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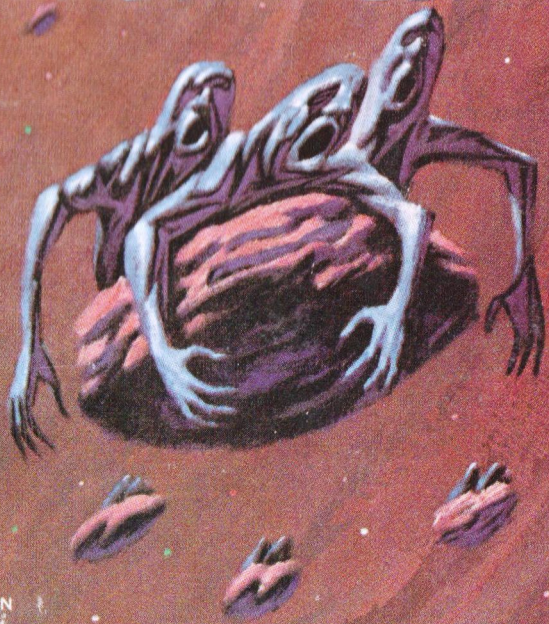

"One of the most perceptive of science-fiction writers."
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"A BRILLIANT CRAFTSMAN!"

—Alfred Bester, *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*

The room was quiet; the man in front of the mirror was the only living thing there, and he was too horrified to utter a sound.

In the mirror, five faces stared back at him: one young and ruddy, which was his own, and four that did not belong in that place at all, for they were wrinkled, malevolent, small as crabapples and as blue as smoke.

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Contents

WHAT ROUGH BEAST

MR. FRANK said to me, "Hey, you. Get that corner cleaned up." He was a big man with red face, mouth always open little bit, wet lips always pulling back suddenly over little yellow teeth. This I remember, late at night, just after rush from theaters and before bars close. Place was empty, all sick light on the tiles and brown tabletops. Outside, dark and wet. People going by with coat collars turned up and faces gray like rain.

On corner table was some dishes, some food spilled. I cleaned up, put dishes in kitchen sink on top of big stack, then came back to Mr. Frank. He was cutting tomato for sandwiches, using his knife too quick and hard. Tip of his big pink thumb was white from holding knife.

I said to him, "Mr. Frank, I work here three weeks and you call me 'Hey, you.' My name is Kronski. If it is too hard to remember, say Mike. But not 'Hey, you.' "

He looked down on me, with lips twitching away from yellow teeth. Sides of his nose turned yellow-white, like I saw before when he was mad. And his knife went cut. He sucked air between teeth, and grabbed his hand. I saw the blood coming out dark as ink where he sliced the side of his thumb. Blood was dripping on board and pieces of tomato. It was deep cut, bleeding hard. He said through teeth, "Now look what you made me do. Christ!"

From other end of counter, Mr. Harry called out, "What's the matter?" He started toward us—a thin man, bald, with big eyes blinking all time like afraid.

Was my fault. I went quickly to Mr. Frank, but he pushed me away with his elbow. "Get off of me, you creep!"

Now Mr. Harry looked at Mr. Frank's thumb and he whistled, then turned and went to the medicine box on wall. Mr. Frank was holding his wrist and cursing. From the cashier's desk at front of cafeteria, Mr. Wilson the night manager was coming; I heard his footsteps click on the tiles.

Mr. Harry was trying to put a bandage on, but it would not stick. Mr. Frank pushed him out of the way, shouting, "God damn it!" and pulled the medicine box off wall. Always bleeding.

I got quickly a fork and handkerchief, not clean, but best I could do. I tied a knot in the handkerchief, and tried to put it around Mr. Frank's wrist, but he pushed me away again.

"Give me that," says Mr. Harry, and he took from me the fork and handkerchief. Now Mr. Frank was leaning back against coffee machine looking white, and Mr. Harry slipped the handkerchief over his wrist. In coffee machine I saw myself, like shadow standing—no face, just blackness—and I looked other way.

Always was blood, over counter, duckboards, steam tables, everything. Mr. Harry tried to tighten the fork, but he

dropped it and I picked up. He took it saying, "Get out of the way, will you?" and started to turn the handkerchief.

"Better call a hospital," says Mr. Wilson's voice behind me. Then, "Look out!"

Mr. Frank had his eyes turned up and mouth open. His knees started to bend and then he was falling, and Mr. Harry tried to catch, but too late, and he also went down.

Mr. Wilson was going around end of counter, so I went the other way to telephone.

Was in my pocket, no dimes. I thought to go back and ask, but it would take minute. I thought maybe Mr. Frank would die because I was not quick. So I put fingers in the metal hole where coin is supposed to come back, and was no coin there; but I felt deeper, down where turning place was, and I found it and I turned. Then, was a dime lying in coin hole. So I took it and put in top of telephone. I called ambulance for Mr. Frank.

Then I went back to where he was lying, and they were by his side squatting, and Mr. Wilson looked up and said, "Did you call that hospital?" I say yes, but without stopping he said, "Well, get out of my way then. Harry, you take the feet and we'll straighten him out a little."

I could see Mr. Frank's red shirt front, and hand wrapped now in gauze, also red, with tourniquet around his wrist. He was lying without moving. To lose blood is for some not easy.

I went to stand at end of the counter, out of way. I was feeling very bad for Mr. Frank. I saw he was mad, and I knew he was cutting with knife, as it was my fault.

After long while came a policeman, and he looked on Mr. Frank, and I told how it happened. Mr. Harry and Mr. Wilson also told, but they did not see from beginning. Then came ambulance, and I ask Mr. Wilson if I can go with Mr. Frank to hospital. So he said, "Go on, I don't care. We won't need you here after tonight anyhow, Kronski." He looked on me from bright glasses. He was gray haired man, very neat, who always spoke cheerful but thought suspicious. I liked Mr. Harry, and even Mr. Frank, but him I could never like.

So I was fired. Not new feeling for me. But I thought how

in a year, two years, or even sooner, those men would forget I was ever alive.

I was working in place three nights, night shift, cleaning up tables and stacking dishes in sink for dishwasher. It is not enough to make a place different because you are there. But if you make no difference, you are not living.

At the hospital, they wheeled Mr. Frank up indoors and took him in elevator. Hospital woman asked me questions and wrote down on a big paper, then policeman came again, and was more questions.

"Your name is Michael Kronski, right? Been in this country long?"

"Since twenty years." But I told a lie, was only one month. Policeman said, "You didn't learn English very good, did you?"

"For some is not easy."

"You a citizen?"

"Sure."

"When naturalized?"

I said, "Nineteen forty-five." But was a lie.

He asked more questions, was I in army, how long belong to union, where I worked before, and always I would lie. Then he closed book.

"All right, you stick around till he comes to. Then if he says there was no assault, you can go on home."

In hospital was quiet like grave. I sat on hard bench. Sometimes doors opened, doctors shoes squeaked on floor. Then telephone went *brr* very quiet, hospital woman picked up and talked so I could not hear. She was blonde, I think from bottle, with hard lines in cheeks.

She put down telephone, talked to policeman for minute, then he came over to me. "Okay, they fixed him up. He says he did it himself. You a friend of his?"

"We work together. *Did* work. Is something I can do?"

"They're going to let him go, they need the bed. But somebody ought to go home with him. I got to get back on patrol."

"I will take him to his home, yes."

"Okay." He sat down on bench, looked on me. "Say, what kind of an accent is that, anyhow? You chesky?"

"No." I would say yes, but this man had the face of a Slav. I was afraid he should be Polish. Instead, I told different lie. "Russian. From Omsk."

"No," he said slow, looking on me hard, and then spoke some words in Russian. I did not understand, it was too different from Russiche, so I said nothing.

"*Nyet?*" asked policeman, looking on me with clear gray eyes. He was young man, big bones in cheeks and jaw, and lines of smiling around mouth.

Just then came down the elevator with Mr. Frank and nurse. He had a big white bandage on hand. He looked on me and turned away.

Policeman was writing in his book. He looked on me again. He said something more in Russian. I did not know the words, but one of them was like word for "pig" in Russiche. But I said nothing, looked nothing.

Policeman scratched his head. "You say you're from Russia, but you don't get the language. How come?"

I said, "Please, when we leave Russia, I was young boy. In house was speaking only Yiddish."

"Yeah? *Ir zent ah Yidishe' yingl?*"

"*Vi den?*"

Now was better, but still he did not look happy. "And you only spoke Yiddish in the home?"

"Sometimes French. My mother spoke French, also my aunt."

"Well—that might account for it, I guess." He closed book and put away. "Look, you got your naturalization papers on you?"

"No, is home in box."

"Well, hell, you ought to carry them on you. Times like these. You remember what I said. All right, take it easy now."

I looked up, and was no Mr. Frank. I went quickly to desk. "Where did he go?"

Woman said very cold, "I don't know what you mean." Each word separate, like to child.

"Mr. Frank, was just here."

She said, "Down the hall, the payment office." And pointed with yellow pencil over her shoulder.

I went, but in hall I stopped to look back. Policeman was leaning over desk to talk with woman, and I saw his book in pocket. I knew there would be more questions, maybe tomorrow, maybe next week. I took long breath, and closed eyes. I reached down where turning place of book was. I found it, and turned. I felt it happen.

Policeman never noticed; but next time he would look in book, would be no writing about me in it. Maybe would be empty pages, maybe something else written.

He would remember, but without writing is no good.

Mr. Frank was by window in hall, pale in face, arguing with man in office. I came up, I heard him say, "Twenty-three bucks, ridiculous."

"It's all itemized, sir." Man inside pointed to piece of paper in Mr. Frank's hand.

"Anyway, I haven't got that much."

I say quickly, "I will pay." I took out money, almost all I have in purse.

"I don't want your money," said Mr. Frank. "Where would you get twenty-three bucks? Let the workmen's pay for it."

"Please, for me is pleasure. Here, you take." I pushed money at man behind window.

"Twenty-three seventeen." I gave him the change.

"All right, give him the God damn money," said Mr. Frank, and turned away.

Man behind the window stamped bill and gave me. I quickly caught up Mr. Frank and we went outdoors. Mr. Frank could not walk straight. I took his elbow. First he pushed me away, but then he let me.

"That's it," said Mr. Frank. Was street of old thin houses with stone steps coming down like they stick out all their tongues. I paid the taxi driver, and helped Mr. Frank up steps. "What floor you live?"

"Fourth. I can make it."

But I said, "No, I help you," and we went up stairs. Mr. Frank was very weak, very tired, and now his lips did not pull back over teeth any more.

We went in kitchen and Mr. Frank sat down by table under the sour yellow light. He leaned his head on hand. "I'm all right. Just let me alone now, okay?"

"Mr. Frank, you are tired. Eat something now, then sleep."

He did not move. "What sleep? In three hours I got to be on my day job."

I looked on him. Now I understand why was cutting so hard with knife, why was so quick anger.

"How long you worked two jobs?" I say.

He leaned back in chair and put his hand with white bandage on the table. "Year and a half."

"Is no good. You should quit one job."

"You don't know a thing about it."

I wanted to ask something more, but then opened a door, and I saw someone in bathrobe standing. A voice said, "Pop?" Was young girl's voice.

Mr. Frank answered her, and I said quick, "Well, I will go then. Goodbye." And while the girl was coming into kitchen one way, I was going out other. I saw only face, pale, and brown hair, and I thought she was tall.

Downstairs I found mailbox with Mr. Frank's name, and apartment number, and over door was number of house. I wrote on piece of paper, thinking when I go home I would make some money and send him by mail. From me he would not take, but if he finds in mailbox, is like from God, he must take it and give thanks.

On street, dawn was coming up, gray and cold. In gutter was papers blowing.

Since I was small boy in Novo Russie—what they call here Canada, but it is all different—always I could see where every thing in world, even every stone and stick, had shadow in past and in future. To me is hard thing to understand that other people only see what is *now*.

Sometimes I would say to my brother Misha when he

would hurt himself, "But didn't you *see* that it would happen?" And because I was stubborn, sometimes I would even say this when I saw that he would hit me because I said it.

But then I learned also to reach, not with hands but with mind. And in darkness where something could be or not be, I learned to turn it so that it is different. At first I did it without knowing, when I was very sick, and frightened that I would die. Without knowing it I reached, and turned, and suddenly I was not sick. Doctor was not believing, and my mother prayed a long time before icon, because she thought God had saved my life.

Then I learned I could do it. When I did badly in school, or if something else I did not like would happen, I could reach and turn, and change it. Little by little, I was changing pieces of world.

At first was not so bad, because I was young boy and I only did things for myself, my own pleasure.

But then I was growing up, and it was making me sad to see how other people were unhappy. So then I would begin to change more. My father had a bad knee, I made it well. Our cow broke her neck and died. And I made her alive again.

First I was careful, then not so careful. And at last they saw that I did it.

Then everyone said I was going to be a saint, they prayed over me, and big men talked to me so much that I believed it.

And I worked miracles.

Then one day I began to see that what I do is bad. I made so many patches in world that it was not world any more, but mistake. If you would try to make chair better by many patches, putting a piece oak wood here, and piece cherry wood there, until all was patches, you would make a worse chair than before.

So I saw every day that I was only making more patches, but I would not let myself know that it was bad. And at last I could not bear it, and I reached back far, I changed not little bit but whole country. I reached back before I was born, and I turned, and I changed it.

And when I looked up, all world around me was different —houses, fields, people.

My father's house was not there. My mother, my brothers, my sisters, they were all gone; and I could not bring them back.

Then for first time, I knew what I was.

Next day after Mr. Frank's accident, I found a new room. It was time for me to move anyway; in old room was becoming everything black so I could not see it. My new room was on second floor, not bad—maple furniture, oilcloth on table, washbowl, like usual. I moved in, and then I remembered about Mr. Frank, and I took a dollar bill, my last one, and reached back and turned where man could have given me five dollar bill by mistake. Always it is possible this should happen, even if only once in hundred times. So I turned where it did happen, and in my hand was five dollar bill. Then I turned again where instead of five it is ten; and then instead of ten, ten one dollar bills. And so I went on turning until I had three hundred dollars in ten dollar bills. And in drug store I bought envelope and stamps, and wrote Mr. Frank's address on envelope, "Mr. Frank Verney, Apartment 4B." When I put bills inside envelope, they are already becoming dark so I cannot read the numbers. This money is no good for me, I will always make mistakes if I try to spend it; but for Mr. Frank it would be all right.

Next day I was angry with myself, and I lay on bed doing nothing. I told myself it would be no good to get different job, which I knew; but I did not tell myself without job I would be like dead man, which I also knew.

Next day, I went on Greenwich Avenue walking. Sky was deep blue over the building roofs. The sun was shining warm, and all buildings looked surprised and sad, as if they would say, "I am dirty, but is best I can do."

Here, in this same place, I have seen droshkies. Also steam cars, quiet, with white puffing like man smoking a pipe very quick. I have seen people all dressed in black, and people in many colors like parrots. I know how wide is the

world God made. Is so big, so deep, that heart turn small to feel it. But I would say to God, "Why did you not make a world smaller? More like man?"

I went home, and in hall the door of Mr. Brennan was standing open, the one they called landlord, but he was only janitor, and Mr. Brennan was in doorway looking. He was a man with frozen face, mouth tight like he taste lemon, and eyes always big. I said, "Hello, Mr. Brennan," but he said nothing, only looked while I went up the stairs. Behind him I saw his wife, small brown-haired woman with too much rouge.

I went in the room, and inside was policeman.

My heart was hurting chest, and I was so weak that I must lean against door. Policeman was same one that was at hospital before. He was sitting in my good chair, with hands on knees. The light was not good, but I saw his gray eyes burning.

"Shut that door."

I did it.

"Come over here."

I went.

"Okay, take everything out of your pockets and throw it on the bed."

I took out wallet, money, handkerchief and so on. My hands were shaking.

"Sit down."

