of arousing his former fervent passion for work and awakening his deadened soul, his friends took him to see other artists' beautiful works, but he remained indifferent as before, and the smile did not warm up his tightened lips. And only after listening to lengthy talks about beauty, he would retort wearily and indolently: "But all this is a lie."

By day, when the sun was shining, he went into his magnificent, skillfully built garden, and having found a place without shadow, he exposed his bare head to the glare and heat. Red and white butterflies fluttered around; from the crooked lips of a drunken satyr, water streamed down with a splash into a marble cistern, but he sat motionless

and silent, like a pallid reflection of him who, in the far-off distance, at the very gates of the stony desert, sat under the fiery sun.

5

And now it came to pass that the great, deified Augustus himself summoned Lazarus. The imperial messengers dressed him gorgeously, in solemn nuptial clothes, as if Time had legalized them, and he was to remain until his very death the bridegroom of an unknown bride. It was as if an old, rotting coffin had been gilded and furnished with new, gay tassels. And men, all in trim and bright attire, rode after him, as if in bridal procession indeed, and those foremost trumpeted loudly, bidding people to clear the way for the emperor's messengers. But Lazarus' way was deserted: his native land cursed the hateful name of him who had miraculously risen from the dead, and people scattered at the very news of his appalling approach. The solitary voice of the brass trumpets sounded in the motionless air, and the wilderness alone responded with its languid echo.

Then Lazarus went by sea. And his was the most magnificently arrayed and the most mournful ship that ever mirrored itself in the azure waves of the Mediterranean Sea. Many were the travelers aboard, but like a tomb was the ship, all silence and stillness, and the despairing water sobbed at the steep, proudly curved prow. All alone sat Lazarus exposing his head to the blaze of the sun, silently listening to the murmur and splash of the wavelets, and afar seamen and messengers were sitting, a vague group of weary shadows. Had the thunder burst and the wind attacked the red sails, the ships would probably have perished, for none of those aboard had either the will or the strength to struggle for life. With a supreme effort some mariners would reach the board and eagerly scan the blue, transparent hollow of an azure wave, or a drunken gay centaur dash along and in frenzy splash the wave with his hoof. But the sea was like a wilderness, and the deep was dumb and deserted.

With utter indifference Lazarus set his feet on the street of the eternal city, as if all her wealth, all the magnificence

of her palaces built by giants, all the resplendence, beauty and music of her refined life were but the echo of the wind in the desert quicksand. Chariots were dashing and along the streets were moving crowds of strong, fair, proud builders of the eternal city and haughty participants in her life; a song sounded; fountains and women laughed a pearly laughter; drunken philosophers harangued, and the sober listened to them with a smile; hoofs struck the stone pavements. And surrounded by cheerful noise, a stout, heavy man was moving, a cold spot of silence and despair, and on his way he sowed disgust, anger, and vague, gnawing weariness. Who dares to be sad in Rome? the citizens wondered indignantly, and frowned. In two days the entire city knew *all* about him who had miraculously risen from the dead, and shunned him.

But some daring people there were who wanted to test their strength, and Lazarus obeyed their imprudent summons. Kept busy by state affairs, the emperor constantly delayed the reception, and seven days did he who had risen from the dead go about visiting others.

And Lazarus came to a cheerful Epicurean, and the host met him with laughter: "Drink, Lazarus, drink!" he shouted. "Would not Augustus laugh to see you drunk?"

And half-naked drunken women laughed, and rose petals fell on Lazarus' blue hands. But then the Epicurean looked into Lazarus' eyes and his gaiety ended forever. Drunkard remained he for the rest of his life; never did he drink, yet forever was he drunk. But instead of the gay revelry which wine brings with it, frightful dreams began to haunt him, the sole food of his stricken spirit. Day and night he lived the poisonous vapors of his nightmares, and Death itself was not more frightful than its raving, monstrous forerunners.

And Lazarus came to a youth and his beloved, who loved each other and were most beautiful in their passions. Proudly and strongly embracing his love, the youth said with serene regret: "Look at us, Lazarus, and share our joy. Is there anything stronger than love?"

And Lazarus looked. And for the rest of their life they kept loving each other, but their passion grew gloomy and joyless, like those funeral cypresses whose roots feed on the decay of the graves and whose black summits in a still evening hour seek in vain to reach the sky. Thrown by the

unknown forces of life into each other's embraces, they mingled tears with kisses, voluptuous pleasures with pain, and they felt themselves doubly slaves, obedient slaves to life, and patient servants of the silent Nothingness. Ever united, ever severed, they blazed like sparks and like sparks lost themselves in the boundless Dark.

And Lazarus came to a haughty sage, and the sage said to him: "I know all the horrors you can reveal to me. Is that anything you can frighten me with?"

But before long the sage felt that the knowledge of horror was far from being the horror itself, and that the vision of Death was not Death. And he felt that wisdom and folly are equal before the face of Infinity, for Infinity knows them not. And it vanished, the dividing-line between knowledge and ignorance, truth and falsehood, top and bottom, and the shapeless thought hung suspended in the void. Then the sage clutched his gray head and cried out frantically: "I can not think! I can not think!"

Thus under the indifferent glance for him who miraculously had risen from the dead, perished everything that asserts life, its significance and joys. And it was suggested that it was dangerous to let him see the emperor, that it was better to kill him, and having buried him secretly, to tell the emperor that he had disappeared no one knew whither. Already swords were being whetted and youths devoted to the public welfare prepared for the murder, when Augustus ordered Lazarus to be brought before him next morning, thus destroying the cruel plans.

If there was no way of getting rid of Lazarus, at least it was possible to soften the terrible impression his face produced. With this in view, skillful painters, barbers, and artists were summoned, and all night long they were busy over Lazarus' head. They cropped his beard, curled it, and gave it a tidy, agreeable appearance. By means of paints they concealed the corpselike blueness of his hands and face. Repulsive were the wrinkles of suffering that furrowed his old face, and they were puttied, painted, and smoothed; then, over the smooth background, wrinkles of good-tempered laughter and pleasant carefree mirth were skillfully painted with fine brushes.

Lazarus submitted indifferently to everything that was done to him. Soon he was turned into a becomingly stout,

venerable old man, into a quiet and kind grandfather of numerous offspring. It seemed that the smile, with which only a while ago he was spinning funny yarns, was still lingering on his lips and that in the corner of his eye serene tenderness was hiding, the companion of old age. But people did not dare change his nuptial garments, and they could not change his eyes, two dark and frightful glasses through which the unknowable Yonder looked at men.

6

Lazarus was not moved by the magnificence of the imperial palace. It was as if he saw no difference getween the crumbling house, closely pressed by the desert, and the stone palace, solid and fair, and indifferently he passed into it. The hard marble of the floors under his feet grew similar to the quicksand of the desert, and the multitude of richly dressed and haughty men became like void air under his glance. No one looked into his face, as Lazarus passed by, fearing to fall under the appalling influence of his eyes; but when the sound of his heavy footsteps had sufficiently died down, the courtiers raised their heads and with fearful curiosity examined the figure of a stout, tall, slightly bent old man, who was slowly penetrating into the very heart of the imperial palace. Were Death itself passing, it would be faced with no greater fear: for until then the dead alone knew Death, and those alive knew Life only—and there was no bridge between them. But this extraordinary man, although alive, knew Death, and enigmatical, appalling, was his cursed knowledge. "Woe!" people thought; "he will take the life of our great, deified Augustus"; and then sent curses after Lazarus, who meanwhile kept on advancing into the interior of the palace.