I sat on wooden chair while he picked up the wallet and looked inside. Always was heart pounding, and hard to breathe.

Policeman said, "I've been looking for you for three days. My wife thinks I'm nuts. I must have tried every rooming house in Chelsea before I hit this one." He looked on me, with nostrils big.

"Nothing like this ever happened to me before," he said. "When I went to make my report out, it was all gone. Pretty soon I began to wonder if I dreamed the whole thing."

He looked at cards from my wallet, then opened his book

hard on knee, and wrote. Then he threw the wallet back on bed, and said, "All right, now what's your real name?"

"I told you before, Michael Kronski."

"You told me plenty. Where are you from?"

"Odessa, Russia."

"Didn't you tell me Omsk before?"

"No, Odessa." He was right, I said Omsk, but I was too frightened to make up new lie.

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody. Maybe God."

He leaned and slapped me across mouth with his hand. "Don't give me that sacrilegious crap."

I jumped, and my chest got tight, harder to breathe. Inside was something like balloon wanting to burst.

I said, "Please, you make mistake."

"How did you do that trick to me?"

"If you would let me explain—"

"Well?" He waited, then slapped my face again. My body was trying to go through back of chair.

"Let's have it. By God, I'll get it out of you. Where are you from? What are you here for?" He slapped me again.

I said, "Don't," but already was inside me like a bursting. I felt big weight roll over inside, then nothing.

Yellow light was shining on empty chair.

Was no policeman. No one in room but me.

I was weak all over like a baby. With the hitting I could not think, could not stop it. Now I have reached back, maybe thirty years, I have made policeman not born.

Once more, I have killed a man.

I was crying. I thought, if only he would not have hit me in face. But it was me that made him so frightened that he must hit. It was me, my fault, always my fault.

To reach back again for same turning place is foolish, because I know I cannot do it, but I tried. Was like reaching where is nothing, like empty shelf in old dusty closet.

I sat in chair, looking at walls. Then I could not bear it. I went down stairs, past Mr. Brennan and wife still in doorway watching. My knees were weak. I went like a drunk man.

I knew they would go up to my room and find no policeman, and would think I do not know what, but I had no time to worry. I went out in the street, looking for something.

My jaw was shaking, like cold, teeth going click. My hands, arms were shivering, and knees weak. But I must hurry. I crossed big avenue, running; then I was in quiet street with many old stone houses. In the street was playing two little girls with a ball.

While I stood looking, around corner came a car, too fast, tipping on wheels. I heard tires shout, and car was coming so quick that I could do nothing but stand and watch.

In street, little girls began to run. One had dark pigtails tied with pieces white ribbon, and her dress was blue and white. The other had blonde curly hair, and she was wearing pink dress. I saw their legs flashing, and I saw the ball rolling very slowly across street.

Then the car hit sideways into another car parked by sidewalk, and it made a sound like hammer hitting tin cans. The car bounced away, still coming, and I saw driver, young man with blonde hair, bouncing in seat. Car was red, with no top. He was turning the wheel as hard as he could, but the car went by little girl with pigtails and just touched her going by, and she was down in street, not moving.

Then car hit fire plug on other side of street, and stopped. All up and down street was sound of hit metal. In the car, young man was leaning over wheel. Then I saw him straighten up, I look around. In doorways and windows now was people.

Now I was beginning to run. Now came a woman out of basement, and she was screaming, "Jeannie!" But now the red car backed up away from fire plug, and the young man was twisting wheel quick, and now was grinding sound, and then red car jumped down street again, past me so close I felt the wind, and saw young man's red eyes. Then he was gone around the corner.

In middle of street was people gathering. Woman still screaming at top of voice, more people running from doorways. I did not see the girl any more.

I could not run. I was sick inside. I bent over with hands

on belly; inside my head was still shouting the tires, and red car still coming sidewise down street, to hit car, bang, hit girl, hit fire plug, bang.

Inside was reaching, turning. I felt the whole street, sky, turning all together. Then I was lying on cold pavement with ringing sound in my head.

When I looked up, I saw face hanging in the sky, men and women all looking down on me. Closer was two little girls. One blonde, pink dress, one dark pigtails, blue and white dress.

Woman's voice said, "Jeannie, go on now. Get in the house." Girl with dark pigtails turned slowly and went away, looking back over her shoulder to me. It was the same girl that I saw lying in street; but now she was not hurt, not dirty, not even frightened, only curious.

Then I began to understand. Without knowing it I had reached and turned where car would not hit girl, but would hit me instead. And now there was blood on pavement—but it was mine.

I closed my eyes, then opened them again. To lie on pavement was good, was like growing to earth. Overhead was sky very big, and here was peace. All day long would be people walking on this street, but how many would lie down?

If I was hurt, I did not feel it, only numb place on side of head. I pushed myself up on one elbow and with other hand tried to feel my head if it was broken. Then was hands helping me to sit up, even though I did not know I wanted to do it. I heard someone say "hospital."

I said, "No. No hospital." On side of head was only a cut, not big. To show them I was all right, I stood up. But could not stand straight, and with many hands they helped me.

"Where do you want to go? Where do you live?"

For minute, I could not remember. So often I move, I forget easily the old addresses and sometimes the new ones too. Always I tell myself to write down new address, and I never do it, but I felt in my pockets anyway. I found little piece of paper, squeezed together.

My fingers would not hold it, and so a man took it away

from me, and opened it up, and read an address. It was man with new white cap on, like for golfing. He had face brown like coffee, and gold tooth. What he read did not sound right, but I saw paper, and it was my writing.

"Mister, don't you want to come inside and have a cup of coffee first?"

I said, "No, please—just want to go home."

Young man with many pimples said, "It's just up the block."

So they took me one on each side, with my arms around their necks, and we started. I thought we were going wrong way, but maybe it was short cut. Then we start to go up high stone stairway into building, and I stop and say, "No. Wrong house."

Man looked at paper again and said, "Two twelve east? This is it. Apartment 4B. See, it says right here." He showed me the paper, but I could not read what it said, only that the handwriting was mine.

Also we did not walk long enough to get back to my house; but I knew that I had seen this house before. And I could not understand it; except that I think in back of my mind, I did understand.

Man with white cap said, "Well, it must be somebody that knows him, anyway. Let's take him up." So we went up the stairs.

Then we knocked on a door, and I saw face of young woman, surprised, looking through crack. Then they were talking, and after minute door opened all the way, and they helped me in through kitchen, and narrow hall, then brown living room and they put me in a chair. Now my head was hurting. But I saw young woman, brown hair, tall, in blue dress. Then they were lifting me, putting me down on soft bed. Then I remember smell of perfume, and soft hands lifting head, giving me pills to take and glass of water. Then perhaps I sleep, because when I looked up, was no one in room.

Outside window by bed was iron fire escape, and then deep courtyard, gray stone, with clotheslines across and white clothes hanging. Clotheslines curved down, beautiful. Light came from somewhere, not bright, and clothes swung a little

bit from wind. Was quiet, peaceful. Was best time of day in city, when people are working, not so crowded in buildings. Light was quiet and gray; bed where I was lying smelled good from laundry.

While I was looking, I heard small noise from next room, and turned my head. Young woman came in, tall, with hands together. She had brown hair soft and shiny, not curled straw like so many; face very clean and young, but also very big. She had a wide mouth, and I wanted to see her smile, because if teeth were good, she would be beautiful.

She said, "Mr. Kronski? Is that right?"

I nodded yes, still looking at her. Now I saw little bit in her past, not clear, but what I saw I did not like.

"I thought you must be." She smiled a little, just enough to show teeth white. "I wasn't sure, but you had our address in your pocket."

"Yes." Now I knew: she was Mr. Frank's daughter.

Then I must have made a face, because she said, "Are you all right? Does your head hurt?"

I said no, head was all right. With my fingers now I could feel where she had put a gauze bandage around my head, but even without feeling I could tell that underneath was nothing wrong: no cut, nothing. In sleep I had made myself well. Always, all my life it was so. On my whole body is no mark, no scar, not even pimple.

Now I was trying not to look on her, because I could see also a little bit the future, and I was afraid. But she sat down and said, "Mr. Kronski, if you're sure you're feeling all right —"

I said rough, "You want to know if I sent money to your father."

She said, "Well—the writing on the envelope looked the same. Did you?"

"Yes. I will tell you. I sent it."

"That was pretty nice of you. You know?"

"No, foolish. Now you are going to tell me you need more money, much more than I sent."

Her eyes opened big. "How did you know that?"

"Never mind, I know."

She was pale, but now pink. She got up and said, "You seem to think people are all alike."

"No, every one different, but all foolish like me. I ran away from you so hard, I got myself knocked down on your street, with your address in pocket."

She looked on me and said, "I don't think I get that. What do you mean, about running away from me?"

I said, "I did not want to help you. But now is no more use running." Was hard to talk, because throat was swollen up. I held out my hand and said, "Please. Let me see your shoulder."

She went stiff all over, and one hand jumped to the shoulder of her blue dress. She looked on me with big eyes, bright and mad. "Did my father—?"

"No," I said, shaking my head hard, "he didn't tell me nothing, but I know. Don't you see that I know? Now let me see it."

She was again pink, and trying not to weep from shame. She sat down, still holding her shoulder, and did not look on me.

I said, "If you want I will help you. Do you understand? Now let me see."

She did not understand, but she looked on me. Eyes pink and wet, face swollen, not pretty. Was hard to look on her so, but I did it. After a minute she took a hard breath and turned away from me, and began to unbutton her dress in back.

I had my hands in fists, and I looked on them. After minute I heard her turn and say, "All right."

I looked, and she had pulled away the blue dress from one shoulder. By her neck, was skin smooth and like cream. But on the shoulder and across the chest was skin hard and white, standing up in strings and lumps, like something that had melted and boiled, and then hardened.

She had her head down, and eyes shut, crying. I was crying also, and inside was a big hurt trying to get out. I touched her with my hand, and said, "My dear."

She jumped when hand touched her, but then sat still. I felt under my fingertips cold skin, tough like lizard. Inside me was big hurt jumping, I could not hold in very long. I rubbed her very easy, very slow with my fingers, looking and feeling where was inside the wrong skin. Was not easy to do. But if I did not do it this way, then I knew I would do it without wanting, all at once, and it would be worse.

To make well all at once is no good. Each cell must fit with next cell. With my fingertips I felt where down inside the bottom part of bad skin was, and I made it turn, and change to good skin, one little bit at a time.

She held still and let me do it. After a while she said, "It was a fire, two years ago. Dad left a blowtorch lit, and I moved it, and there was a can of plastic stuff with the top off. And it went up—"

I said, "Not to talk. Not necessary. Wait. Wait." And always I rubbed softly the bad skin.

But she could not bear to have me rub without talking, and she said, "We couldn't collect anything. It said right on the can, keep away from flame. It was our fault. I was in the hospital twice. They healed it, but it just grew back the same way. It's what they call keloid tissue."

I said, "Yes, yes, dear one, I know."

Now was one layer on the bottom, soft skin instead of hard; and she moved a little in the chair, and said in a small voice, "It feels better."

Under my fingertips the skin was still hard, but now more soft than before. When I pushed it, was not like lizard any more, but like glove.

I worked, and she forgot to be ashamed until it came a noise of door opening at front of apartment. She sat up straight, looking around and then on me. Her face got pink again, she grabbed my wrist. "What are you doing?" Her voice was thin and not real.

In a minute I knew she would jump up and pull her dress together, and then she would run out of room, so whatever happened, it would not be her fault.

But I could not let her do it. I was also ashamed, and my

ears like on fire, but to stop now was impossible. I said loud, "No, sit down." I held her in the chair, and kept my fingers on her skin. I did not look up, but I heard a man's feet come into room.

I heard Mr. Frank say, "Hey, you. What do you think you're up to?"

And the girl was trying to get up again, but I held her still, and I said, "Look. Look." With tears running down my cheeks.

Under my fingers was a little piece of good, soft skin, smooth like cream. While I moved my fingers, slowly that place got bigger. She looked down, and she forgot to breathe.

Over her shoulder, I saw Mr. Frank come nearer, with face mad and wondering. He said once more, "Hey," with lips pulling back hard over teeth, and then he looked on the shoulder of his daughter. He blinked his eyes like not believing, and then looked again. He put his hand on it, quick, hard, and then took away like burned.

Now was changing more fast the rest of skin. Was like rubbing from a window the frost. Still they were not moving, the daughter and Mr. Frank, and then he went down on his knees beside the chair with arm around her and arm around me holding so hard that it hurt, and we were all three tight together, all three hot wet faces.

In living room was radio, so loud you could not think, and people laughing. I was sitting by table in kitchen when Mr. Frank came out with glass in his hand, and fell against table, and sat down hard. His face was red like from steam bath. He looked on me and said, "Well, there you are. I thought you got lost in the john or something. Well, why don't you join the party, for Christ sake? Get in there and have a little fun."

I said, "I'm feeling tired. Would like to just sit quietly for while."

He blinked and said, "Sure. You do whatever you want. You're the greatest, Mike, you know that? You just sit there and take it easy, old buddy." He looked in his drink, and shook ice cubes, and then drank what was in bottom and put

it down. "You know," he said, "two years I had that hanging over me. Two years, would you believe it?" He shook his head. "I use to belong to a bowling club. Had to give that up. Use to go out bowling every Tuesday night. Sold all my fishing stuff, too—never got much for it. Had to take the telephone out. You know we were living on franks and beans? Over two hundred bucks a week coming in, and living on franks and beans. Every cent went to the doctors. For two years. I don't take no credit, what the hell, I done the damage. And I paid for it too." He reached for bottle on cabinet, and poured more whisky in glass. He drank some and put it down.

"You know she was engaged to a fellow. I never liked him. His name was Ernest. Ernest Nixon, he worked for a bank. But, she thought she loved him and all that. Then come her accident, and we never saw him again. I broke that up, all right. And don't you think she ever let me forget it." He held up glass. "You want some of this?"

I said, "No, thank you. It makes me sick in stomach."

"Too bad." He drank again. "Funny you can't fix a thing like that. I mean, after what you done for Anne."

I said, "I could fix it, but to me is not worth the trouble."

"Oh, yeah?" He nodded without interest, and then looked up. "Mean you can fix other stuff? Like if anybody got sick?"

"Some things I can fix. But not germ disease, because is too many little germs. But sometimes cancers I can fix, and things where body is not working right."

He put down his glass. "Cancer? You kidding? Yeah, you're kidding, you can't fix no cancer." He drank again.

"No, not kidding."

"Cut it out, will you? If you could do that, you'd be a millionaire, not a bus boy."

Just then door from outside opened and two girls came in giggling, Anne and her girl friend Loraine. Anne said, "Poppa, look?" They were both wearing pretty dresses, and Anne held open little jacket to show how low was neck of dress. Where bad skin was on her chest, was now only brown place you could hardly see—tanned from sun, because if not for her

accident, she would have been at beach many times in bathing suit. And even this she had powdered now so it did not show. "A strapless!" she said. "Oh, you just don't know what it *means!*" In her eyes was tears. She kissed him, and then leaned over and kissed me also on forehead. Her lips were warm and greasy with lipstick, which I did not like. Then she and other one were rustling down hall toward where radio was going.

Mr. Frank stood up, holding onto chair. He said, "Excuse me a minute. Be right back." He went down the hall.

I sat and listened to radio too loud with music I did not understand. After long time, Mr. Frank came back, bumping into one side of hall and then other, with behind him Mr. Pete, the round bald one who always smiled. Mr. Frank sat down in chair so hard I thought he would break it, and Mr. Pete tried to help him but he said, "I'm all right."

Mr. Pete sat down on other side and put his hand on my shoulder. "Well, how you doing, boy?"

"All right."

"Frank here was just telling me, you have some kind of a secret where you cure cancer, is that right?" He smiled on me, with teeth gray and wet.

"I can cure it," I said. I moved away little bit.

But he kept his hand on my shoulder. "Well, like how do you do it? I mean, do you say some words, or what?"

"Is hard to explain."

He nodded, smiling, and said to Mr. Frank, "See, Frank, a four-flusher. I seen them before. When he says it's hard to explain, that means he can't do it."

He turned to me and said, "Is that right?" On his breath was liquor. His head was bald and shiny brown under light.

I said, "I can do it."

"Well, you don't sound like you can do it. Look, can you do it or not?" He moved little closer to me. "I mean, like if you can do it, do it, or if you can't do it, shut up." Always smiling.

Mr. Frank sat up straight and said, "What have you, got

a cancer? What's he going to cure, for Christ sake? Don't be such a jerk, will you, for Christ sake?"

Mr. Pete said, "Look. I got a wart, see?" He held up hand. There was a brown wrinkled wart on thumb. "Now if he can cure a cancer, it stands to reason he can cure a wart, don't it?"

"Oh, don't be such a jerk, Pete." Mr. Frank was frowning and rolling himself from side to side in chair. "Come on now, I don't like it." He leaned forward suddenly and took hold of my arm. "You and me are buddies, right, Mike?"

"Sure, Mr. Frank."

"You bet. So don't be such a jerk, Pete, I don't like it." He sat back and closed his eyes.

Mr. Pete was still holding up hand with wart. He was smiling, but not so wide. He said, "Okay, how about it?"

I said, "For wart is not worth it, and already I had a hard day, I am tired—"

"No, now," said Mr. Pete, holding wart in my face, "you said you could do it, and I want to see you do it. Come on, boy, let's see you cure that wart. Go ahead, make her disappear. Go ahead."

I looked on his face, and he was very hating man, very quiet and smiling, but always looking for reason to hurt someone. And I saw in his past a shadow that made me feel bad in stomach.

Now my heart was again jumping hard in chest, and I was afraid it would be again like with policeman. So I reached, and turned where there was no wart. And it was gone.

Mr. Pete jumped like hit, and grabbed his hand. Mr. Frank had eyes open and watching, and I saw him rub his own thumb, where was small bandage. But he was not thinking about it, he was looking on Mr. Pete's hand. Then they both looked on me.

Mr. Pete swallowed and said, "He did it, by God."

"Gone?"

"Look here. You can't even see where it was."

Mr. Pete looked on me again with small bright eyes, and smile almost gone. "I don't know about this. I got to think."

He rubbed his thumb, looked on it and then rubbed again. I smelled him sour and I knew he was afraid. He said, "There's possibilities in it, Frank."

"Aw, he's kidding you. Why ain't he a millionaire, then? He's nothing but a lousy bus boy. It's all a load of crap."

I said, "I could do it, but I would not. Sometimes I can help, like with Anne. But if I would cure everybody who is sick, first it would be like whirlpool, everyone coming, fighting. I could make well forty, fifty people a day, that is nothing. It is like throwing one piece bread to hundred people who are starving. Believe me, I have seen it and I know. You cannot imagine what ugliness, how terrible is a world where all life, all happiness depends on one man."

But I stopped, because I saw they were looking on me but not listening. When I stopped, Mr. Pete got up and went around table to Mr. Frank. He bent down to whisper in his ear.

Then I thought it would be better if I should go, and I got up and went to the door. But with a crash of chair on floor they came after me, one on each side, both with red faces and liquor breath, and held my arms.

"Come on!" said Mr. Pete, and they made me walk across kitchen, down hall, and they opened bedroom door and pushed me in.

They were both breathing hard. Mr. Pete stood in doorway and took knife out of pocket, and showed me the blade. "Listen," he said, "one peep out of you, and this. Understand?"

I said nothing. They backed out of door and closed it, and I heard a click.

In room it was dark then, but I found string hanging from ceiling and turned on light. It was one lightbulb, dim and sad. One wooden chair was in room, one bureau, and one little folding bed with thin mattress and Indian blanket on it. In air was smell of spray to kill insects.

I turned out light again and sat down on bed in the dark. Then I was very tired, and I lay down. After little while I heard voices and footsteps in hall, and then in kitchen, and door slammed. Then I heard only Anne's voice sounding mad

asking some questions, and Mr. Frank and Mr. Pete answering, and then after while radio was turned off and it was quiet.

I lay still and closed eyes, but could not rest. First my leg would jump, then neck, then hand. And always I would think of Mr. Pete and Mr. Frank sitting in kitchen, under sick yellow light, with their wet eyes looking on me.

Then sometimes I would remember shiny black streets empty at night, and walls of brick and soot, and the faces of the people gray as they went down stairs into subway.

After long time, when house was quiet, I got up and went to door. Underneath in crack I could see light, very thin. I tried door and it would open little way, then click on something and stop. It was not a lock, but a bolt outside, the kind that slides across and then down into a slot.

I reached, and turned to make the bolt not be there. Then I opened door little by a little, and looked out. Hall was dark, only a little bit light coming from underneath kitchen door, which was now closed. Other way, all was black in living room, but I heard someone breathing slow.

Kitchen door also was closed by bolt, and this bolt also I removed. Carefully I opened door and looked in.

Mr. Pete was asleep in chair, leaning back against wall in corner. He was partly against wall, partly against front door, so it could not open without hitting his chair. His head was hanging, and he was breathing loud. Every so often he would start to lean too far off the chair, and then he would pull himself back with a jerk, and his breathing would be quiet. Then, noisy again, and he would lean, and so on. He was frowning, and looked worried.

I went quietly across floor. The front door was closed with a big spring lock, also a bolt, and a chain. To open them would be easy, but then if I would open door, it would knock down Mr. Pete's chair and wake him up. So I reached, and turned to where whole door was not hung. And it flickered and disappeared. A cold air began to flow in through open doorway, and I stepped out into the hall.

When I was at the top of stairs, I heard a crash and a yell from inside apartment. I looked up as I started down stairs,

and I saw Mr. Pete in doorway, with eyes big. When he saw me he ducked back behind the doorway, and then I saw him coming out again, and suddenly was a flash of fire and a sound like house breaking apart. Then I was falling downstairs. In my shoulder, slowly, was a feeling like someone would have hit me with a stick.

I was lying with my head downstairs, feet up. The stairs were full of that noise that made in my ears a pain, and whole building was going slowly around. Then I saw over the railing Mr. Pete's gray face looking down on me, and I saw his hand move, and inside me the fear came bursting up, and then suddenly was a black hole over my head. No Mr. Pete, no hallway, all vanished.

I was feeling sick, and dizzy. Now when I moved I felt pain in my shoulder, and in my mind I said, "He shot me. I am shot." I put my hand on place, and there was blood.

For minutes I could not see, and I thought I would faint. Then upstairs I heard feet running, and dimly I saw Mr. Frank standing on edge of hallway, where beginning of hole was, and trying not to fall over. He was in pajamas, top part open. When I saw him, the fear came up again, and then he was gone, like candle going out.

Downstairs I heard doors banging, voices. I was trying to feel inside shoulder and find bullet, but there was no bullet, only hole. Then I started to fix wound, but it was too hard, I could not think with all the voices calling, and feet running in hallways. Then I heard Anne: "Pop! Pop!" And I saw her on edge of hallway upstairs, in blue bathrobe and pajamas. She was looking at hole in floor, holding on to railing with one hand, and with other brushing back her hair from face. I said, "Go back," and then she saw me but did not hear. She said, "Mike!" and began to move sideways along railing, putting her feet in spaces between the bars.

She got safely to top of stairs and came down quickly. "Mike, what *happened*? Gee, are you hurt? Let me—"

I said, "Shot. Trying to fix it, but— Must get out." I tried to get up, and she helped me. "Mike, where's Pop? Oh, look out, you're bleeding!"

I got my feet down where should be, and stood up holding on to wall. Anne tried to help, but did not like to touch side where I was bleeding.

I said, "Don't worry, doesn't matter," and I started down stairs holding wall with one hand, and her arm with other. Still I was trying to fix bullet hole, little by little, but could not do much, only close up to make the blood stop.

Going down the next flight we met two men in bathrobes coming up. They began to ask questions, and one tried to help me and make Anne go back, but I pushed him away. Now my shoulder was hurting, but we went down, past more people in doorways, until finally we were in bottom hallway, and Anne helped me push open the big door to outside. And cool air was blowing in our faces.

I went down stone steps slow, holding on. I tried not to think, not feel, only lean against the cold stone and make well my hurt shoulder.

Behind me Anne's voice said, "Mike, should I get a doctor?"

"No, wait, I can fix." Looking up street to avenue I could see the red eyes of traffic lights, and it was so quiet that when the lights changed to green, I could hear the click all way from corner.

Still, inside me was the fear pushing to get out. I heard Anne coming down stairs behind me, and each footstep I heard like a touch on my skin. She came and looked on my face, and began to say something.

Then doors of houses opened bang, and again I was like shot: I saw a man standing in doorway with legs apart and mouth open—but only a flicker, and then doorway turned black and melted away. The man was gone. Inside house, was a rain of plaster falling into hallway like a cave: and a dirty cloud puffed out of hole where doors had been.

In my ears was pain, on my knees cold stone. Inside house, I heard a woman scream. Then the stairs shook like thunder with feet coming down; and I could not help it, the fear came up inside me again. And it was quiet inside house. Except for patter of dropping things.

Anne was calling in my ear, "Mike, Mike, what is it?" Holding my arm till it hurt.

But I could not speak to her, because from few blocks away I heard a sound that made my skin cold. It was a siren of police car—coming nearer.

Then once more the bursting inside me, bigger than before; and the siren stopped like cut off with knife.

Then there was a rumble that shook street, and a cloud of dust crawled up over tops of buildings. Anne was shouting in my ear; I could not hear what she said.

I was seeing in my mind where buildings were cut in half, with people falling out.

I could not stop it. I put my hands over ears, but no good, I heard window opening, and my head jerked up; but all I saw was bricks flying from hole in building behind me. They winked out in middle of air, and never hit sidewalk. Then—one, two—the fear bulged again inside me, and there was nothing left of that building—not a brick, not a scream, only empty lot, color of ashes.

Anne said, in hoarse voice, "Mike—"

But across the street was doors opening, and people standing . . . and then, nothing. Darkness. Empty lots, and dark backs of buildings on next street. The wind was blowing a piece white paper, like bird with broken wing. And we looked on it.

Then I heard in the air a sound like police car a million times bigger. It was air raid siren, howling, in pain, shaking the streets, up and down, up, down. I could not stand it, and there was inside me like explosion, and that sound also stopped.

Stillness came whispering down the street.

But it was no more a street, only flat gray land as far as I could look. Not a tree, not even weed, only rock. Where minute ago we were in bottom of the street, like bugs in a crack, now we could see to edge of the world, and over us was the whole sky.

Now, slowly, like one muscle unclenching after another, my fear went away.

I listened. Under stillness was no sound, not even cricket; only more stillness, deep and deep. Across the land came a cold strong wind, and it passed us and went on.

"What happened?" said Anne. Her voice was flat and dull.

I said, "I killed them. Some I killed. Some cut in pieces. And the rest I made go away."

She looked on me, and after minute whispered, long and slow, "Why?"

"I was afraid." I listened to that word, waiting for it to echo like hand slapped on a wall, but it only floated away into darkness.

She said, "But what happened—to all the buildings? The —"

"I turned to where they were not built. Where was no city, and even no life. Now is a city on a world of gray rock, like this."

"I don't understand."

I said, "The way I fix your shoulder. I turned each little bit to where your accident never happened. Many worlds, many Annes. It is to me like breathing. I could always do it, even when I did not want to do it."

She did not seem to understand. She looked on me and said politely, "How is your shoulder?"

I felt, and it was whole again. "When I am asleep, or sometimes if I am very frightened, it is like inside me a small frightened child. Anything that is wrong with me, or anything it is afraid of, it will fix. To hurt other people—it does not know, it does not care."

She shook her head, looking past me. "It was all here, just a minute ago. Gee, I was sound asleep. Then I heard this big noise, and Pop got up and ran outside—and then I got up too, and went to see—" She laughed. "I just can't believe it. I mean, it was all here." She looked around, and said, "Oh," with her hand to mouth.

"What?"

"I just thought, Queens is gone too. That's where Phil lived." I saw her eye shine. "He's a boy where I work. He

kept asking me for dates, and I liked him, but— Gee, I'll never know, will I? And Pop—"

She put face down into her hands and her body began to shake. Deep, hurting sounds came up from her belly. And it kept going on. I could not bear to listen, and I went close and said, "Anne, don't cry. I will do anything, anything to help you."

Still she wept, and between crying she said to me, "Why couldn't you kill yourself instead!"

I said, "Once I tried it. But inside would not let me. And I woke up, and I was alive."

She was still weeping, and only to comfort her, I said, "All must die sometime, Anne, but to be me is not easy."

She raised her head and looked on me, blind with crying. I said, "If I try to bring back a world where something has made me afraid, that frightened child will not let me. I tell you with shame, that it is stronger than me. And it never forgets. I could do for you only two things. Either I could take you over there"—I pointed—"where is still other cities—Philadelphia, Boston—"

She said in thick voice, "What's the other one?"

"I could turn where is another world, and another city—not New York, but it would be as much like New York as I could make."

"Pop?" she asked.

"No. There will be no one that you knew, because I must turn before they were born. But you are young, pretty, you will make friends—"

She wiped her eyes with sleeve. "Will they build New York up again?"

"In this world? They will build it, yes, but never in your life would it be the same. Also there will be hard times for a while, even if you would go to California. I tell you truth, so you will know. To lose such a city, is like to a man to lose his arm. There will be shock, and much unhappiness."

"I lived here all my life," she said. "What would this other place be like?"

I said, "I will reach back and turn where simple thing was

different—maybe one man president of country instead of another man. From this will be all things a little bit different—there will be different people born, and even different buildings built. But it will look like New York to you, and you will soon feel at home in it. That I promise."

She found handkerchief in her pocket, and turned away. "Don't look at me."

Now I knew she would be better, so I went little bit away and sat looking across gray plain, where ash colored sky was turning slowly to a little bit green and pale gold.

"I'm sorry."

I turned to her. She was sitting straight, with hands in lap. "I'll take the other place you talked about. Can you do it right now?"

"Yes." I reached back, feeling for place to turn. It was easy to find one, but not so easy to pick right one. After minute I said, "Ready."

I reached and turned. And like a light going on in dark room, so quick it hurts the eyes, around us was a street with high buildings of red brick: and down at corner, traffic lights were turning green, and a long car went by with swish of tires on pavement. Street lights were yellow and dusty, and sky was again black. Under the stillness was small sounds everywhere, and in air was smell of burned gasoline.

I heard Anne say, very small, "Oh."

It was almost like old street. Small different things wherever you look, but from corner of eye, almost the same.

I said, "You will need some money," and I stepped to curb. I reached, and turned one small part of gutter, like deck of cards, until I found place where money was dropped. I picked it up, it was a dollar bill, but in middle was a different face. Then I turned to where it was a five instead, and then a ten, and so on until there was five hundred dollars. And I gave it to her, but she was holding robe tight around her and looking if anyone should see her not dressed. "Wait," I said, "I will fix it."

Under stone stairway was cellar entrance with railing, and garbage cans. I climbed over railing, and turned until I found

place where was a coat thrown away. It was lying beside garbage can, a fur coat, with fur rubbed off some places, but better than bathrobe. I climbed back, and gave it to her, and she put it on.

"Now what?" she said, trying to smile.

Up at corner, lights were red, and I saw a taxi, a yellow one with sign on top lit. I stood at curb and waved, and I saw driver's head turn, and then lights were yellow, then green, and the taxi came curving around. It rolled up to us and stopped. The driver looked at us out of his window without saying anything. He was young, with long, pale chin, and he was chewing gum. He saw me and he saw Anne in her bad fur coat, with bedroom slippers on her feet, but he did not look away with politeness, or stare with rudeness; he did not care.

I opened the door for her, and she got in. "Take her to a good hotel," I told driver, "quiet, not too expensive." I started to close door, but she held out her hand.