Already did the emperor know who Lazarus was, and prepared to meet him. But the monarch was a brave man, and, felt his own tremendous, unconquerable power, and in his fatal duel with him who had miraculously risen from the dead he wanted not to invoke human help. And so he met Lazarus face to face.

"Lift not your eyes upon me, Lazarus," he ordered. "I heard your face is like that of Medusa and turns into

stone whomsoever you look at. Now, I wish to see you and talk with you, before I turn into stone," he added in a tone of kingly jesting, not devoid of fear.

Coming close to him, he carefully examined Lazarus' face and his strange festal garments. And although he had a keen eye, he was deceived by his appearance.

"So. You do not appear terrible, my venerable old man. But the worse for us, if horror assumes such a respectable and pleasant air. Now let us have a talk."

Augustus sat, and questioning Lazarus with his eye as much as with words, started the conversation: "Why did you not greet me as you entered?"

Lazarus answered indifferently: "I knew not it was necessary."

"Are you a Christian?"

"No."

Augustus approvingly shook his head.

"That is good. I do not like Christians. They shake the tree of life before it is covered with fruit, and disperse its odorous bloom to the winds. But who are you?"

With a visible effort Lazarus answered: "I was dead."

"I had heard that. But who are you now?"

Lazarus was silent, but at last repeated in a tone of weary apathy: "I was dead."

"Listen to me, stranger," said the emperor, distinctly and severely giving utterance to the thought that had come to him at the beginning, "my realm is the realm of Life, my people are of the living, not of the dead. You are here one too many. I know not who you are and what you saw there; but, if you lie, I hate lies, and if you tell the truth, I hate your truth. In my bosom I feel the throb of life; I feel strength in my arm, and my proud thoughts, like eagles, pierce the space. And yonder in the shelter of my rule, under the protection of laws created by me, people live and toil and rejoice. Do you hear the battlecry, the challenge men throw into the face of the future?"

Augustus, as if in prayer, stretched forth his arms and exclaimed solemnly: "Be blessed, O great and divine Life!"

Lazarus was silent and with growing sternness the emperor went on: "You are not wanted here, miserable remnant, snatched from under Death's teeth, you inspire weariness and disgust with life; like a caterpillar in the fields,

you gloat on the rich ear of joy and belch out the drivel of despair and sorrow. Your truth is like a rusty sword in the hands of a nightly murderer, and as a murderer you shall be executed. But before that, let me look into your eyes. Perchance only cowards are afraid of them, but in the brave they awake the thirst for strife and victory; then you shall be rewarded, not executed. . . . Now, look at me, Lazarus."

At first it appeared to the deified Augustus that a friend was looking at him, so soft, so tenderly fascinating was Lazarus' glance. It promised not horror, but sweet rest, and the Infinite seemed to him a tender mistress, a compassionate sister, a mother. But stronger and stronger grew its embraces, and already the mouth, greedy of hissing kisses, interfered with the monarch's breathing, and already to the surface of the soft tissues of the body came the iron of the bones and tightened its merciless circle, and unknown fangs, blunt and cold, touched his heart and sank into it with slow indolence.

"It pains," said the deified Augustus, growing pale. "But look at me, Lazarus, look."

It was as if some heavy gates, ever closed, were slowly moving apart, and through the growing interstice the appalling horror of the Infinite poured in slowly and steadily. Like two shadows entered the shoreless void and the unfathomable darkness; they extinguished the sun, ravished the earth from under the feet, and the roof from over the head. No more did the frozen heart ache.

Time stood still and the beginning of each thing grew frightfully near to its end. Augustus' throne, just erected, crumbled down, and the void was already in the place of the throne and of Augustus. Noiselessly did Rome crumble down, and a new city stood on its site and it too was swallowed by the void. Like fantastic giants, cities, states and countries fell down and vanished in the void darkness, and with uttermost indifference did the insatiable black womb of the Infinite swallow them.

"Halt!" ordered the emperor.

In his voice sounded already a note of indifference, his hands dropped in languor, and in the vain struggle with the onrushing darkness his fiery eyes now blazed up, and now went out.

"My life you have taken from me, Lazarus," said he in a spiritless, feeble voice.

And these words of hoeplessness saved him. He remembered his people, whose shield he was destined to be, and keen salutary pain pierced his deadened heart. "They are doomed to death," he thought wearily. "Serene shadows in the darkness of the Infinite," thought he, and horror grew upon him. "Frail vessels with living, seething blood, with a heart that knows sorrow and also great joy," said he in his heart, and tenderness pervaded it.

Thus pondering and oscillating between the poles of Life and Death, he slowly came back to life, to find in its suffering and in its joys a shield against the darkness of the void and the horror of the Infinite.

"No, you have not murdered me, Lazarus," said he firmly, "but I will take your life. Begone."

That evening the deified Augustus partook of his meats and drinks with particular joy. Now and then his lifted hand remained suspended in the air, and a dull glimmer replaced the bright sheen of his fiery eye. It was the cold wave of Horror that surged at his feet. Defeated, but not undone, ever awaiting its hour, that Horror stood at the emperor's bedside, like a black shadow all through his life, it swayed his nights but yielded the days to the sorrows and joys of life.

The following day, the hangman with a hot iron burned out Lazarus' eyes. Then he was sent home. The deified Augustus dared not kill him.

Lazarus returned to the desert, and the wilderness met him with hissing gusts of wind and the heat of the blazing sun. Again he was sitting on a stone, his rough, bushy beard lifted up; and the two black holes in place of his eyes looked at the sky with an expression of dull terror. Afar off the holy city stirred noisily and restlessly, but around him everything was deserted and dumb. No one approached the place where lived he who had miraculously risen from the dead, and long since his neighbors had forsaken their houses. Driven by the hot iron into the depth of his skull, his cursed knowledge hid there in an ambush. As if leaping out from an ambush it plunged its thousand invisible eyes into the man, and no one dared look at Lazarus.

And in the evening, when the sun, reddening and growing wider, would come nearer and nearer the western horizon, the blind Lazarus would slowly follow it. He would stumble against stones and fall, stout and weak as he was, would rise heavily to his feet and walk on again; and on the red screen of the sunset his black body and outspread hands would form a monstrous likeness of a cross.

And it came to pass that once he went out and did not come back. Thus seemingly ended the second life of him who for three days had been under the enigmatical sway of death, and rose miraculously from the dead.

R. A. Lafferty is known as a writer of peculiar short stories (most of his best are collected in *Nine Hundred Grandmothers,* a recent Ace Science Fiction Special), and the story below is as odd as they come. It's about love and a kind of curse—or maybe just bad luck. You'd never get Sour John to believe that, though.