"Aren't you coming too?"

The driver was listening, but I said, "Anne, this is not a world for me. If I would stay here, it would be same as last time. Better I should go now, and not take chances."

She said, "Go where?"

"Somewhere."

"What's the use, if it always turns out the same?"

"It will not always be the same. Somewhere I know God has made a place, even for me."

On her forehead was pain. She touched my hand and said, "Mike, Mike—"

Then I closed door slowly. "Goodbye. Please go on now, driver."

She was rolling down her window as taxi made a metal sound, and gray smoke came out of tail pipe, and taxi began to roll away down empty street; and Anne's head came out of window looking back, getting smaller, and I saw her hand waving; then taxi turned corner and she was gone.

I did not think to lose her would be so hard.

But if I would have stayed with her now, first from loneli-

ness and then from being grateful, she would have grown to need me. Other bad things there would be, but this worst of all.

At least I had not done that to her, to spoil her by making myself a little demon who would do miracles, whenever a pot would boil over or a fingernail was broken.

Over roofs of buildings the sky was turning a bright, clear blue between streamers of purple-gray cloud. There was no use to wait any more. I was tired, but I could rest where I was going.

I took long breath, and reached back deep and far, farther than ever before—two thousand years or little bit less. I was thinking that maybe all my trouble was because I was trying to stay close to my own world, and always to be traveling around it even though I could never go back. If I must wander, why not go far?

I found place, where if one man was not born, all world would be different. And I turned.

The buildings jumped like flames and disappeared. Then, under that same sky, there was another city.

Cold gray buildings climbing one behind another, all with peaked doors and windows, very big, and with domes of yellow stone or of powdery blue copper. Across the brightening sky was an airplane drifting—not cross-shaped, but round. The street was of cobblestones.

I was standing inside a little park with a railing of stone carved like loops of cloth. Behind me was a pedestal of stone, and two statues, one of handsome young man in a hat with no brim, carrying a torch in his arms. And the other just the same, but with torch upside down. They looked down on me with blank stone eyes.

Is it you? They seemed to say.

And I, looking back, said, *Is it here?*

But we could not answer each other; and I left them standing there, and went into the city.

THE SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN

THOUGH HE WAS used to the tropical sun, a sliver of light reflected from one of the laboratory windows stabbed into Craven's head as he crossed the walkway, leading his little group of mainlanders. He felt uneasy and feverish, more than the previous night's drinking would account for. Perhaps he was coming down with something, God forbid—it would be a rotten time for it, with the rest of the staff over in Charlotte Amalie for the weekend.

"What time did you say that plane's coming from Miami?" asked the gray, paunchy man with the clipped mustache. Hurrying to catch up with Craven, and glancing at his wristwatch, he stumbled and swore. "I ought to be back in New

York right now. I hate to be out of the country with the situation the way it is."

"Two-fifteen," said Craven shortly. "You'll have plenty of time."

"What do *you* think about the crisis, Dr. Craven?" one of the women asked. She was plump and gray-haired. "Aren't you worried to be out here all by yourself? My goodness, I would be."

"Oh, I expect it'll blow over," Craven said indifferently. "They always do."

"Well, that's right, they always *have*," the paunchy man said, sounding relieved. He paused, squinting his eyes to peer out past the white concrete pens to the harbor. "Saw something jump out there. There's another. Are those some of the animals?"

"Yes, those are the dolphins," Craven said. Irritably he strode forward to open the laboratory door. "This way, please."

Inside, it was cooler than outdoors, but full of sunlight from the big windows overlooking the sea. On the wall was an alphabet chart, with brightly colored pictures of simple objects. The floor was a concrete slab, cut away across the far side of the room to form a channel open at both ends. The water in the channel rose and fell with a slow, vertiginous surge. Craven's head was beginning to ache.

"Here's where we do most of our work with the dolphins," he said. "Just a moment, I'll see if I can get one for you." He stepped to a wall panel, pressed a switch, and spoke into the microphone. "Pete, this is Charles. Come in, please."

A quacking gobble of sound from the wall speaker answered him.

"Okay, come on in," Craven said, and switched off the mike.

"What was that?" one of the matrons demanded. "Was that one of the dolphins *talking*?"

Craven smiled. "That's right—that was Pete, our star pupil. Look out the window. And stand back a little from the channel, please."

There was a nervous shuffling of feet as some of the visitors moved away from the edge, others crowded closer to the windows. Down the concrete channel that led past the pens directly to the wall of the laboratory, something gray was moving with surprising speed. It was submerged, but kicked up an occasional burst of spray. The visitors began to murmur in alarm; some backed away from the window.

"Look out!" someone yelled. The gray shape burst into the room; the water in the channel lifted as if about to overflow, then fell back with a slapping sound. There was a shriek, then nervous laughter.

In the channel, balancing itself half out of the water, was a streamlined, water-bright shape. It spoke, in the same quacking gabble as before.

"Okay, Pete," Craven said. "Out you come."

"Was it really *talking*?" someone asked behind him. "Could you understand what it said?"

Craven, without bothering to reply, pressed a switch on the control panel. Out of a recess in the wall came an electric hoist supporting a curved, heavily braced metal platform. The platform lowered itself into the water; the dolphin swam into position over it. Craven pressed another switch; the platform rose, streaming water. The hoist moved forward again, then lowered its passenger onto a wheeled framework that stood beside the channel. There was a click. The supporting arms of the hoist, disengaged from the platform, rose out of the way.

On the platform, which now formed the bed of the wheeled cart, lay a bulky eight-foot mammal. One eye was cocked alertly at Craven. The mouth, open in what seemed a pleasant smile, was full of sharp conical teeth.

"Goodness!" said one of the women. "I hope he doesn't bite!"

"Dolphins have never been known to attack a human being," Craven said perfunctorily. He pressed a button on the control panel. "Say hello to our visitors, Pete."

The dolphin glanced alertly at the people standing behind Craven, then emitted one of its high-pitched bursts of sound. To Craven's accustomed ear the words were blurred but un-

derstandable. To the others, he knew, they were only noise.

He pressed another button on the panel. After a moment, the dolphin's recorded voice, slowed down and deeper in pitch, came out of the speaker.

"Hello, lat'ss and ge'men."

There was a general murmur, some nervous laughter, one clear voice: "What did he say?"

"His mouth didn't move when he talked," someone commented suspiciously.

Craven grinned. "He doesn't use it for talking—that's for fish. He talks through his blowhole—there, on the top of his head. Come on over, Pete, let's have a look at you."

Obediently, the dolphin glided nearer on his cart, trailing a long plastic hose. Sprays of water had begun to spurt out of perforated tubes along either side of the cart, making the dolphin's skin gleam wetly. Out of this tiny personal rainstorm, the dolphin stared up at the visitors with friendly interest.

"He's shaped just like a jet plane!" one of the male visitors remarked. "Look at the curve of his head and, uh, snout—"

Craven smiled at the man. "Similar solutions for similar problems," he said. "Pete's streamlined, just like a jet. He's a bottle-nosed dolphin—*Tursiops truncatus*—the same specimens Lilly used in his original work. He weighs about four hundred pounds; his brain is a little bigger than a man's. Pete is more intelligent than a dog or a monkey. He can not only understand commands in English—he can talk back to us. That's why we feel this research is so important. What we're doing is teaching another species to enter the human community."

There was a moment of impressed silence. *That will hold them.* Craven thought.

"What are all the gadgets for?" another man asked.

"He controls the cart motors with those bars under his flukes," Craven said. "The other levers on either side are for manipulation—he works those with his flippers. Pete's great lack is that he hasn't any hands or feet, you see—but we're trying to make up for that. Show them, Pete, okay?"

"Okay, Charless," said the dolphin cheerfully. The cart

wheeled, glided across the floor to the low bench on the far side, leaving a wet path behind it. Jointed arms extended from the front of the cart, groped for a pointer, picked it up in metal pincers.

"Show us the apple, Pete," Craven said.

The pointer rose, wavered, came to rest with its tip on the bright picture of an apple on the wall chart.

"Now the boy," Craven said. There were murmurs of admiration as the dolphin pointed to the boy, the dog, the boat. "Now spell cat, Pete," said Craven. The pointer spelled out C-A-T.

"Good boy, Pete," Craven said. "Plenty of fish for you today."

The dolphin opened his jaws wide, emitted a Bronx cheer, then a burst of crackling dolphin laughter. There was a nervous stir among the visitors.

"You said dolphins have never been known to attack a person," said a gray-eyed girl. It was the first time she had spoken, but Craven had been aware of her; she was slender and pretty, held herself very erect.

"That's right," he said, facing her. "It isn't that they couldn't—you know they kill sharks—but they just never have."

"Even when people have hurt them?" she asked. Her gray eyes were sober.

"That's correct," Craven said.

"And it's true, isn't it, that many dolphins have been killed in the course of this research?"

Craven felt a little irritated. "There were some fatalities, before we learned how to handle them," he said shortly. He turned away. "Now let's try something more difficult. Show them the chemistry experiment, Pete."

As the dolphin turned toward the bench again, Craven commented, "This is something Pete has just been learning. We're pretty proud of it."

On the bench was a little stand with several stoppered bottles, a beaker and a row of test tubes. Controlling the jointed arms with his flippers, the dolphin reached out, picked up a

bottle and pulled the stopper. One set of metal pincers held the bottle; the other picked up a test tube. Slowly Pete made the bottle pour into the test tube. It ran full and spilled over. The dolphin rocked back and forth nervously in his cart.

"Okay, Pete," Craven said soothingly. "Don't get nervous. It's all right—go ahead."

The dolphin set the bottle down with a crash, poured the contents of the test tube into the beaker. The pincers reached for another bottle, slipped and tried again. They got the bottle on the second try, tilted it but missed the test tube. Overcorrecting, the dolphin crashed bottle and test tube together, and the test tube broke. The bottle dropped, spilled.

The dolphin backed his cart away, swiveled toward Craven. "Too hard, Charless," he said plaintively. "Too hard."

Craven's fists clenched with disappointment. The creature had done it perfectly on the last three tries! "Never mind, Pete," he said. "It's okay—you did fine. Go on out and play now."

"All finiss?" Pete asked.

"Yes. So long."

"So long." The dolphin wheeled his cart around, glided over to the edge of the channel. The jointed arms retracted. The cart bed tilted slowly; the dolphin slid off it into the water, almost without a splash. There was a glimpse of his gray body darting underwater; then the channel was empty.

On the way down to the seaplane, Craven found himself walking beside the gray-eyed girl. "Well, what did you make of it all?" he asked her.

"I thought it was *pathetic,*" she said. Her gray eyes were indignant. "You talk about making them enter the human community. It's all wrong! He's a dolphin, not a man. He was trying so hard, but the best you could turn him into was something like a retarded, crippled child. I felt so *sorry.*"

Hours after the visitors were gone, Craven was still restless. He kept remembering what the girl had said; there was just enough truth in it to make it rankle. His headache had not improved; the sunlight was still oppressive. He prowled

through his living quarters, glanced with distaste at the black headlines of the day-old Miami paper, finally turned on the television.

". . . initials stand for 'non-radioactive heat emitters,' " a chubby, gray-haired man was saying, enunciating each word clearly. "Now the question is, what would be the consequence to *us* if these weapons—"

His voice cut off suddenly and a placard filled the screen: NEWS SPECIAL. Nothing more happened for a moment. Craven lit a cigarette and waited patiently: probably it was something more about the interminable peace talks in New Delhi.

A voice said abruptly, "We interrupt this program to bring you—" Then it stopped, and the placard vanished. There was nothing on the screen but a raster, and nothing but a hiss coming out of the speaker.

After a moment Craven put his cigarette down and punched the channel selector. There was nothing on any of the channels except 13, where a faint gray picture came in for a moment, then vanished.

Craven stared at the machine, feeling abruptly frightened. If there was something wrong with the set, then why would channel 13—?

He discovered that he was shaking. Without trying to understand what he was doing, he began to rip off his shirt and trousers. Naked except for shoes, he ran to the locker, pulled out mask, flippers, air tanks and regulator.

The sky was bright and empty as he ran toward the dock —not even a plane in sight. Craven shrugged into his harness, buckled it hastily. He glanced toward the buoy that marked the underwater station, then dropped into the water.

Halfway out toward the station, swimming two fathoms deep, Craven knew he had been right. A sudden hissing patter came above him, and looking up, transfixed, he saw a shower of golden sparks descending, each in its furious cloud of bubbles. One came so near that he felt its heat on his skin. He writhed away from it, staring incredulously as it fell to the bottom ten fathoms below.

All around, the golden sparks were disappearing into the sand, each still marked by a boiling stream of bubbles. The water felt faintly warmer.

It came to Craven's stunned mind that the thing that must not happen had happened: someone had used the weapons that were too terrible for use.

The underwater station was in sixteen fathoms, as deep as it could have been built without pressuring the dome. It stood on a rocky shelf in deep water, and although several of the golden sparks had fallen around it, none seemed to have clung to the dome. Craven swam to the lock, let himself in, and sat hugging himself, shaken by chills, as air slowly filled the chamber.

Inside, he stared wildly around at the deserted dome—the two cots, recording instruments, shelves of supplies. The air seemed oppressively warm, and he bent to look at the thermometer, ready to cut off the surface air supply and turn on the tanks: but the temperature was normal.

He heard himself say aloud, "My God, what am I going to do?" Scraps of information from other TV broadcasts came back to his mind. Those informal little pellets would go on emitting heat for months. And this must be only an accidental scattering: on the mainland, in populated centers, they would have fallen thick as hail. Anywhere they dropped, the land would shortly become too hot for life. Only the ocean could carry away so much heat. . . .

There was a compressor here in the station, and a tide-driven standby generator; he could recharge his tanks indefinitely; but what about food, after the canned stuff on the shelves was gone?

Fish.

Craven felt weak with reaction, but could not be still. He adjusted his mask and mouthpiece again, went out through the lock.

There seemed to be no more of the pellets on the bottom than before, and none were falling. Craven plucked up his courage, swam to the surface. Treading water, he put his mask up and stared across at the island.

The laboratories were in flames. Behind them, the mountain was one mass of yellowish-white smoke: the whole island was on fire.

The sky seemed empty, but Craven could not endure its gigantic blue stare. He lowered his mask and dived again.

Down in the clear blue depths, Craven heard the high-pitched gabble of dolphin conversation, and once or twice saw their gray shapes flitting by. A school of plump blues swam into view. Craven started, then went after it.

There were spear-guns in the station, but he had not thought to bring one. He swam at the fish, grasping ineffectually with his hands, but they scattered easily around him.

I've got to learn, Craven's mind was telling him. *This is my element now, the sea—I've got to adapt . . .*

Something large and gray swam up toward him. Craven stiffened, but it was only Pete, gazing at him with friendly curiosity.

The school of blues had reformed not far away. Abruptly the dolphin wheeled, darted away with a lazy surge of his flukes. In a moment he was gliding back, with a fat blue-fish in his jaws.

"Look, Charless," he said kindly, "this is the way to catch a fiss. . . ."

BE MY GUEST

I

The room was quiet; the man in front of the mirror was the only living thing there, and he was too horrified to utter a sound.

In the mirror, five faces stared back at him: one young and ruddy, which was his own, and four that did not belong in that place at all, for they were wrinkled, malevolent, small as crabapples and as blue as smoke.

This is the way it happened:

AFTER THE FUNERAL, the only thing that occurred to Kip Morgan was to go out and get boiled. It was one time when he didn't even want to see Angelica MacTavish, but she was

there, looking open to suggestion, so he drove her down Sunset to a bar he knew that wasn't really a bar, but a chop house. It was quiet and dark; the wallpaper didn't yell at you because there wasn't any, there was old black paneling instead; there was a jukebox, but nobody ever played it; the waiters wore black jackets and gold-rimmed spectacles; and if a man wanted to get quietly, darkly drunk in there, the management would serve him and leave him alone.