THE UGLY SEA

R. A. Lafferty

"The sea is ugly," said Sour John, "and it's peculiar that I'm the only one who ever noticed it. There have been millions of words written on the sea, but nobody has written this. For a time I thought it was just my imagination, that it was only ugly to me. Then I analyzed it and found that it really is ugly.

"It is foul. It is dirtier than a cess-pool; yet men who would not willingly bathe in a cess-pool will bathe in it. It has the aroma of an open sewer; yet those who would not make a pilgrimage to a sewer will do so to the sea. It is untidy; it is possibly the most untidy thing in the world. And I doubt if there is any practical way to improve it. It cannot be drained; it cannot be covered up; it can only be ignored.

"Everything about it is ignoble. Its animals are baser than those of the land. Its plant life is rootless and protean. It contaminates and wastes the shores. It is an open grave where the living die down with dead."

"It *does* smell a little, Sour John, and it *is* untidy. But I don't think it's ugly. You cannot deny that sometimes it is really beautiful."

"I do deny it. It has no visual beauty. It is monotonous, with only four or five faces, and all of them coarse. The sun and the sky over it may be beautiful; the land that it borders may be fair; but the old sewer itself is ugly."

"Then why are you the only one who thinks so?"

"There could be several reasons. One, that I've long suspected, is that I'm smarter than other people. And another is that mankind has just decided to deny this ugliness for subconscious reasons, which *is* to say for no reason at all. The sea is a lot like the subconscious. It may even *be* the subconscious; that was the teaching of the Thalassalogians. The Peoples of the Plains dreamed of the Sea before they visited it. They were guilty dreams. They knew the sea was there, and they were ashamed of it. The Serpent in the Garden was a Hydra, a water snake. He ascended the river to its source to prove that nothing was beyond his reach. That is the secret we have always to live with: that even the rivers of Paradise flow finally into that evil grave. We are in rhythm with that old ocean: it rises irregularly twice in twenty-four hours, and then repents of rising; and so largely do we."

"Sour John, I will still love the sea though you say it is ugly."

"So will I. I did not say I did not love it. I only said it was ugly. It is an open secret that God was less pleased with the sea than with anything else he made. His own people, at least, have always shunned it.

"Oh, they use it, and several times they have nearly owned it. But they do not go to sea as seamen. In all history there have been only three Jewish seamen. One was in Solomon's navy; he filled a required berth, and was unhappy. One served a Caliph in the tenth century; why I do not know. And the third was Moysha Uferwohner."

"Then let us hear about Moysha."

"Moysha was quite a good man. That is what makes it

sad. And the oddest thing is what attracted him to the evil sea. You could not guess it in ten years."

"Not unless it was a water-front woman."

"That is fantastic. Of all unlikely things that would seem the most unlikely. And yet it's the truth and you hit it at once. Not a woman in being, however, but in potential (as the philosophers have it); which is to say, quite a young girl.

"Likely you have run across her. So I will tell it all."

This begins ten years ago. Moysha was then a little short of his majority, and was working with his father in an honorable trade not directly connected with the sea, that of the loan shark. But they often loaned money to seamen, a perilous business, for which reason the rates were a little higher than you might expect.

Moysha was making collections and picking up a little new trade. This took him to the smell of the sea, which was painful to him, as to any sensible man. And it took him to the Blue Fish, a water-front cafe, bar, and lodging house.

A twelve year old girl, a cripple, the daughter of the proprietor, was playing the piano. It was not for some time, due to the primacy of other matters, that Moysha realized that she was playing atrociously. Then he attempted to correct it. "Young lady, one should play well or not at all. Please play better, or stop. That is acutely painful."

She looked as though she were going to cry, and this disconcerted Moysha, though he did not know why it did. Half an hour later the fact intruded itself on his consciousness that she was still playing, and still playing badly; but now with a stilted sort of badness.

"Young lady, this is past all bearing. I suggest that you stop playing the damned thing and go to your bed. Or go anywhere and do anything. But this is hideous. Stop it!"

The little girl really did cry then. And as a result of it Moysha got into an altercation, got his head bloodied, and was put out of the place; the first time that such a thing ever happened to him. Then he realized that the seamen liked the little girl, and liked the way she played the piano.

This does not seem like a good beginning for either a tender love or a great passion. But it had to be the beginning; that was the first time they ever saw each other.

For the next three days Moysha was restless. A serpent was eating at his liver and he could not identify it. He began to take a drink in the middle of the day (it had not been his custom); and on the third day he asked for rum. There was a taste in his mouth and he was trying to match it. And in the inner windings of his head there was an awful smell, and it made him lonesome.

By the evening of the third day the terrible truth came to him: he had to go down for another whiff of that damned sea; and he possibly could not live through another night unless he heard that pretty little girl play the piano again.

Bonny *was* pretty. She had a wise way with her, and a willful look. It was as though she had just decided not to do something very mean, and was a little sorry that she hadn't.

She didn't really play badly; just out of tune and as nobody else had ever played, with a great amount of ringing in the ballad tunes and a sudden muting, then a sort of clashing and chiming. But she stopped playing when she saw that Moysha was in the room.

Moysha did not get on well at the Blue Fish. He didn't know how to break into the conversation of the seamen, and in his embarrassment he ordered drink after drink. When finally he became quarrelsome (as he had never been before) they put him out of the place again.

Moysha lay on a dirty tarp out on a T head and listened while Bonny played the piano again. Then she stopped. She had probably been sent to bed.

But instead she came out to the T head where he was.

"You old toad, you give me the creeps."

"I do, little girl?"

"Sure you do. And papa says 'don't let that Yehude in the place again, he makes everybody nervous, if someone wants to borrow money from him let them borrow it somewhere else.' Even the dogs growl at you down here."

"I know it."

"Then why do you come here?"

"Tonight is the only time I ever did come except on business."

"Tonight is what I am talking about."

"I came down to see you."

"I know you did, dear. Oh, I didn't mean to call you that. I call everybody that."

"Do you want to take it back?"

"No, I don't want to take it back. You old toad, why aren't you a seaman like everybody else?"

"Is everybody else a seaman?"

"Everybody that comes to the Blue Fish. How will you come to the Fish now when Papa won't let you in the place?"

"I don't know."

"If you give me one of your cards I'll call you up."

"Here."

"And if you give me two dollars and a half I'll pay you back three dollars and a quarter Saturday."

"Here."

"I can't play the piano any other way. If you were a seaman I bet you'd like the way I play the piano. Good night you old toad."

"Good night, Bonny."

And it was then that the dismal thought first came to Moysha: "What if I should be a seaman after all?"

Now this was the most terrible thing he could have done. He could have become a Christian, he could have married a tramp, he could have been convicted of embezzlement. But to leave his old life for the sea would be more than he could stand and more than his family could stand.

And there was no reason for it: only that a twelve year old girl looked at him less kindly than if he had been a seaman. It is a terrible and empty thing to go to sea: all order is broken up and there are only periods of debauchery and boredom and work and grinding idleness, and the sickening old pond and its dirty borders. It was for such reasons that Moysha hesitated for three months.