"When I was a kid," said Morgan to his scotch-and-water, "nobody died. Except my Uncle Austin one time, and he fell off a ladder. Now all of a sudden they're dying like flies. I must be getting old."

Angelica watched him and listened calmly. She was one of those slim, compact young women who wear collegiate sports clothes and next to no makeup, not because they want to particularly, but because they look like dressed-up little girls in anything else. They have structural-steel spines and muscles like a cat's, and when they are pretty, as they usually are, it would stop your heart to look at them. When they're intelligent as well, it's a great pity, for then they're too good for most men and they know it.

After a moment she said, "You liked him a lot, didn't you."

"Old George? Sure. He was—" Kip's square fingers tightened on his glass, trying to squeeze expression out of it. "He was worth a million of me." He frowned and tried again. "He was the kind of a guy—it made you feel good, just to know that he was alive."

"I never met him."

"No. That's right." Kip blinked at her. "You were at the funeral, though."

"Yes."

"How come?"

"You asked me if I wanted to go. Last Wednesday."

"*That's* right. Sure. He was only forty-six, the obituary said. Cerebral hemorrhage; that's a filthy thing. He should have lived to be a hundred and ninety."

"What's going to happen to his work now?"

"His work?" said Kip.

"Didn't you tell me he'd discovered a new vitamin?"

"Oh, that. I dunno. Nothing, probably. It was his own private thing—he didn't have a grant. He had a couple of graduate students working with him, one time or another, but they weren't much good. Head of the department had all the hotshots tied up on a cancer project. . . . I washed bottles for him sometimes; so did his daughter, when she could get away from her mother. Except she broke more than she washed."

"That would be the starry-eyed one, who didn't cry?"

"Uh, yeah. Nancy."

"She was bearing down on you when we left. What's the matter with her, Kip?"

"Everything. All—bottled up inside. You ever see a spastic? Like that, only in her mind instead of her muscles. She can't *reach* people—keeps trying, all the time, it hurts you to watch her. She doesn't know how."

He gulped the last of his drink and set the glass down carefully. "I saw her coming at me, back there," he said.

Angelica's eyebrows went up a trifle; otherwise her expression didn't change. "Tell me some more about the vitamin," she said. "If it's as important as it sounds, why do you think nobody's going to pick it up?"

Kip shook his head. "Not important. It was a bust. Contra-survival."

She blinked slowly. "A contra-survival *vitamin*?"

"Sure."

"No," she said positively. The waiter came and put down two fresh drinks and took the old glasses away, thinking about something else all the time.

"Kip, what's the source of this thing—where did Professor Liebert find it to begin with?"

"Pig liver."

"Then it wasn't contra-survival for the pig."

"No. Might have been, though, if it had turned out to be any good for people. See, the pig synthesizes this stuff. It isn't anything to him, one way or the other—just a by-product from something else he was doing at the time. Only way it

could affect him is if it turned into another reason for slaughtering pigs."

Angelica frowned slightly. "Aren't you using 'survival' in two different ways?"

"Well, yeah, but you have to. Like, take a Jersey heifer that breeds true—short horns and a big udder. Those are pro-survival factors, right?" He paused and added, "As long as the farmer's around."

She nodded.

"Or if you want vitamins, take C. It keeps us from getting skin hemorrhages and pulpy gums, and it gets the lemon cultivated—good for us, and good or bad for the lemon, we don't know yet. Or the L complex—good for you, if you ever have kids and want to nurse them, but lousy for me if it had the same effect on men, which God forbid.

"Another thing L does, we found out, is to break down George's vitamin in primates. He had to synthesize the stuff—took him six years. Got it pure, and the L let it alone—must have been a chain reaction with the natural vitamin and its impurities, and the L. So he tried it on rhesus monkeys."

"And?"

"Well, it's a vitamin. Guinea pigs and rabbits got fatter and grew heavier fur than the control group, rats and mice were more active. The monkeys went into hysteria and convulsions. Last of them died two weeks ago Thursday. . . . George put a poison label on twenty cc's of the stuff and stuck it in his lab for a keepsake; he poured the rest down the drain."

Kip swallowed half his drink as if it were tincture of dubious vitamin, then put the glass into the patch of stained light from the tiny window overhead, and watched the ice cubes turn to amber, sapphire and ruby. Angelica, who never spoke merely to break a silence, sat as quietly as he.

The waiter came and went. The old pendulum clock over the archway paused to chime discreetly, and resumed its delicate funereal ticking, and after a long while chimed again. The patches of light moved imperceptibly across the table until the corner of it touched Angelica's folded hands.

The hands moved. Kip raised his head as Angelica drew back the forest-green sleeve and looked at her watch.

"Mm?" he said.

"It's two o'clock."

"Oh. Uh—you got a date?"

"Yes."

"Oh. Where? I'll drive you—" He started to get up.

"Here."

He sat down again and looked at her dazedly. "That's funny."

"Kip."

"Yeah?"

"It's *Monday*. Lunch. Remember?"

Kip looked startled, incredulous, then stricken. "Monday," he said. "You've got the afternoon off."

"Yes."

"We were going to have lunch, and then go to the beach if it was nice, or dance if it wasn't."

"*That* Monday," she said, smiling.

Kip glanced at his watch, then craned his neck to look at the wall clock. "It's two o'clock," he said foolishly. He blundered up and looked for the waiter.

"Kip, we could just order here."

"*No*. Not here—someplace where there's a lot of plate glass, and parakeets in cages, and waitresses with Italian haircuts, and flowers all the hell over." He looked at the bill the waiter was holding out, piled bills on top of it, and reached for Angelica's hand. "Come on!"

So they had lunch, with exactly the right number of Martinis, and argued cheerfully about what kind of a day it was, because it was the late-fall kind that always turns out to be whatever you thought it wasn't; and finally Kip said: "Look. If we go to the beach, either it'll rain or it'll be just one degree too cool, but we'll stick it out to show how tough we are. Right?"

"Right."

"And if we go dancing, either it'll be a perfect day for the

beach, or it'll rain and we'll wish we were someplace we could sit and listen to it."

"Right."

"And either way, we'll find ourselves eating burned lamb chops with a side of spaghetti and listening to Mario Lanza sing louder than human."

"It figures."

"All right. Let's go to my place and listen to Mahler, and I'll cook us an honest steak."

Kip (for Kipling) Morgan lived in a cottage that went with his job and was more job than cottage—pro shop in the front, living room, kitchenette, bedroom and bath in the rear. There are a lot of golf pros in southern California, and hundreds of them were better than Kip, who had all the style in the world and no tournament spirit at all; but he was patient and friendly, he was ornamental, he didn't seduce the lady members, and by and large they couldn't seduce him; and everybody liked him, because Kip liked everybody.

The club was a wonderful place to meet people. He had met Angelica there; she played a strong, clean game of golf, because she couldn't help it, built the way she was, and because she took it seriously—which, Kip was guiltily aware, was the way you were supposed to take it.

Angelica worked as a research secretary for a city councilman who was going to be Mayor; she knew politics from the dirty end up and was intensely partisan about it; she spoke French and Spanish too fast for anybody but a native, had a Master's in sociology, and could sing harmony to anything without a score. Kip was a little frightened of her, because he wanted her more than he had wanted anything in the world since he was twelve.

The sky was a luminous water-agate color when they came up the walk; the air was cool and moist, and there was a little wind in the tops of the eucalypti. It was going to rain.

Kip opened the door and ushered her in with one big hand warmly in the small of her back, where it seemed to belong. For a moment he thought she was leaning back against

him; then he realized she had stopped, halfway through the door. Then he got a whiff from inside, and knew something was wrong.

He slid in behind her and closed the door. The venetian blinds were closed, not the way he had left them, but he could see that the wall looked funny and there was something scattered whitely across the floor. He clicked the wall switch.

Light spilled out from the three lamps, yellow and strange against the watery gray light from outdoors. The multicolored mound on the long table was garbage: coffee grounds, wet newspaper, banana skins, lumps of pale grease, lettuce leaves, seaweed tendrils of spinach.

Eggshells crunched under his feet as he crossed the room. The green monk's-cloth drapes from one of the windows had been nailed to the wall over the couch to form a kind of garland. In the enclosed space something was written in red smeary letters:

$$\text{LuO} + \text{Vi}_2 + \text{E} \rightarrow \text{i LOVE u}_2$$

Angelica was at his elbow. She looked at him as he turned, her eyes wide and alert.

Kip walked over to the leather chair in the far corner. The thing propped up in it was a toilet seat, decorated with a red heart-shaped outline. It framed a piece of brown cardboard, apparently torn from a carton; the red lettering said:

WILL U
BE MY
VALENTINO?
? ? ?

He opened the bedroom door and glanced in, then went around the dogleg past the tiny kitchenette and tried the door that led to the storeroom behind the shop. It opened. He stood in the doorway without moving for a moment, then closed the door and came back.

"Red lead all over hell," he said. "She must have opened a gallon."

"She?" Angelica asked.

Kip bent and picked up a scrap of ruled paper; there were dozens of them on the floor, among the eggshells. This one was covered with lines of verse in a precise schoolgirl hand. Kip stared at it quietly, then dropped it and went over to the table. Angelica followed.

The garbage on the table was piled into three rough tiers. On the top one stood two little figures made of pipe cleaners and papier-mache, delicately tinted with water colors, a boy one and a girl one. The boy figure had bright yellow hair, and the girl figure was wearing a long white crepe-paper dress, with a veil.

"Who, Kip?"

He picked up the girl figure and tossed it gently in his hand. "Nancy Liebert," he said. "She makes these things."

Angelica looked at him curiously, then went to the couch and sat down, under the garland. "George's daughter," she said.

"George's daughter. She's—got a crush on me."

"I can see that," said Angelica. "Has this been going on long?"

"No." There was a small silence.

"I made a mistake," said Kip, reddening slowly. "It was last week, after her father died. She found him. She phoned me and I went over . . . she held up all right till the cops and the coroner were all through, and then she let go. She cried. You ever read about people crying buckets, and think it was funny? The front of my shirt was still wet the next morning. . . . Warm tears down my chest—the damndest feeling. It was like she was bleeding all over me. And she kept saying that she was twenty-six years old and ugly, and the only one that had ever loved her was her father, and now he was dead."

After a moment Angelica said unsteadily, "What was your mistake?"

"I kissed her."

". . . Was that all?"

"No," Kip said. "I told her I loved her—and, God, I did—I do. . . . But she took it—the other way."

The rain began: first a tap, then a hammering at the windows, and then a steady scything sound, hollow from the roof, staccato on the flagstones, and the rushing gurgle in the downspouts.

Kip's head turned abruptly. "What was that?"

"What?"

"Sounded like a door closing—in here."

"I heard it. I thought it was a car door slamming, outside."

"Maybe," said Kip doubtfully. He glanced at her, then walked around the dogleg into the hall.

The bathroom door was ajar. It had been closed before. Kip pulled it open the rest of the way and stepped in. There was a steamy smell in the air, and a faint reek of after-shave lotion. The toilet-seat lid was propped against the wall under the medicine cabinet, in a litter of tubes and boxes. Kip's toothbrush lay in the middle of the floor, its bristles oozing a puddle of red.

He stepped over it, glanced at the moist gritty ring in the bathtub, and opened the door to the bedroom.

The bed was rumpled. There were two brown wads of nylon on the pillow, and a gray dress on the floor, draped over a lump that was probably a pair of shoes. Kip walked past them into the L-shaped room, around the corner that had been cut out to form the kitchenette on the other side.

The living-room door was open. Kip went through in time to hear Nancy Liebert say, "Why don't you go home?"

She was standing by the table, barefoot, with a black cloth bag clenched in one red-knuckled hand. Her shoulderblades were like plucked bony wings. Her slip was wrinkled and hung awry; one brassiere strap was fastened with a safety pin.

She turned to face him, hunched and awkward, with those big greenish eyes staring feverishly. "Hello, Kip," she said. "Don't *you* think she ought to go home?"

Nancy's hair was red: not carrot-color, and not henna-

color, but the real, dark, glossy red that you see once in a lifetime. She had the pale skin that goes with it, and that made it worse. Her thin face was scarred and blotched and lumped with acne. It looked like something that ought to have been covered up. Her eyes didn't belong in that face, or in any face; they were too large and too bright, and the whites had the yellowish tint of discolored teeth.

Kip said, "Nancy, will you do me a favor?"

"She ought to go home. It isn't right for her to be here, Kip."

"We'll talk about that afterward," said Kip. His hands were curling involuntarily. "First the favor, huh?"

"Well, what is it?"

"Go put your dress on. Please."

She thought about it. "Well," she said confidentially, "if she won't go, we'll just have to pretend she isn't here." She marched past Kip into the bedroom. After a moment they heard the springs creak as she sat down.

"What are you going to do?" Angelica murmured.

He sat beside her, trying to unwind the tension. "Take her home."

"Kip, that girl ought to be in a psychiatric ward."

"I know it. George wanted her to get help years ago, but her mother wouldn't hold still for it. Took it as a personal insult. I can't get her into a hospital; it needs a relative."

"Call the police. Have her arrested for malicious mischief. I *know* how it sounds, but it's the best thing you can do for her."

Nancy walked out of the kitchenette, wearing the gray dress, unbuttoned, and one stocking. She was still carrying the black bag in one hand; with the other, she held up a bottle of prune juice.

"Have some?" she said brightly.

"No, thanks," said Kip. "Nancy—"

She giggled and walked back out of sight. They heard bottles clinking in the refrigerator, then nothing but the rain.

When the silence alarmed them, a few minutes later, Kip first called to her and then went to look. A window in the

bedroom was open, rain whipping in in gusts over the bed and half the floor. Nancy was gone.

The next morning was bad. The alarm rolled him out at 6:30 and Kip sang in the shower, out of habit, before he remembered. Then he wrapped himself in a towel and padded into the living room to make sure. It was true, all right: there were the nail holes in the wall over the couch, there were the faint stubborn smears of red paint that wouldn't come off, and there was the spot, by the door, where Angelica had said a word to him that would be hard to take back.

He brooded about it while his eggs turned leathery in the pan. After Nancy's disappearance, they had gone over the business about Kip's calling the police, with all the logic on Angelica's side, and nothing at all on Kip's except the knowledge that he'd feel like the executioner at Golgotha if he did it without trying all the other ways first.

From that, in some way that wasn't clear to Kip, they'd got onto the subject of his job. Kip didn't see anything wrong with it; he'd tried a lot of things since college, and had fun at all of them—lumberjack, boy's-camp counselor, zoo attendant, merchant seaman—but never a one had been as pleasant or congenial as this. He said so. He pointed out in passing that if he'd been doing any other work, he would very likely never have met Angelica. For no apparent reason, this seemed to infuriate her.

She was silent long enough to count ten; then her eyes narrowed. "Kip, I just remembered something you said at lunch. Did you study bio-chemistry in college?"

"Sure. U.C.L.A. George was one of my profs—didn't I ever tell you?"

"Then am I wrong in thinking that you did a little more for Professor Liebert than just washing bottles? Were you one of his star pupils, by any chance?"

"Well, he gave me A's, but—"

"Well, then *why*—"

"Wait a minute. That was just a kind of a hobby—I wasn't majoring in it."

That stopped her for a minute. "What was your major—physical ed?"

"Physics. Nuclear."

That stopped her again. Her eyes got big and round. "I suppose you got A's in that, too. Don't tell me, I know you did. Kip, I'm sorry, this isn't really my business—but how could you give that up, or even half of it, for this kind of a life?"

He groped for a way to tell her. "It wasn't like that—not the way you mean it. See, when I was a kid I was a science nut. Skinny little guy with an armload of books. Well, all through high school and college I kept thinking that was what I wanted to do, but the work was getting tougher and tougher. All right, then I went back for p.g., figuring with the football and track out of the way, I'd really hit it. And I got sick. I didn't finish the first semester.