Bonny came to see him for possibly the tenth time. She was now paying him interest of sixty cents a week on an old debt which, in the normal state of affairs, she would never be able to clear.

"Bonny, I wish there was something that I could say to you."

"You can say anything you want to me."

"Oh Bonny, you don't know what I mean."

"You want to bet I don't?"

"Bonny, what will you be doing in four years?"

"I'll be getting married to a seaman if I can find one to take me."

"Why shouldn't one take you?"

"For a seaman it is bad luck to marry a crippled woman."

So on the first day of summer Moysha went off to sea as a lowly wiper. It broke his heart and shamed his family. He woke and slept in misery for the foulness of the life. He ate good food and sinned in the ports in attempting to be a salty dog. And it was nine weeks before he was back at his home port; and he went to the Blue Fish with some other seamen.

It was afternoon, and Bonny went for a walk with him across the peninsula and down to the beach.

"Well, I'm thunderstruck is all I can say. Why in the world would a sensible man want to go to sea?"

"I thought you liked seamen, Bonny."

"I do. But how is a man going to turn into a seaman if he isn't one to start with? A dog would turn into a fish easier. That's the dumbest thing anyone ever did. I had an idea when you come to the place today that you turned into a seaman just for me. Did you?"

"Yes."

"I could be coy and say 'Why Moysha, I'm only twelve years old,' but I already knew how you felt. I will tell you something. I never did a mean thing, and I never saw anybody I wanted to be mean to till I met you. But I could be mean to you. It would be fun to ruin you. We aren't good for each other. You oughtn't to see me ever again."

"I have to."

"Then maybe I have to be mean to you. It's for both of us that I ask you not to see me again. I don't want to ruin you, and I don't want to be a mean woman; but I will be if you keep coming around."

"Well, I can't stay away."

"Very well, then I'll be perverse. I'll shock you every time I open my mouth. I'll tell you that I do filthy things, and you won't know whether I'm lying or not. You won't know what I mean, and you'll be afraid to find out. You'll never be able to stay away from me if you don't stay away now. I'll have husbands and still keep you on a string. You'll stand outside in the dark and look at the light in my window, and

you'll eat your own heart. Please go away. I don't want to turn mean."

"But Bonny, it doesn't have to be that way."

"I hope it doesn't, but it scares me every time I see you. Now I'll make a bargain with you. If you try to stay away I'll try to stay good. But if you come back again I won't be responsible. You ought to go back uptown and not try to be a seaman any more."

After that the little girl went back to the Blue Fish.

Moysha did not go back uptown. He returned to the sea, and he did not visit that port again for a year. And there was a change in him. From closer acquaintance he no longer noticed that the sea was foul. Once at sunset, for a moment, he found something pleasant about it. He no longer sinned excessively in the ports. Ashore he traveled beyond the waterfront bars and visited the countries behind and met the wonderful people. He got the feel of the rough old globe in his head. In a pension in Holland he played chess with another twelve year old girl, who was not precocious, and who did not dread turning into a mean woman. In a pub in Denmark he learned to take snuff like the saltiest seaman of them all. At an inn in Brittany he was told that the sea is the heritage of the poor, who cannot afford the land. It was in Brittany that he first noticed that he now walked like an old salt.

After a year he went back to his home port and to the Blue Fish.

"In a way I'm glad to see you," said Bonny. "I've been feeling contrary lately and you'll give me an excuse. Every morning I wake up and say 'This day I'm going to raise hell.' Then I can't find anyone to raise hell with. All those water rats I like so well that I can't be mean to them. But I bet I know how to be mean to you. Well go get a room and tell me where it is, and I'll come to you tonight."

"But you're only a little girl, and besides you don't mean it."

"Then you're going to find out if I mean it. I intend to come. If you think you love me because I'm pretty and good, then I'll make you love me for a devil. There's things you don't even know about, and you've been a seaman for a year. I'll make you torture me, and it'll be a lot worse

torture to you. I'll show you what unnatural really means. You're going to be mighty sorry you came back."

"Bonny, your humor is cruel."

"When did I ever have any humor? And you don't know if I'm kidding, and you never will know. Would you rather I did these things with someone else than with you?"

"No."

"Well I will. If you don't tell me where your room is, I'll go to someone else's room tonight. I'll do things so filthy you wouldn't believe it. And even if I don't go to somebody, I'll tell you tomorrow that I did."

But Moysha would not tell her where his room was. So late that night when he left the Blue Fish she followed him. It was fantastic for a grown man to walk faster and faster to escape a thirteen year old crippled girl, and finally to run in panic through the dark streets. But when finally she lost him she cried out with surprising kindness: "Good-night Moysha, I'm sorry I was mean."

But she wasn't very sorry, for the next night she was still mean.

"You see that old man with the hair in his ears? He's filthy and we don't even understand each other's language. But he understood what I wanted well enough. He's the one I spent last night with."

"Bonny that's a lie, and it isn't funny."

"I know it isn't funny. But can you be sure that it's a lie? I only lie part of the time, and you never know when. Now tonight, if you don't tell me where your room is, I'm going to take either that old red-faced slobberer or that black man. And you can follow me, since you run away when I follow you, and see that I go with one of them. And you can stand out in the street and look up at our light. I always leave the light on."

"Bonny, why are you mean?"

"I wish I knew, Moysha, I wish I knew."

After a week of this he went to sea again, and did not come back to his home port for two years. He learned of the sea-leaning giants.

"I do not know the name of this tree," said Sour John, "though once I knew it. This is the time of a story where one usually says it's time for a drink. However, for a long

time I have been worried about my parasites who are to me almost like my own children, and this constant diet of rum and red-eye cannot be good for them. I believe if the young lady would fry me a platter of eggs it would please my small associates, and do me more good than harm."

He learned, Moysha did, of the sea-leaning giants. They are massive trees of the islands and the more fragmentary mainlands, and they grow almost horizontal out toward the sea. They are not influenced by the wind; from the time they are little whips the wind is always blowing in from the sea, and they grow against it and against all reason. They have, some of them, trunks nine feet thick, but they always lean out over the sea. Moysha began to understand why they did, though most people would never understand it.

He acquired a talking bird of great versatility. He acquired also a ring tailed monkey and a snake that he carried around inside his shirt, for Moysha was now a very salty seaman.

He was prosperous, for he had never forsaken the trade of the money lender, and he was always a shrewd buyer of novelties and merchandise. He turned them over as he went from port to port, and always at a profit.

He became a cool student of the ceaseless carnage of the ocean, and loved to muse on the ascending and descending corpses and their fragments in that old watery grave.

He spent seven months on a certain Chinese puzzle, and he worked it, the only occidental who ever had patience enough to do so.

When she was fifteen Bonny married a seaman, and he was not Moysha. This happened just one week before Moysha came back to port and to the Blue Fish. The man she married was named Oglesby Ogburn; and if you think that's a funny name, you should have heard the handles of some of them that she turned down.

The very day that Moysha came to the Blue Fish was the day that Oglesby left; for the honeymoon was over, and he had to go back to sea. Bonny was now all kindness to everyone. But she still put the old needle into Moysha.