"When I got my strength back I tried it again—summer extension. And I got sick again. *Real* sick—anemia, hypertension, asthma, every damned thing, and a jolt of cerebrospinal meningitis on top of it. When I came out of that, I sat down and figured it out. All those things are psychomatic, except the meningitis, and by that time I was a sucker for any kind of bug. I was asking for it. I didn't *want* to spend the rest of my life getting hunchbacked and nearsighted over a lab bench, but I was kidding myself that I did. What for? To make bigger and better bombs?

"So I headed north and spent a season logging. I haven't been sorry once."

Angelica's cheeks were pinker than usual. She said gravely, "And you think that wasn't giving up anything? What are you going to do when you can't be a golf pro any more, Kip?"

"I may not wait that long. I've got my eye on a little place up in the sequoia country that I'd like to buy if I can raise the price. A tourist camp, on a lake."

"A *tourist* camp!"

"Sure. I know there's more work in it than most people think—carpentry, plumbing, anything you want to name, but that's all right. I can do anything that—"

"You can do anything," said Angelica hurriedly, getting up, "but you *won't.*" She picked up her raincoat with one motion, got into it with two more. She had the door open before he could move. She turned.

"Why do they give talent to people like you?" she asked, looking at him as if he had a window in his forehead. And then she was gone. . . .

The scrambled eggs were brown around the edges and a delicate greenish color in the middle. Kip nudged them off onto a plate, added underdone bacon, and carried the mess abstractedly into the living room. Rolls, butter, fruit juice, coffee. The coffee was cold.

He swore at it without enthusiasm and drank the prune juice, which bit him on the way down.

He choked, spraying brown droplets on the already colorful eggs, and stared at the empty glass. "Brandy," he said aloud, and then, "Nancy."

That was right: she'd come into the room with the bottle in her hand. She must have laced the stuff with cognac just before that, or else on the way back. Before, probably. Another little joke.

But it didn't fit. Everything else had followed one plain pattern: the toilet seat, the garbage wedding cake, even the eggshells: love and fear.

What was the symbolic significance of cognac? Of prune juice?

Kip stood up suddenly and walked into the kitchenette. He opened the refrigerator. There was the prune-juice bottle, and there, directly above it on the cabinet, was the cognac, but they didn't tell him anything.

He didn't understand it, and he didn't like it.

If it came to that, what about Nancy's exit through the window? That wasn't pattern, either; he had expected to spend the rest of the evening trying to get her home.

Could she have overheard what they were saying in the living room? Very likely; they'd been keeping their voices down, but there was no telling how long she'd been listening

at the bedroom door or just around the corner in the hall.

That reminded him that nobody had answered the phone last night at the apartment Nancy shared with her mother. It was too early yet for anything but a fire or an earthquake; he'd give them till eight, anyhow, before he tried again.

He wandered back into the living room and looked moodily at the wall where Nancy's inscription was still faintly legible. "LuO + Vi_2 + E → i LOVE u_2." That fitted, but not particularly well, unless you took chemistry to mean stinks.

Chemistry.

Question: Why would you put cognac in a bottle of prune juice?

Answer: To hide the taste of something else.

Kip felt a little odd. The room was blurry and there was a ringing in his head—no, not a ringing, a murmur.

Nancy could have got hold of all her father's keys. She might have found the lab safe combination among his papers.

And George had put a poison label on the . . .

Kip turned to the table, dipped his finger in the little puddle left in the prune-juice glass, and tasted it. Prune. Cognac. And something else, unmistakable now that he was looking for it: the dark oily taste of the vitamin solution.

He whirled and headed for the bathroom. The murmuring was getting louder: tinny little voices, as if a bunch of people were talking quietly at the bottom of a well. Sweating, Kip tried not to hear them, but he couldn't help it:

". . . afraid of being poisoned."

"Peculiar. Must be cracking up."

They were talking about *him*. Was this what had happened to George's monkeys, to make them froth at the mouth, and bite themselves bloody, and die?

He skidded on the wet floor, grabbed the rim of the washbowl and found himself staring at his own flushed image in the cabinet mirror. For an instant he thought idiotically that someone had painted little malevolent faces on the wall be-

hind him. Then they snapped into focus, and no matter how long he looked, he couldn't deny what he saw:

Four little men, smoke-blue and as insubstantial as soap bubbles, squatting on his shoulders.

II

KIP SAT in the leather chair with his head in his hands, eyes shut, knuckles tight against his temples. There was one repeated thought in his mind: *A monkey isn't a man.* He had been thinking it so long and so hard that he wasn't quite sure what he meant by it any more, but it was a comforting thing: it was something to hold onto.

Keeping his eyes closed was an improvement, but he could still hear the voices; putting his fingers in his ears, he'd already discovered, didn't help. The sounds weren't ordinary physical vibrations, he was sure, although he was certainly hearing them with his ears; they were binaural and he could estimate their sources with exactness; for example, two of them were still on his left shoulder, but the other two were moving—

He sat bolt upright, with a thrill of pure horror.

One of the two abominable little voices was now coming from the general region of his lungs. The other was inside his skull.

There was a knocking on the storeroom door, and then a hoarse yell: "Hey, Kip!" That was Lebeau, the caddy master.

He got up stiffly and went to the door without opening it. "Yeah, Irving?"

"Mr. Chase is out here—says you promised to work him out with his irons this morning."

"Vitamins?" the voice in chest was saying. *"What the thunder and blazes are vitamins?"*

"You know," said the voice in his head, *"those chemical things. Blast it, Alfie, try to be a little more help . . ."*

"Tell him I'm sorry," said Kip. "I can't make it—feeling kind of rocky."

"Okay. Hey, Kip."

"Yeah."

"You know who slopped all this paint around the storeroom?"

"Oh," said Kip. The two voices inside him were still arguing about vitamins, and now the things on his shoulder had joined in; he could see them out of the corner of his eye. "I did that myself, Irv—I'll straighten it out with the club." He hesitated, then opened the door.

Lebeau looked at him, his sad face all lit up with concern and curiosity. "Hey, you do look beat. You better go see a doctor."

"Think I will. Look, Irv, will you square me with the paying customers, and so on? And about the paint—tell Olcutt I'll talk to him tonight or tomorrow. Okay?"

"Sure, Kip."

. . . That settled one point, anyhow; not that he had been in much doubt about it: the little blue people were visible and audible only to him.

Next— Kip went grimly back into the bathroom, sponged the cold sweat off his forehead, and stared at the two little beings who were still visible on his shoulder. One had a long, hatchet-sharp face, the other was pudgy and shapeless. They stared back at him, and it was pretty hard to take.

"Who are you?" he said to the mirror in the empty room.

They blinked at each other. "Think we ought to tell him?" asked the pudgy one. "It seems only polite," said Hatchetface. "But—of course—he is not real."

Kip's jaw wouldn't close properly. While he was working on it a blue haze flowed out of him and solidified into the other two creatures, the lantern-jawed one with the bristly mustache and the squat sheep-faced one. "What's this? What's this?" said Lantern-jaw.

"Talking to us," explained the shapeless one. "Wants to know who we are."

Lantern-jaw looked affronted. "Irregular," he said.

"Still—why not?" asked Hatchet-face. "I am Don Nobilio Hernandez San Juan Filippe Salvador Guevara de Cervera-Silva. These gentlemen are Captain Ephram Goodnews—

Major Jocelyn Britt-Howard—and Dr. Alfred R. O'Leary."

"Doctor of dentistry," piped up the sheep-faced one.

"How do you do," said Kip insanely; and then, "What's this all about? What are you doing here, what do you want? And what do you mean, *I'm* not real?"

Lantern-jaw snorted. "My dear fellow," he said, "we're dreaming you."

"You," asked Kip carefully, "are dreaming me?"

"Absolutely. Nothing odd in that, is there? I'll admit this is an uncommonly long dream, but that suits me. When I went to sleep, I don't mind telling you, I was a damn' sick man. *Damn'* sick."

"I also," sighed Hatchet-face. "We are not as young as we used to be."

"I can use the rest," said the sheep-faced one. "Have to be pretty careful—my heart, you know."

"Spar knocked me into the scuppers," the shapeless one said. "Worst storm I ever saw. Don't know why we haven't foundered by now."

Kip stared at them all in horror. The transparency of Major Britt-Howard's face was splotched and spotted. In Don Nobilio's right temple, just over the eye, there was a tiny, puckered hole. And Captain Goodnews, lumpy, swollen—

"What year is it?" he asked hoarsely. "Not in your dream, but the real year?"

All four looked uneasy. "Ought nine," snapped the Major.

"It is the year of Our Lord eighteen sixty-seven," said Don Nobilio.

"Nineteen twenty-one," said Dr. O'Leary.

"Eighty-nine," said Captain Goodnews.

They glared at each other briefly. "You're *dead*," said Kip. He didn't want to, but he couldn't stop. He pointed to the Major. "You and Dr. O'Leary died of disease. You—" to Don Nobilio—"were shot in your sleep. And you—" to Captain Goodnews—"drowned."

There was a babble of furious protest, dominated by Major Britt-Howard's "Nonsense! Nonsense!" He added, "Knew it was a mistake to talk to the beggar. Argue with a dream,

deserve what you get. Come along, Alfie, Ephram, Billy-oh."

All four melted into a blue shimmer that sank into Kip's body and was gone. He heard their voices, down inside, muttering together angrily.

On the subject of survival after death, Kip's attitude had always been the cheerfully pragmatic one of a man who can count on its being a long way away—if it was true, he'd find out about it, and if it wasn't, it wouldn't matter.

Somewhat to his surprise, the notion was now violently repugnant to him. His mind kept shying away from it into sophistries: There was no reason to suppose that his senses were correctly interpreting the new information they were getting. Where Kip saw little blue ghosts, somebody else in his shoes might see purple beetles and hear them singing barbershop harmony; there was no way of telling.

But that was pure Berkeleian idealism, which could be used just as logically to explain away a ham sandwich. Worse yet, it violated the law of parsimony—it introduced one more assumption than you needed to explain the observed data. And finally, what was his objection to the idea of ghosts in the first place?

That there was no evidence for their existence? Well—hardly. Kip was uncomfortably aware that the case for disembodied spirits was as well documented as the case for meteorites; there was just no place to file it but under "Superstition."

That they were theoretically impossible? No, because you can't say that of anything until you know what the theory is.

True, ghosts were supposed to haunt places, not people; but— Wait a minute!

Kip got up from the couch and paced blindly across the room, avoiding the table by reflex and instinct.

Sure, there were recorded instances of spirits inhabiting people. There was a common word for it:

Possession.

Suppose the human body were the natural habitat of spectres, and that when they were seen floating around in ruined

buildings, it wasn't from choice but because they had nowhere else to go? If, like the four he'd met, all earthbound spirits were those who couldn't bear to give up the pleasures of a bodily existence—or, indeed, even to admit to themselves that they were dead—what other explanation would do?

And that would account for the lugubrious aspect of house-haunting ghosts, compared to the complacency and general snottiness of Kip's tenants . . .

Tenants. Peaceful possession. *Possession,* said the disused dictionary in Kip's skull, dustily: *Condition of a person's having such control of property that he may legally enjoy it to the exclusion of all others having no better right than himself. . . .*

"Hell in a bucket!" said Kip.

He wasn't a free agent, he was a piece of real estate—to be precise, a sort of private club for four elderly gentlemen. Hot running blood, dining hall, air conditioning, spectator sports; library in the top story, used for smoking in, probably; nobody ever read the books. Warranted of sound construction, desirable neighborhood, cooking on the premises. Plez cnoke if an rnsr is not reqid.

Did they have a lease? And if they did or if they didn't, how was he going to evict them?

Well, how did you evict anybody? By invoking a law. Exorcism . . .

But it depended on what kind of law you were talking about. In jurisprudence, a law was a rule of conduct or action *enforced by a sanction.* No policeman, no law.

Therefore, before invoking a law, consider the sanction. In the case of exorcism, what was it?

Very simple, he remembered. If the exorcism didn't work, the afflicted person was drowned or put to the stake. It was effective—if the tenants won't leave, burn down the house!—but extreme.

There was another kind of law that, in this universe at least, could never be revoked and needed no sanctions, and from which there was no appeal: physical law.

Kip was on friendly terms with at least a dozen doctors, none of whom had ever made a nickel off him. He phoned one at random, a bright young man named Latham who had offices in West L.A.

"You get beaned by a golf ball?" Latham asked in honest surprise.

"No, I'm okay; I just want a checkup. And, Al, I'm in kind of a hurry. Can I get the works this morning, basal, x-rays and everything?"

"When did you eat last?"

"About eleven last night."

"All right, if you want the basal you'll have to wait till eleven today. Don't take any exercise, and don't eat or drink anything before you come over. Make it about ten-thirty; we'll get some of the other stuff done first. How about lunch afterward?"

Kip begged off and dialed another number.

Mike Vitale, a paunchy little man with nervous eyebrows and an inextinguishable grin, was devoted to golf, at which he was very bad, and to sonics, at which he was as good as they come. Kip spent most of the morning at his Westwood laboratory, looking at everything and asking questions, and contriving to get in the way of every nonlethal sub- and ultrasonic frequency known to man.

The subsconics made him feel depressed, happy, fighting mad, sleepy and as amorous as a mink—the latter when Vitale's good-naturedly plain lab assistant, who was used to the gag, happened to pass by. The ultrasonics, those that Vitale would let him try, didn't make him feel any particular way; and none of them, sub or ultra, made any apparent difference to the little blue people. *Buzz buzz buzz,* down there in his chest. . . .

"That all there is?"

"That's all I can show you," said Vitale, "except a few frequencies that would set you afire or curdle your brains, little things like that. I tried 'em, and look at me."

"Oh," said Kip. "Well—thanks, Mike."

Vitale put a hand on his arm. "Kip, what's it all about?

You didn't come here because you're interested in the work."

"Did it show?"

"Kip, you know what I said to you about five minutes ago? I said to you, 'The resonator coils are built around a core of laminated cream cheese.' And you said uh-huh."

Kip grinned. "You crumb."

"Sure. And you know damn well I don't use cream cheese in there; it hasn't got the right squeak quotient. Pasteurized shoe polish, that's the stuff, right? Okay. Now how many hours did I put in showing you around the lab, because you're a friend of mine and you asked me? Two. What for, Kip?"

Kip hesitated. "If I told you," he said, "you wouldn't even think I was crazy. You'd think I was kidding you, only it wouldn't be funny, Mike. I'm sorry."

He went away from there, feeling about three feet high.

The basal metabolism test turned out normal; so did the knee-jerks and all the rest of it. Kip was depressed. He had had a lovely hunch that something would show up in the basal; if his visitors were parasitic, he ought to be burning more energy than he needed.

Latham fluoroscoped him and x-rayed him from every angle. It didn't bother the little blue men.

Latham, it presently appeared, believed that every M.D. ought to know a little about all the principal varieties of psychoquackery. "Kip, what would you do if you found out you were seriously ill?"

"I dunno. Hey, Al, who do you know that has an encephalograph?"

"Why? What do you think it would show?"

Kip sighed. "Nothing, probably." He paid and got away with some difficulty from the lie-down-relax-and-tell-me-all-about-it gleam in Latham's eye. It was getting on toward noon, and he was so hungry he could hardly think straight any more, so he headed toward Olympic and stopped at the first restaurant he saw—which, unfortunately, was entirely paneled in peach-tinted mirrors, suitable for framing upside down in the canopy of a bed.

This meant Waldorf salad and chops with paper panties, followed by jello with carrot strips embalmed in it. It also meant that unless Kip took care not to look up, he couldn't help seeing the reflections of the four wraiths who were now once more squatting on his shoulders, clicking their lips and looking around for the waitress.

As soon as his order was brought, however, they all disappeared inside him again. Kip ate warily, listening to their very voices down below:

"Ghastly food." (That was the Major.) "These Americans simply don't know cooking; no offense, gentlemen, I'm still a bit nervy. The indecency of the fellow, saying a thing like that to our faces! Fellow that said a thing like that ought to be horsewhipped!"