"I've had a husband for a week now, so I won't be able to get along without a man. You stay with me while you're

in town; and after that I'll get another, and then another and another. And by that time Oglesby will be back for a week."

"Don't talk like that, Bonny, even if I know you're joking."

"But you don't know that I'm joking. You never know for sure."

"How can anyone who looks so like an angel talk like that?"

"It does provide a contrast. Don't you think it makes me more interesting? I didn't know you were the kind who chased married women."

"I'm not. But oh Bonny! What am I to do?"

"Well I've certainly offered you everything. I don't know how I can offer you any more."

And a few days later when Moysha was leaving port they talked again.

"You haven't given me a wedding present or wished me luck. And we do need it. It's always bad luck for a seaman to marry a crippled woman. What are you going to give me for a wedding present?"

"The only thing I will give you is the serpent from my bosom."

"Oh don't talk so flowery."

Then he took the snake out of his shirt.

"Oh, I didn't know you had a real snake. Is he for me? That's the nicest present anyone ever gave me. What do you call him?"

"Why, just snake. Ular, that is, he's a foreign snake."

So he went back to sea and left the little girl there with the snake in her hands.

Bonny was a widow when she was sixteen, as everyone had known she would be. It's no joke about it being bad luck for a seaman to marry a cripple. They seldom lose much time in perishing after they do it. Oglesby died at sea, as all the Ogburns did; and it was from a trifling illness from which he was hardly sick at all. It was many weeks later that Moysha heard the news, and then he hurried back to the home port.

He was too late. Bonny had married again.

"I thought you'd probably come, and I kind of wanted it to be you. But you waited so long, and the summer was half over, that I decided to marry Polycarp Melish. I'm

halfway sorry I did. He wouldn't let Ular sleep with us, and he killed him just because he bit him on the thumb.

"But I tell you what you do. What with the bad luck and all, Polycarp won't last many months. Come around earlier next year. I like to get married in the springtime. I'll be a double widow then."

"Bonny, that's a terrible way to talk even when kidding."

"I'm not kidding at all. I even have an idea how we can beat the jinx. I'll tell you about it after we get married next year. Maybe a crippled girl gets to keep her third husband."

"Do you want Polycarp to die?"

"Of course I don't. I love him. I love all my husbands, just like I'll love you after I marry you. I can't help it if I'm bad luck. I told him, and he said he already knew it; but he wanted to do it anyhow. Will you bring me another snake the next time you're in port?

"Yes. And you can keep the monkey in place of it till I come back. But you can't have the bird yet. I have to keep someone to talk to."

"All right. Please come in the spring. Don't wait till summer again or it'll be too late and I'll already be married to someone else. But whether we get married or not, I'm never going to be mean again. I'm getting too old for that."

So he went to sea again happier than he ever had before.

When she was seventeen Bonny was a widow again as everyone had known she would be. Polycarp had been mangled and chopped to pieces in an unusual accident in the engine room of his ship.

Moysha heard of it very soon, before it could have been heard of at home. And he took council with his talking bird, and with one other, technically more human.

"This other," said Sour John, "was myself. It was very early spring, and Moysha was wondering if it was really best to hurry home and marry Bonny.

" 'I am not at all superstitious,' he said. 'I do not believe that a crippled woman is necessarily bad luck to a seaman. But I believe that Bonny may be bad luck to everyone, including herself.'

"We were on a chocolate island of a French flavor and a French name. On it were girls as pretty as Bonny, and without her reputation for bad luck: girls who would never

be either wives nor widows. And there is a way to go clear around the world from one such place to another.

" 'The Blue Fish is not necessarily the center of the earth,' I told him. 'I have always believed it to be a little left of center. And Bonny may not be a queen. But if you think that she is, then for you she is so. Nine months, or even a year is not very long to live, and you will be at sea most of the time. But if you think a few weeks with the little girl is enough, then it is enough for you. A lot of others who will not have even that will be dead by next Easter.' I said this to cheer him up. I was always the cheerful type.

" 'And what do you think?' Moysha asked the talking bird.

" 'Sampah,' said the bird in his own tongue. This means rubbish. But whether he meant that the superstition was rubbish, or the idea of marrying with consequent early death was rubbish, is something that is still locked up in his little green head."

Moysha hurried home to marry Bonny. He brought a brother of Ular for a present, and he went at once to the Blue Fish.

"Well you're just in time. I was going to have the bans read for me and somebody tomorrow, and if you'd been an hour later it wouldn't have been you."

"I was halfway afraid to come."

"You needn't have been afraid. I told you I knew a way to beat the jinx. I'm selling the Blue Fish. I wrote you that Papa was dead. And we're going to take a house uptown and forget the sea."

"Forget the sea? How could anyone forget the sea?"

"Why, you're only a toy seaman. You weren't raised to it. When you go away from it you won't be a seaman at all. And crippled women are only bad luck to seamen, not to other men."

"But what would I do? The sea is all I know."

"Don't be a child, Moysha. You hate the sea, remember? You always told me that you did. You only went to sea because you thought I liked seamen. You know a hundred ways to make a dollar, and you don't have to go near the sea for any of them."

So they were married. And they were happy. Moysha discovered that Bonny was really an angel. Her devil talk had been a stunt.

It was worth all five dark years at sea to have her. She was now even more lovely than the first night he had seen her. They lived in a house uptown in the heart of the city, and were an urbane and civilized couple. And three years went by.

Then one day Bonny said that they ought to get rid of the snake, and maybe even the monkey. She was afraid they would bite one of the children, or one of the children would bite them.

The talking bird said that if his friends left he would leave too.

"But Bonny," said Moysha, "these three are all that I have to remind me of the years when I was a seaman."

"You have me also. But why do you want to be reminded of those awful days?"

"I know what we could do, Bonny. We could buy the Blue Fish again. It isn't doing well. We could live there and run it. And we could have a place there for the snake and the monkey and the bird."

"Yes, we could have a place for them all, but not for the children. That is no place to raise children. I know, and I was raised there. Now my love, don't be difficult. Take the three creatures and dispose of them. And remember that for us the sea isn't even there any more."

But it was still there when he went down to the Blue Fish to try to sell the three creatures to the seamen. An old friend of his was present and was looking for an engineer first class to ship out that very night. And there was a great difficulty in selling the creatures.

He could not sell them unless he put a price on them, and he was damned if he'd do that. That was worse than putting a price on his own children. He had had them longer than his children, and they were more peculiarly his own. He could not sell them. And he could not go home and tell his wife that he could not sell them.

"He went out and sat on the horns of the dilemma and looked at the sea. And then his old friend (who coincidentally was myself)," said Sour John, "came out and said that he sure did need an engineer first class to leave that every night.

"And then what do you think that Moysha did?"

"Oh, he signed on and went back to sea."

Sour John was thunderstruck.

"How did you know that? You've hit it again. I never will know how you do it. Well, that's what he did. In the face of everything he left his beautiful wife and children, and his clean life, and went to the filthy sea again. It's incredible."

"And how is he doing now?"

"God knows. I mean it literally. Naturally he's dead. That's been a year. You don't expect a seaman married to a crippled woman to live forever do you?"

"And how is Bonny?"

"I went out to see her this afternoon; for this is the port where it all happened. She had out an atlas and a pencil and a piece of string. She was trying to measure out what town in the whole country is further from the sea.

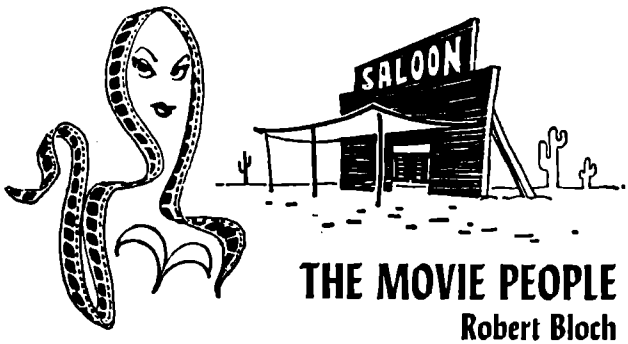
"She is lonely and grieves for Moysha, more than for either of her other husbands. But oh she is lovely! She supports herself and her brood by giving piano lessons."

"Is there a moral to this?"

"No. It is an immoral story. And it's a mystery to me. A man will not normally leave a clean home to dwell in an open grave, nor abandon children to descend into a sewer, nor foreswear a lovely and loving wife to go faring on a cess-pool, knowing that he will shortly die there as a part of the bargain.

"But that is what he did."

Robert Bloch, who makes his living these days writing movies for Hollywood, is as fascinated by the glamour and mystique of Hollywood's past as even you and I. This is a story about Hollywood and love—the kind that *really* doesn't die.



THE MOVIE PEOPLE

Robert Bloch

Two thousand stars.

Two thousand stars, maybe more, set in the sidewalks along Hollywood Boulevard, each metal slab inscribed with the name of someone in the movie industry. They go way back, those names; from Broncho Billy Anderson to Adolph Zukor, everybody's there.

Everybody but Jimmy Rogers.

You won't find Jimmy's name because he wasn't a star, not even a bit-player—just an extra.

"But I deserve it," he told me. "I'm entitled, if anybody is. Started out here in 1920 when I was just a punk kid. You look close, you'll spot me in the crowd shots in *The Mark of Zorro*. Been in over 450 pictures since, and still going strong. Ain't many left who can beat that record. You'd think it would entitle a fella to something."

Maybe it did, but there was no star for Jimmy Rogers, and that bit about still going strong was just a crock. Now-

adays Jimmy was lucky if he got a casting-call once or twice a year; there just isn't any spot for an old-timer with a white muff except in a western barroom scene.

Most of the time Jimmy just strolled the Boulevard; a tall, soldierly erect incongruity in the crowd of tourists, fags and freakouts. His home address was on Las Palmas, somewhere south of Sunset. I'd never been there but I could guess what it was—one of those old frame bungalow-court sweatboxes put up about the time he crashed the movies and still standing somehow by the grace of God and the disgrace of the housing authorities. That's the sort of place Jimmy stayed at, but he didn't really *live* there.

Jimmy Rogers lived at the Silent Movie.

The Silent Movie is over on Fairfax, and it's the only place in town where you can still go and see *The Mark of Zorro.* There's always a Chaplin comedy, and usually Laurel and Hardy, along with a serial starring Pearl White, Elmo Lincoln, or Houdini. And the features are great—early Griffith and DeMille, Barrymore in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* Lon Chaney in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* Valentino in *Blood and Sand,* and a hundred more.

The bill changes every Wednesday, and every Wednesday night Jimmy Rogers was there, plunking down his ninety cents at the box-office to watch *The Black Pirate* or *Son of the Sheik* or *Orphans of the Storm.*

To live again.

Because Jimmy didn't go there to see Doug and Mary or Rudy or Clara or Gloria or the Gish sisters. He went there to see himself, in the crowd shots.

At least that's the way I figured it, the first time I met him. They were playing *The Phantom of the Opera* that night, and afterwards I spent the intermission with a cigarette outside the theater, studying the display of stills.

If you asked me under oath, I couldn't tell you how our conversation started, but that's where I first heard Jimmy's routine about the 450 pictures and still going strong.

"Did you see me in there tonight?" he asked.

I stared at him and shook my head; even with the shabby hand-me-down suit and the white beard, Jimmy Rogers wasn't the kind you'd spot in an audience.

"Guess it was too dark for me to notice," I said.

"But there were torches," Jimmy told me. "I carried one."

Then I got the message. He was in the picture.

Jimmy smiled and shrugged. "Hell, I keept forgetting. You wouldn't recognize me. We did *The Phantom* way back in '25. I looked so young they slapped a mustache on me in Make-up, and a black wig. Hard to spot me in the catacombs scenes—all long shots. But there at the end, where Chaney is holding back the mob, I show up pretty good in the background, just left of Charley Zimmer. He's the one shaking his fist. I'm waving my torch. Had a lot of trouble with that picture, but we did this shot in one take."

In weeks to come I saw more of Jimmy Rogers. Sometimes he was up there on the screen, though truth to tell, I never did recognize him; he was a young man in those films of the Twenties, and his appearances were limited to a flickering flash, a blurred face glimpsed in a crowd.

But always Jimmy was in the audience, even when he hadn't played in the picture. And one night I found out why.

Again it was intermission time and we were standing outside. By now Jimmy had gotten into the habit of talking to me and tonight we'd been seated together during the showing of *The Covered Wagon.*

We stood outside and Jimmy blinked at me. "Wasn't she beautiful?" he asked. "They don't look like that any more."

I nodded. "Lois Wilson? Very attractive."

"I'm talking about June."

I stared at Jimmy and then I realized he wasn't blinking. He was crying.

"June Logan. My girl. This was her first bit, the Indian attack scene. Must have been seventeen—I didn't know her then; it was two years later we met over at First National. But you must have noticed her. She was the one with the long blonde curls."

"Oh, *that* one." I nodded again. "You're right. She was lovely."

And I was a liar, because I didn't remember seeing her at all, but I wanted to make the old man feel good.

"Junie's in a lot of the pictures they show here. And from '25 on, we played in a flock of 'em together. For a while we talked about getting hitched, but she started working her way up, doing bits—maids and such—and I never broke out of extra work. Both of us had been in the business long

enough to know it was no go, not when one of you stays small and the other is headed for a big career."

Jimmy managed a grin as he wiped his eyes with something which might once have been a handkerchief. "You think I'm kidding, don't you? About the career, I mean. But she was going great, she would have been playing second leads pretty soon."

"What happened?" I asked.

The grin dissolved and the blinking returned. "Sound killed her."

"She didn't have a voice for talkies?"

Jimmy shook his head. "She had a great voice. I told you she was all set for second leads—by 1930 she'd been in a dozen talkies. Then sound killed her."

I'd heard the expression a thousand times, but never like this. Because the way Jimmy told the story, that's exactly what had happened. June Logan, his girl Junie, was on the set during the shooting of one of those early *All Talking-All Singing-All Dancing* epics. The director and camera crew, seeking to break away from the tyranny of the stationary microphone, rigged up one of the first traveling mikes on a boom. Such items weren't standard equipment yet, and this was an experiment. Somehow, during a take, it broke loose and the boom crashed, crushing June Logan's skull.