"Then I take it," said the calmer, wearier voice of Don Nobilio, "that you are in favor of our looking for another host?"

Kip spilled his coffee.

"No," said the Major reluctantly, but with conviction. "If I had my choice, of course—but there, one seldom does."

"I don't see why—" said Dr. O'Leary.

"Well, we shouldn't expect you to, Alfie. You haven't seen what we've seen. Oh, I don't deny there are places that could be got tomorrow, if we decided to move. I've lived in some of 'em. I tell you, Alfie, we were *damn'* lucky to get this when the last one fell down. *Damn'* lucky, even with all the trouble we had. Perhaps you think that was extraordinary, but I can assure you it wasn't. No, you never get exactly what you want; you've got to tinker with it till you get something that suits you more or less. And then if you've made the wrong choice to begin with, the whole thing cracks up and you've got to start over. Isn't that right, Billy-oh?"

"So I have always found it. But if we are all agreed that we wish to remain—"

Listening, Kip forgot to chew; and in a moment, when the implication of what the Major had just said sank home, he forgot to listen. ". . . got to tinker with it . . ." Had they been tinkering with *him*?

He lost the thread altogether, then picked it up briefly: ". . . know you can't keep anything from the Committee, blasted nosy parkers, they've probably got wind of it already. And there's no telling what they'll decide to do, but what I say is, we've got to find out what's really at the bottom of this—even if it means going to that ghastly mobhouse, what's her name, Nancy Liebert—"

Nancy.

Kip started guiltily, looked at his watch, swore, and headed for the pay phone.

There was pure blind selfishness for you if you liked; he'd been thinking of nothing but his own trouble all day. The ringing signal pulsed in his ear, stopped with a click.

"Hello, who *is* this?" Mrs. Liebert's voice, sounding more hysterical than usual.

"This is Kip Morgan, Mrs. Liebert. I wanted to talk to you about—"

"Where is she? *What have you done with her?*"

"Who, Nancy? Didn't she come home—"

"You know very well what I mean. The idea, coming into my house without a word and taking her away—what's the *matter* with you? Why can't you leave Nancy alone?"

"Mrs. Liebert—"

"She doesn't *want* you hanging around her. She's perfectly happy here with me, why can't you *realize* that?"

"Mrs. Liebert, when did this happen? I haven't seen Nancy since last—"

"You know when it happened. Just *now!* A few *minutes* ago! I went into the kitchen for a *second,* and when I turned around she was gone: How can you stand there and pretend—"

"Mrs. Liebert—"

"This excitement is very bad for me, but you don't care—"

"Mrs. Liebert, please. Couldn't she just have stepped out for a minute?"

"*No,* because I looked in the hall, and then I looked out the window, it's right over the entrance, and I didn't see her

come *out!*" Her voice sharpened. "Nancy's told me about your disgusting behavior, Mr. Morgan. She tells me everything, maybe you didn't realize that. Now you bring her right back, or I'm going to call for the *police!*"

She hung up.

Kip stared perplexedly at the phone. Angelica had been right, of course, and admitting that, Mrs. Liebert's calling the police was probably the best thing that could happen—if she could be counted on to do it. This seemed a little doubtful; anyone who would accuse Kip of making off with Nancy, while in the same breath saying that she couldn't have left the building—

What *was* the answer to that, by the way?

The more he thought about it, the less he liked it. He didn't quite see Nancy jumping out a courtyard window, or going down cellar to cut her throat, but it was possible, he supposed. She might be hiding from some imaginary danger. She might have gone into fugue and be wandering around the building, or on the roof—

The waitress was nowhere in sight. The cashier was talking to a man in a seersucker jacket, and wouldn't turn to look at him. Exasperated, Kip dropped money on the counter and walked out, nearly running down a plump youth who seemed to have his mind on higher things.

The building was on 15th Street in Santa Monica. Kip had never been there and didn't know the neighborhood; the house numbers, as usual, were invisible, so he parked and got out to check.

In the third yard he came to, cross-legged under a lantern bush, sat Nancy Liebert.

She didn't move as he walked toward her. She looked at him or past him, he couldn't tell which. Remembering the cashier and the fat boy in the restaurant, Kip suddenly felt cold. What if those hadn't been coincidences? What would it be like if she couldn't see him—if *nobody* could see him?

"Nancy," he said, tentatively.

Her head turned a little: toward him, or past him? She looked slowly surprised.

"Oh, of course," she said. "You're dead too, Kip."

She got up. "I'm glad I killed you, Kip," she said confidingly. "Now we can be together always, can't we?"

Kip's tenants were buzzing away inside him; he tried to ignore them. "You didn't kill me. I'm alive," he told her.

"Oh, no. If you were alive, you couldn't see me. Live people can't see dead people, Kip. Mother can't see me."

Some high-school-aged kids were straggling down the pavement, all talking at once, clear treble and brand-new bass. Kip glanced at them, then back to Nancy.

"Look, your mother's worried about you—let's go tell her you're all right." He put a hand persuasively on her arm.

She pivoted away from him and stepped back. "Then you don't know yet. Do you want me to show you, Kip? Look."

She backed down the lawn, keeping her eyes on him. She stepped onto the sidewalk squarely in front of the first group of kids.

A girl and two boys were walking abreast. The girl turned to speak to someone behind her, and at the same moment the middle boy jostled the other one; they staggered wrestling into the gutter. In the next breath a commotion broke out behind them: a tall boy dodged into the street with two girls after him, reaching for a handbag that he seemed to be trying to open as he ran. A whoop went up, and then the whole pack was pounding diagonally across the street. Nancy had not moved.

It was all perfectly reasonable—a pure coincidence—or was it?

"See?" said Nancy.

"You aren't invisible," he told her. "They didn't see you, but it was because they were all looking another way."

Nancy nodded. "That's how it was with Mother, too," she said.

Chills paraded up his spine. It was, he realized, a question of definition. A thing that was completely transparent was invisible, like a non-reflecting window; and a thing that was

perfectly camouflaged was invisible, too, like a stick-insect on a twig or a faun in dappled shade. And a thing that nobody ever happened to look at—

What about the feeling he had often had when he was a child, mostly in dark lonely places but sometimes in full daylight too—that he mustn't turn his head, that something horrible would happen if he did?

A man was coming toward them down the walk, striding rapidly, swinging a briefcase; moving a little awkwardly, because his head was turned away as if he were scanning the house-fronts opposite.

Kip moved into his path. "Excuse me," he said.

The man came on, humming under his breath. At the last moment his head jerked down, he darted to the right, stooping, reaching toward something that glittered dully on the pavement: a flattened wad of metal foil. His fingertip spurned it, he straightened, all in the same motion, and walked on. He hadn't touched Kip or looked at him: another coincidence.

Kip breathed heavily for a moment without speaking. Nancy was watching him with her fixed yellow stare and her fixed expectant smile. He took her arm. "Come on," he said.

The crowds on the avenue parted miraculously to let them through. They saw faces turned away, faces staring up, faces staring down. In the drugstore, the girls behind the fountain were in a whispering cluster; the customers were intent on the merchandise; the tobacco clerk was checking his stock.

A man at the directory rack turned away abruptly when Kip reached out to put his hand on the open book. Kip looked up two numbers and went into a booth. Nancy waited outside, with that same stare and that same frozen smile.

The police department did not answer.

Neither did the fire department.

The operator did not answer.

Kip hung up and sat looking at nothing much in the darkness of the narrow booth. He thought of the people who had disappeared, suddenly and completely and forever: Ambrose Bierce, Benjamin Bathurst, Judge Crater. . . . Had they spent

the rest of their lives wandering among faces that were turned away, shouting across gulfs of silence, begging, weeping, praying, writing desperate letters that they knew would never be delivered?

There was one more number he was afraid to call. He dialed it, anyhow, with a steady hand.

Angelica's office did not answer.

. . . But that, it occurred to him after a long bitter moment, would be a switchboard operator like all the rest. He was trembling a little when he dialed Angelica's home number. There was no reason to suppose she'd be home at this hour, but—

"Hello? Hello?"

"Angelica!"

"Kip!" Her voice broke. "Oh, *Kip*. I've been so— Where are you, are you home?"

"No, I'm in a phone booth. In Santa Monica. Look—"

A thin arm came sneaking past his face and tried to pull the receiver away. Nancy's ruined face was leaning into the booth. "Don't talk to her!" she said urgently. "She hasn't any *right*."

He pried her loose and got the receiver back to his ear. ". . . or hear me, it's as if I wasn't there. I called you, but there wasn't any answer. Kip, try to believe me, this isn't a joke—"

"I know," he said. "It's the same with me. Look, my place is nearer. Can you meet me there in half an hour?"

"Yes, but— Yes."

"I'm not kidding you," said Kip tightly, "and you're not going crazy, and it really is happening to both of us. And Nancy Liebert, too. I'll explain when I see you. Okay?"

"All right. See you. . . . *Kip*."

"Yeah."

"Nothing—I'm all right, now. Goodbye."

He discovered that he was still hanging onto Nancy's wrist, hard enough to hurt her. When he let go, her other hand came up to rub it, but otherwise she didn't move, and her too-bright, too-confident smile didn't change.

He hardly noticed. He was remembering something one of the blue men had said, not long ago. He hadn't been paying attention, and one word of it was all he could bring back now; but that was enough. One word:

Quarantine.

III

NANCY, who had not learned to like Angelica any better, was sitting on the edge of the leather chair by the bedroom door. Angelica was on the couch, feet together, hands in her lap, with an oddly watchful expression on her smooth face.

"Can you hear them now?" she asked. "What are they saying?"

Kip listened. "*. . . three-goal man at Poona, tall fella, cast in one eye, couldn't stand the climate . . . first shot, at over a hundred yards, you know; biggest buck I ever . . .*"

"Nothing useful," he said. "The Major's talking about polo, and Dr. O'Leary about hunting. That's all they've been talking about, the last half hour or so. I can't figure it; they sounded so worried before."

"Kip, does it strike you that just maybe you're making all this up without realizing it—all these little blue men inside you?"

"And the quarantine, too?"

She frowned. "No, of course not, but does that necessarily have anything to do—"

"No, look, it all fits together. When I drank the vitamin solution that Nancy put in the prune juice—"

Angelica stood up irritably and reached for an ashtray. "If you had just called the police last night," she said in an undertone, and sat down again.

"But that was after the damage was done," Kip said reasonably. "Anyhow—"

"All right, tell me this, then. This vitamin exists in natural form, doesn't it? Something else breaks it down in the body, you said, but there must have been times when a person had this vitamin in him and not the other thing, whatever it is—"

"L complex."

"All right. Then why hasn't this ever happened to anyone before?"

Kip said, "It *has*. That's what I was trying to tell you. Look, George's vitamins comes from pork liver; L_1 is found in beef liver and L_2 in yeast. There are other sources for all of them, probably, but those are the major ones. So you can figure that anybody who ate a lot of pork and little or no beef or yeast might have his system clear enough of L, every now and then, to catch just a glimpse or two of a ghost. Right? All right, whose diet does that describe—and where do all the traditional ghost stories come from? Goblins, kobolds, banshees; figure them in, too—"

Angelica's eyes widened slightly. "The Irish?"

"The Irish, the Scots, middle Europeans—pastoral peoples, and not cattle herders, either: pig and goat farmers." He ticked them off on his fingers: "Pig. No beef. And unleavened bread—no yeast.

"Add the Chinese and other eastern peoples," he said. "Pig and rice, no bread at all—plenty of ghost stories *and ancestor worship.*"

Angelica was silent for a moment. "And this is the first time the synthetic vitamin has been used," she said. "And that doesn't break down. I see. But surely it'll be used up, eliminated, sooner or later—then all we have to do is wait!"

"I don't think so," said Kip. "Theoretically it ought to, but if that were all there was to it, I can't figure why they'd be in such a sweat. I think they think it's going to last. And," he added, "if it was just waiting, I don't even know I could do that, for long. It's kind of rough."

Nancy said unexpectedly, "What does it feel like, Kip?"

He thought about it. "Crawly," he said. "Dirty, inside."

Angelica shuddered and looked away; Nancy merely nodded. "That's what I thought."

Kip looked at her intently; he started to speak, thought better of it, and turned to the paper parcel on the table.

"What's that?" asked Angelica.

Kip was taking bottles, vials, pasteboard boxes out of the parcel and arranging them neatly on the tabletop. "I picked

these up before I left the drugstore," he said. "Antispasmodics. Desiccants. Stimulants." He showed her a vial and a hypodermic syringe. "Adrenalin. Hope I won't need that, but you never know."

Angelica's eyebrows went up and down in the are-you-kidding gesture. "And what's *that*?"

"Incense," said Kip, spilling the little brown cones into an ashtray. "I hate the stuff."

Her lips tightened. "Kip—if you don't mind—?"

"Just a minute." He carried the hypodermic into the kitchenette, washed it, and put it into a saucepan to boil. He rummaged in the cabinet, found a bulb of garlic and a can of red pepper, and brought them back in with him.

"I wanted to get that started—it'll take a few minutes." He grunted. "They've shut up. I think they're beginning to catch on. Anyhow, it won't do any harm to tell you, I guess, because they'll know soon enough even if they haven't already read it in my mind. I'm going to exorcise them. E-x-*o*-r."

Angelica said nothing. Nancy giggled suddenly.

"After I tried a couple of obvious things like radiation and vibration, and they didn't work, I got to thinking about the traditional approach. Incantation, prayer, fasting, flagellation and so on. I had the usual prejudice, I guess—I thought it was all a lot of nonsense, but it wasn't. Those are all perfectly good lease-breaking methods. When you want to get rid of a tenant who's wrecking the place, and he won't budge, what do you do? You annoy the bejesus out of him!

"The only trouble was, they didn't use the principle selectively enough. Suppose you happened to hit the ghost of a devout masochist with frugal tastes? The prayers wouldn't bother him, he wouldn't care about eating, and the whipping would make him feel right at home. But *I know* what my tenants don't like."

Angelica was beginning to look interested. "How can you be so sure?"

"Easy. I've got four tenants. One of 'em was a British army officer, one owned a hacienda, one was a sea captain, and the other was a dentist with a passion for hunting. All outdoor-

men. Not one of them ever read a book for pleasure in his life. Okay. You remember that time I was telling you about yesterday—when I got sick? What did I do afterwards? I spent a season logging—and hunting when I had time. I shipped out, I worked on a ranch and in a boys' camp, and so on and so on . . . and here I am, in a job that keeps me outdoors and doesn't require me to read any books, and gives me plenty of free time to swim and play tennis and hike and hunt—and I don't mind telling you the thought's occurred to me more than once that if I ever got rich, I'd buy a string of polo ponies."

Something kindled in Angelica's eyes that he'd been missing; something he thought he'd heard in her voice on the phone, only to be disappointed when she turned up half an hour later, cool and self-possessed and faintly watchful. "Kip, that's— You've *got* to get rid of them!"

"Sure."

"But what about the drugs? I don't see where they fit in."

"If they can control other people, even at a distance, to make them forget to look where one of us happens to be—then I don't find it hard to believe they can play tunes on my nervous system if they feel like it. I think I'm going to get awful sick again."

The hypodermic ought to be sterile by now; he fished it out, put it together, filled it from the ampule, and laid it ready on the table, with a clean dishtowel under it. "You know how to use this, if you have to?" he asked Angelica. She nodded, her eyes big and intent.

He pulled down all the blinds and closed the curtains. In the dimness, the floor lamp made a sharp cone of yellow light. He moved it over near the table and put a straight chair under it; then he crossed to the bookcase and pulled out a thin volume in a red and yellowed-gray jacket. "All my law books are in storage," he said, "but this ought to do. Wiener's *Cybernetics*—I bought it five years ago and never got past chapter one."

He went back to the kitchenette and adjusted the faucet to a steady slow drip. He hesitated, looking over the collec-

tion of things on the table—but everything was ready; there was no reason to wait any longer.