It never made the papers, not even the trades; the studio hushed it up, and June Logan had a quiet funeral.

"Damn near forty years ago," Jimmy said. "And here I am, crying like it was yesterday. But she was my girl—"

And that was the other reason why Jimmy Rogers went to the Silent Movie. To visit his girl.

"Don't you see?" he told me. "She's still alive up there on the screen, in all those pictures. Just the way she was when we were together. Five years we had, the best years for me."

I could see that. The two of them in love, with each other and with the movies. Because in those days, people did love the movies. And to actually be *in* them, even in tiny roles, was the average person's idea of seventh heaven.

Seventh Heaven, that's another film we saw with June Logan playing in a crowd scene. In the following weeks, with Jimmy's help, I got so I could spot his girl. And he'd told the truth—she was a beauty. Once you noticed her,

really saw her, you wouldn't forget. Those blonde ringlets, that smile, identified her immediately.

One Wednesday night Jimmy and I were sitting together watching *The Birth of a Nation*. During a street shot, Jimmy nudged my shoulder. "Look, there's June."

I peered up at the screen, then shook my head. "I don't see her."

"Wait a second—there she is again. See, off to the left, behind Walthall's shoulder?"

There was a blurred image and then the camera followed Henry B. Walthall as he moved away.

I glanced at Jimmy. He was rising from his seat.

"Where are you going?"

He just marched outside.

When I followed I found him leaning against the wall under the marquee and breathing hard; his skin was the color of his whiskers.

"Junie," he murmured. "I saw her—"

I took a deep breath. "Listen to me. You told me her first picture was *The Covered Wagon*. That was made in 1923. And Griffith shot *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915."

Jimmy didn't say anything. There was nothing to say. We both knew what we were going to do—march back into the theater and see the second show.

When the scene screened again, we were watching and waiting. I looked at the screen, then glanced at Jimmy.

"She's gone," he whispered. "She's not in the picture."

"She never was," I told him. "You know that."

"Yeah." Jimmy got up and drifted out into the night, and I didn't see him again until the following week.

That's when they showed the short feature with Charles Ray—I've forgotten the title, but he played his usual country-boy role, and there was a baseball game in the climax with Ray coming through to win.

The camera panned across the crowd sitting in the bleachers, and I caught a momentary glimpse of a smiling girl with long blonde curls.

"Did you see her?" Jimmy grabbed my arm.

"That girl—"

"It was Junie. She winked at me!"

This time I was the one who got up and walked out. He

followed, and I was waiting in front of the theater, right next to the display poster.

"See for yourself." I nodded at the poster. "This picture was made in 1917." I forced a smile. "You forget, there were thousands of pretty blonde extras in pictures, and most of them wore curls."

He stood there shaking, not listening to me at all, and I put my hand on his shoulder. "Now look here—"

"I *been* looking here," Jimmy said. "Week after week, year after year. And you might as well know the truth. This ain't the first time it's happened. Junie keeps turning up in picture after picture I know she never made. Not just the early ones, before her time, but later, during the Twenties when I knew her, when I knew exactly what she was playing in. Sometimes it's only a quick flash, but I see her—then she's gone again. And the next running, she doesn't come back.

"It got so that for a while I was almost afraid to go see a show—figured I was cracking up. But now you've seen her too—"

I shook my head slowly. "Sorry, Jimmy. I never said that." I glanced at him, then gestured towards my car at the curb. "You look tired. Come on, I'll drive you home."

He looked worse than tired; he looked lost and lonely and infinitely old. But there was a stubborn glint in his eyes, and he stood his ground.

"No, thanks. I'm gonna stick around for the second show."

As I slid behind the wheel, I saw him turn and move into the theater, into the place where the present becomes the past and the past becomes the present. Up above in the booth they call it a projection-machine, but it's really a time-machine; it can take you back, play tricks with your imagination and your memory. A girl dead forty years comes alive again and an old man relives his vanished youth—

But I belonged in the real world, and that's where I stayed. I didn't go to the Silent Movie the next week or the week following.

And the next time I saw Jimmy was almost a month later, on the set.

They were shooting a western, one of my scripts, and the director wanted some additional dialogue to stretch a

sequence. So they called me in, and I drove all the way out to location, at the ranch.

Most of the studios have a ranch spread for western action sequences, and this was one of the oldest; it had been in use since the silent days. What fascinated me was the wooden fort where they were doing the crowd scene—I could swear I remembered it from one of the first Tim McCoy pictures. So after I huddled with the director and scribbled a few extra lines for the principals, I began nosing around behind the fort, just out of curiosity, while they set up for the new shots.

Out front was the usual organized confusion; cast and crew milling around the trailers, extras sprawled on the grass drinking coffee. But here in the back I was all alone, prowling around in musty, log-lined rooms built for use in forgotten features. Hoot Gibson had stood at this bar, and Jack Hoxie had swung from this dance-hall chandelier. Here was a dust-covered table where Fred Thomson sat, and around the corner, in the cutaway bunkhouse—

Around the corner, in the cutaway bunkhouse, Jimmy Rogers sat on the edge of a mildewed mattress and stared up at me startled as I moved forward.

"You—?"

Quickly I explained my presence. There was no need for him to explain his; casting had called and given him a day's work here in the crowd shots.

"They been stalling all day and it's hot out there. I figured maybe I could sneak back here and catch me a little nap in the shade."

"How'd you know where to go?" I asked. "Ever been here before?"

"Sure. Forty years ago in this very bunkhouse. Junie and I we used to come here during lunch break and—"

He stopped.

"What's wrong?"

Something *was* wrong. On the pan make-up face of it Jimmy Rogers was the perfect picture of the grizzled western old-timer; buckskin britches, fringed shirt white whiskers and all. But under the make-up was pallor, and the hands holding the envelope were trembling.

The envelope— .

He held it out to me. "Here. Mebbe you better read this."

The envelope was unsealed, unstamped, unaddressed. It contained four folded pages covered with fine handwriting. I removed them slowly. Jimmy stared at me.

"Found it lying here on the mattress when I came in," he murmured. "Just waiting for me."

"But what is it? Where'd it come from?"

"Read it and see."

As I started to unfold the pages, the whistle blew. We both knew the signal; the scene was set up, they were ready to roll, principals and extras were wanted out there before the cameras.

Jimmy Rogers stood up and moved off, a tired old man shuffling out into the hot sun. I waved at him, then sat down on the moldering mattress and opened the letter. The handwriting was faded, and there was a thin film of dust on the pages. But I could still read it, every word. . . .

Darling:

I've been trying to reach you so long and in so many ways. Of course I've seen you, but it's so dark out there, I can't always be sure, and then too you've changed a lot through the years.

But I *do* see you, quite often, even though it's only for a moment. And I hope you've seen me, because I always try to wink or make some kind of motion to attract your attention.

The only thing is, I can't do too much or show myself too long or it would make trouble. That's the big secret—keeping in the background, so the others won't notice me. It wouldn't do to frighten anybody, or even to get anyone wondering why there are more people in the background of a shot than there should be.

That's something for you to remember, darling, just in case. You're always safe, as long as you stay clear of close-ups. Costume pictures are the best—about all you have to do is wave your arms once in a while and shout "On to the Bastille" or something like that. It really doesn't matter except to lip readers, because it's silent, of course.

Oh, there's a lot to watch out for. Being a dress-extra has its points, but not in ballroom sequences—

too much dancing. That goes for parties, too, particularly in a DeMille production where they're "making whoopee" or one of von Stroheim's orgies. Besides, von Stroheim's scenes are always cut.

It doesn't hurt to be cut, don't misunderstand about that. It's no different than an ordinary fadeout at the end of a scene, and then you're free to go into another picture. Anything that was ever made, as long as there's still a print available for running somewhere. It's like falling asleep and then having one dream after another. The dreams are the scenes, of course, but while the scenes are playing, they're real.

I'm not the only one, either. There's no telling how many others do the same thing; maybe hundreds for all I know, but I've recognized a few I'm sure of, and I think some of them have recognized me. We never let on to each other that we know, because it wouldn't do to make anybody suspicious.

Sometimes I think that if we could talk it over, we might come up with a better understanding of just how it happens, and why. But the point is, you *can't* talk, everything is silent; all you do is move your lips, and if you tried to communicate such a difficult thing in pantomine, you'd surely attract attention.

I guess the closest I can come to explaining it is to say it's like reincarnation—you can play a thousand roles, take or reject any part you want, as long as you don't make yourself conspicuous or do something that would change the plot.

Naturally, you get used to certain things. The silence, of course. And if you're in a bad print, there's flickering; sometimes even the air seems grainy, and for a few frames you may be faded or out of focus.

Which reminds me—another thing to stay away from, the slapstick comedies. Sennett's early stuff is the worst, but Larry Semon and some of the others are just as bad; all that speeded-up camera action makes you dizzy.

Once you can learn to adjust, it's all right, even when you're looking off the screen into the audience. At first the darkness is a little frightening—you have to remind yourself it's only a theater and there are

just people out there, ordinary people watching a show. They don't know you can see them. They don't know that as long as your scene runs, you're just as real as they are, only in a different way. You walk, run, smile, frown, drink, eat—

That's another thing to remember, about the eating. Stay out of those Poverty Row quickies where everything is cheap and faked. Go where there's real set-dressing, big productions with banquet scenes and real food. If you work fast, you can grab enough in a few minutes, while you're off-camera, to last you.

The big rule is, always be careful. Don't get caught. There's so little time, and you seldom get an opportunity to do anything on your own, even in a long sequence. It's taken me forever to get this chance to write you—I've planned it for so long, my darling, but it just wasn't possible until now.

This scene is playing outside the fort, but there's quite a large crowd of settlers and wagon-train people, and I had a chance to slip away inside here to the rooms in back—they're on camera in the background all during the action. I found this stationery and a pen, and I'm scribbling just as fast as I can. Hope you can read it. That is, if you ever get the chance!

Naturally, I can't mail it—but I have a funny hunch. You see, I noticed that standing set back here, the bunkhouse, where you and I used to come in the old days. I'm going to leave this letter under the mattress, and pray.

Yes, darling, I pray. Someone or something *knows* about us, and about how we feel. How we felt about being in the movies. That's why I'm here, I'm sure of that; because I've always loved pictures so. Someone who knows *that* must also know how I loved you. And still do.

I think there must be many heavens and many hells, each of us making his own, and

The letter broke off there.

No signature, but of course I didn't need one. And it wouldn't have proved anything. A lonely old man, nursing

his love for forty years, keeping her alive inside himself somewhere until she broke out in the form of a visual hallucination up there on the screen—such a man could conceivably go all the way into a schizoid split, even to the point where he could imitate a woman's handwriting as he set down the rationalization of his obsession.

I started to fold the letter, then dropped it on the mattress as the shrill scream of an ambulance siren startled me into sudden movement.

Even as I ran out the doorway, I seemed to know what I'd find: the crowd huddling around the figure sprawled in the dust under the hot sun. Old men tire easily in such heat, and once the heart goes—

Jimmy Rogers looked very much as though he were smiling in his sleep as they lifted him into the ambulance. And I was glad of that; at least he'd died with his illusions intact.

"Just keeled over durng the scene—one minute he was standing there, and the next—"

They were still chattering and gabbling when I walked away, walked back behind the fort and into the bunkhouse.

The letter was gone.

I'd dropped it on the mattress, and it was gone. That's all I can say about it. Maybe somebody else happened by while I was out front, watching them take Jimmy away. Maybe a gust of wind carried it through the doorway, blew it across the desert in a hot Santa Ana gust. Maybe there *was* no letter. You can take your choice—all I can do is state the facts.

And there aren't very many more facts to state.

I didn't go to Jimmy Rogers' funeral, if indeed he had one. I don't even know where he was buried; probably the Motion Picture Fund took care of him. Whatever *those* facts may be, they aren't important.

For a few days I wasn't too interested in facts. I was trying to answer a few abstract questions about metaphysics—reincarnation, heaven and hell, the difference between real life and reel life. I kept thinking about those images you see up there on the screen in those old movies; images of actual people indulging in make-believe. But even after they die, the make-believe goes on, and that's a form of reality too. I mean, where's the borderline? And if there *is* a border-

line—is it possible to cross over? *Life's but a walking shadow—*

Shakespeare said that, but I wasn't sure what he meant.

I'm still not sure, but there's just one more fact I must state.

The other night, for the first time since Jimmy Rogers died, I went back to the Silent Movie.

They were playing *Intolerance*, one of Griffith's greatest. Way back in 1916 he built the biggest set ever shown on the screen—the huge temple in the Babylonian sequence.

One shot never fails to impress me, and it did so now; a wide angle on the towering temple, with thousands of people moving ant-like amidst the gigantic carvings and colossal statues. In the distance, beyond the steps guarded by rows of stone elephants, looms a mighty wall, its top covered with tiny figures. You really have to look closely to make them out. But I did look closely, and this time I can swear to what I saw.

One of the extras, way up there on the wall in the background, was a smiling girl with long blonde curls. And standing right beside her, one arm around her shoulder, was a tall old man with white whiskers. I wouldn't have noticed either of them, exept for one thing.

They were waving at me. . . .

"ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECOMMENDED... ONE OF THE BEST COLLECTIONS I HAVE SEEN IN A LONG TIME."

—Judith Merril, **Fantasy & Science Fiction**

"A WELL-MIXED BAG OF FIFTEEN FRESH AND ENTERTAINING STORIES."

—**Publishers' Weekly**

In response to strong praise for the first volume of NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY, Ace Books now presents a completely new selection of the finest stories of modern imagination. Each of these stories appears here for the first time in any mass-market paperback publica[tion] a special bonus, there are five compl[ete] new stories never before p[ublished] where, by JOANNA RUSS, [THOMAS] DISCH, KATHERINE MAC[LEAN], [AVRAM] DAVIDSON and WILMAR H[OLMES]

Here is a magician's box[ful] don't miss it!