He sat down under the light, touched a match to the incense cones and watched the gray smoke curl up. *Tonk,* said the faucet in the silence.

He opened the book and began to read aloud.

"If the original group is the translation group on the infinite line, so that the operator T changes x into $x+T$, (2.03) becomes: (*Tonk*)

"(2.06) $f(x+T) = \alpha(T)\, f(x)$,

"which is satisfied if $f(x) = e^{i\lambda x}, \alpha(T) = e^{i\lambda T}$. The characters (*Tonk*) will be the functions $e^{i\lambda x}$, and the character group will be the group of translations changing λ into $\lambda+\pi$, thus having the same structure (*Tonk*) as the original group. . . ."

Kip's voice was hoarse. Beadlets of sweat were breaking in the furrow between his brows and trickling down; his eyes blurred and stung. He groped for the clove of garlic on the table, shaved off another bitter, oily bite of it between his front teeth, and kept on reading, concentrating, following the argument.

The incense was getting so thick that it was like trying to breathe cologne. His feet were asleep, and the hard chair was giving him a beautiful case of lecture-room cramp.

"In the case of the group of rotations on a circle, this (*Tonk*) gives us directly that if

"(2.10) $f(x) = \sum a_n e^{inx},$" (*Tonk*)

His stomach lurched.

"then:

"(2.11) $a_n = \frac{1}{2\pi}\int^{2\pi} f(x) e^{inx} dx;$" (*Tonk*)

It lurched again; Kip began to wonder if three antispasmodic pills were going to be enough. He took another, and washed it down with cola.

Time (*tonk*) passed.

He felt a growing reasonless panicky urge to turn his head aside, to get up from the chair, to close the book. It was a hard thing to fight, even though he knew what it was, but he found he could do it: it was knowing, and having a reason to fight, that made the difference.

He lit a cigarette from the butt of the old one, and kept on reading. When the equations blurred and jumped, or when he found himself reading without understanding, he grimly went back and started over.

His stomach squirmed. He took another pill.

His heartbeat speeded up. He took a sedative.

His nostrils began to itch. He sneezed convulsively, blew his nose, sneezed again. His eyes were watering, his nostrils filling with mucus, his lips and throat and the membranes of his eyelids were bloating. As the seizure mounted, he fumbled for the antispasmodics and desiccants and took a triple dose.

It got worse; his nose was so choked that he couldn't breathe through it; he couldn't see no matter how often he wiped his eyes. Then his throat began to constrict. Wheezing sounds came out of him. He couldn't take a full breath—he couldn't *breathe*.

It was worse than he had ever imagined it could be.

Somebody's fingers were prying at his wrist. He let go the book and felt small hard shapes being pressed into his palm —two of damned near everything, by the feel. He swallowed them, put out his hand again and found a glass. Water, thank God; he couldn't have stood any more of the cola.

"Kip, I'm *sorry*—" Angelica's voice said from a long way off.

Very slowly the worst of it went away. When he could speak he said, "Thanks, Angel." When he could see, and had enough breath left over, he raised the book again and began where he had left off, reading a phrase, stopping to breathe through his mouth, reading another.

(*Tonk*) "Note that this expression (3.091) is positive, and that it is independent of w. It is one-half the log-

rithm of the ratio of the sum (*Tonk*) of the mean squares of u and v, to the mean square of v. If v has only a small range of variation, the amount of information concerning (*Tonk*) u which a knowledge of $u+v$ gives is large . . ."

The headache began. One massive dose of methadon—all he dared take, with half the pharmacopoeia in him already —sprung the jaws of the vise far enough apart to let him think again; and no farther.

He read on. The warmth of the light on the back of his neck spread around to his cheeks and forehead. It grew. Kip thought of fever, but the rest of his body was still cool, and he didn't have the light-headedness or the skin sensitivity that go with fever.

"Kip, your *face!*"

He touched his forehead, and felt squashy serum-filled blisters that broke under his fingers. There was nothing to do about blisters, and the pain wasn't intense; it was just bad enough to be a convenient distraction from his other troubles.

"That is, the transformation group (*Tonk*) consisting of the operators T which change $f(t)$ into $f(t+\lambda)$ leaves the probability of the ensemble Invariant. The group satisfies the prop- (*Tonk*) -erties that . . ."

Little muscular tremors began to travel down his arms and legs and trunk. He was bouncing uncontrollably in the chair; the book joggled, his head nodded and his jaw shook. Stabs of pain tweaked him all over. Bursts of idiot emotion followed them: despair, hatred, fury, fear.

To Kip, it was as if his body had been taken away from him: he himself was somewhere inside, a tiny straphanger clinging desperately to one thread of purpose. As long as he hung on the letters would keep bouncing across the screen, and that giant voice that wasn't his any more would keep roaring and groaning and jerking out their meanings; but if he once let go—

The screen went dark.

The shock was enough to swell Kip out to man size again, and as he sat in the chair, in his own private darkness, feeling

such a torrent of anguish and despair as he'd never known before.

Trumps. *If you can't see, you can't read.* He had no card to play against that. He was done.

The book twitched out of his hand.

A strained voice began reading: " 'For example, for quite a wide class of functions *f* of *t* where minus infinity is less than *t* which is less than infinity, we have fully determined *f* when we know the set of quantities: three seventeen—*a* sub *n* equals the integral between minus infinity and zero of *e* to the *t*, *t* to the *n*, *f* of *t*, *d* of *t*: *n* equals zero, one, two and so on. Now let A be some function of the values of *t* in the future: that is, for arguments greater than zero. Then we can determine the simultaneous distribution of *a* zero, *a* one and so on up to *a* sub *n* and A . . ."

He hung on gratefully in the roaring darkness. The tension in the room squeezed slowly tighter like a fist; everything grew more unbearable all at once, the pain, the nausea, the itch—and then, all at once, everything stopped.

The blindness lifted. He was free.

And he realized for the first time that the voice which was still reading was not Angelica's; it was Nancy's.

"Are they really gone?"

"I think so," said Kip numbly. He felt peculiar inside; it was a thing he couldn't put a name to, a sensation he couldn't remember ever having felt before. He looked up. Angelica's eyes were shining; and he realized with a queer shock that he didn't feel any particular way about that. It was as if—there was nothing inside him telling him how he *ought* to feel. That was a funny thought, too. Had there ever been?

He was too busy exploring inside himself to wonder about it. *Major?* he said silently. *Don Nobilio?* There was no answer, only a hollow feeling, a little like the echo in an empty apartment. It was peculiar. He wasn't even sure he liked it.

"Hm?"

"I said, sorry I couldn't help," Angelica told him.

"Uh, but you did, didn't you? Those pills, before?"

She shook her head unhappily. "I was over by the door. I'm sorry. Kip, I wanted to help, I thought I could. But that's something I can't stand—sickness, or any kind of—" She glanced at Nancy and looked away.

Deformity was the word, probably. Nancy was standing across the table, the book still in her hands, the same smile on her face. Kip was beginning to wish something would break that smile; it looked like a thing that had been fastened onto her, hurting her.

". . . When the blisters started, I couldn't take it," Angelica was saying. "You look a lot better now; how do you feel?"

"All right," said Kip abstractedly. "Nancy, I owe you a lot. I mean— Thank you."

"You're welcome," said Nancy politely.

What was going on inside that head? She didn't do things at random; all her responses were ordered and purposeful, they just came out of the wrong slots, kind of—like gum when you put a nickel in for candy. He knew what was wrong with her: at least he knew the name for it, but the name was only a label, useful for identification and for covering up ignorance. What's that? Psychoneurosis. What's psychoneurosis? *That.*

But what was it really, that could get into your mind and change everything around so that everything that happened to you and everything you did was like an untranslatable passage in a foreign language?

"Kip, how do you feel about *things*?" said Angelica.

He looked at her blankly. "Things?"

"Your work, and your job," she said, her tone making it clear that she meant altogether different things.

"I don't know," he said slowly. There was still that curious emptiness, and the more he tried to define it in some other way, the more forcibly it reminded him of an empty house: the vacancy where you expected to find a familiar table or chair or lamp. "I can do whatever I want now, I suppose. . . . Maybe I'll go back to school. At night."

"Take you a long time to get your degree that way."

He said, "Huh?" and then, "Oh. You mean the law. Funny, I hadn't even thought of it."

"Well, what else—?"

"There were a lot of things I couldn't fit into my schedule before. Abnormal psych, sociology, comparative literature—and that course in the history of the movies. . . . No more law, I don't think. I'd be picking it up a little late."

"Well, but you can do it, Kip. My boss passed his bar exams when he was forty! If you want it badly enough—"

"That's just the thing," Kip said. "I don't."

"You don't."

"No. That must have been just a kid thing, after all. Hero worship, maybe—my Uncle Austin was a pretty well-known trial lawyer. You remember, the one I was telling you about —"

"The one who fell off the ladder," said Angelica expressionlessly.

"Yeah, he— *Oh-oh.*"

"What's the matter?"

Kip blinked twice before his eyes focused again. "Well, nothing, except—I just happened to remember. It was *after* Uncle Austin fell off the ladder that I got this big yen to be a lawyer. Right after; the same day. I remember, I felt all noble about it at the time—I was going to carry on where he left off, pick up the torch and so forth. . . . Jesus."

"I don't get it," said Angelica.

He looked at her pretty, impatient face and at Nancy's frozen one. "Suppose when Uncle Austin died, his gang of spooks moved into me? My God, is that what makes lawyers? I always kind of wondered about it, myself. . . . I must have been about fourteen that year. And then along about eight years later—wait a minute, I've got to think."

He knuckled his temples for a moment, then looked up.

"The only way it makes sense is if this happens to people a lot oftener than I thought. I get one gang at fourteen. For all I know there may have been others before that, but say there weren't. Maybe up till puberty a kid's no good for them —too sexless, too alien. But you'd think puberty itself'd scare

them away; I was a mess—" His eyes widened. He glanced at Nancy involuntarily, then shook his head.

"No, it couldn't be. That would mean everybody's got them—it's bad enough this way. Anyway, eight years later —no, say six or seven—I remember the Major talking about how long it took them to whip me into line. . . ." He grimaced. "Call it six—that would make me twenty, and that was the year I had my first serious love affair. You could argue that that marks another level of maturity, as important as adolescence. I know I felt that way about it, anyway. And wham, the first batch leaves or gets kicked out, and another one moves in. The question is—"

"Say what you were going to say before," Nancy interrupted. "Was it something about me?"

"No, not about you, Nancy. I was just thinking, what if I had it backwards—what if it was the first tenants moving in that caused all the—the skin disorders and the emotional upsets and so on? Instead of the other way around. But I hope to blazes that was just a wild thought, with nothing to back it up, because— Oh, *no!*"

Angelica stood up in one motion and took a step toward him. They were both staring at him, looking a question. After that first instant he didn't look at his shoulder, but he could hear the little voices mumbling and squeaking at him, like the sounds of mice inside a wall.

"Seven of them," he said dully. "Different ones."

IV

"HAVE YOU found out anything?" Angelica asked.

Kip finished pouring the third cup of coffee and loaded it onto his tray. "Some," he said. "Not enough." He looked around for silverware, found it, and took three of everything. "This stuff is going to get cold before we get it upstairs."

"All right, but you don't want to eat it down here, do you?"

He looked at the backs of the two cooks, the salad-counter girl and the waitress, all clustered down at the other end of the kitchen. "No, I guess not. Okay, eggs, toast, coffee, milk —what about that damned breakfast fodder for Nancy—oh, you got it? Let's go."

They shouldered out through the swinging doors into the half-empty dining room. A hotel had seemed the obvious answer last night; the quarantine, they'd discovered, was still on, if it had ever been off at all, and there wasn't room for everybody at Kip's. They'd driven around downtown L.A. looking at room lists till they struck a place that had a vacant second-floor suite. Then all they had to do was take the key out of the box behind the room clerk's oblivious back, and move in.

One trouble was that there wasn't any room service.

They couldn't use the elevator, either, unless they waited for somebody who was going to their floor. So far they hadn't even tried it. It was getting to be actively unpleasant to be near other people; for Kip and Angelica, at any rate—if Nancy found this state of affairs harder to take than her ordinary life, it didn't show.

Back in the suite, it was better. The sitting room was quiet and secure; the walls closed it in; there was an air of shipwreck about it, or of world's end, but at least all the corpses were outside.

The eggs were cold, all right, but the coffee was gratefully hot. "Kip, *can* you tell us anything?" said Angelica.

Kip, who hadn't slept, rubbed his whiskery chin irritably. He had brought a razor along, but he didn't feel up to looking in any mirrors.

His population had increased to eight overnight.

"The two new ones are named Tom and Cliff," he said. "I don't know much about them, except they're brothers. The other ones—there's Pappacostas, he was a wine merchant. He sings hymns in Greek, but I don't think he sings them the way they were written; he laughs like hell when he gets through. Burke—had an auto agency, hated his wife. That's all he talks about. Schleiser—ran a pool room, likes the horses. Ottley—worked for the telephone company, talks about women. Freeman won't tell what he did for a living. Levinson was an offset stripper, whatever that is. Not burlesque, anyhow—something to do with commercial lithography. Leeuwerink—he was a jeweler, the kind that makes rings, not the kind that sells them. Used to raise pigeons."

Angelica waited. "Is that all?"

"Makes nine," said Kip, and bit a piece of toast as if it were a throat.

"But is that all you know about them? I'm sorry—but it isn't enough, is it?"

"No."

"You have to find out what they *don't* like."

"Right."

"How much longer do you think it'll take?"

Kip set his fork down. "I don't know," he said with great restraint. "They don't like each other, most of them. That isn't much help. The other time, it was no problem, because they had me trained—what they didn't like, *I* didn't like. Maybe it'll take months or years for that to happen again. I dunno. I've been knocking myself out, trying to think of a way—"

"They don't sound like intellectuals. Why wouldn't the book work again?"

"Tried it last night. Nothing. Either it just didn't bother

them, or one thing isn't enough—you have to hit them with half a dozen of the things they hate the most, all at once."

Nancy patted her lips delicately with a paper napkin and said, "Why don't you try doing a lot of different things?"

For a minute they had forgotten she was there. Kip blinked at her. "It's an idea," he said cautiously. "Go to the zoo, drink beer, ride a bus, smell flowers, look at a policeman—Why not?"

"Ice cream and pickles," said Kip gloomily, and crossed it off his list. "Now what?"

They sat in a row on the curbstone and thought about it. The list was a long one: *beer, policeman, flowers, bus, concert, juke box, zoo, lecture, church, haute cuisine, chow mein, tamales* . . . Most of the items were crossed off; a few had question marks beside them.

They had one success, early in the day: half a glass of a popular alcoholic beverage, which tasted like sweetened grape juice only less so, had made Kip violently sick. He kept drinking the stuff between spasms, while Angelica chanted "Kyrie Eleison," and when the bottle was gone so was Pappacostas, the wine merchant.

But none of the others, apparently, was that simple.

"You've had enough to eat and drink for a while, I guess," said Angelica. "What about some more noises? Boiler factory?"

"Know where there is one?"

"No, but there are plenty of aircraft plants."

So they tried an aircraft plant. They walked down a long aisle, under lights that turned all the pink in their skins to a hecotograph purple, and made Nancy's face into something you would only look at once; past an enclosure where a Negro girl was punching neat holes in an aluminum stamping; past a bigger place where two men and a girl in overalls were doing nothing at all to a partly assembled plane; past an office where a stout man was waddling rapidly on flat feet from a bench to a set of vertical files on the other side of the room, and back again; past the doorway of a beaverboard

hut inside which, in front of a beaverboard barrier, sat a frog-faced plant policeman.

Angelica stopped and looked thoughtful. She said something Kip didn't catch, in the din.

"What?"

"Said that would be the experimental design section," she shouted in his ear. "Very hush-hush!"

"I guess so." He started to move on, but she put a hand on his arm.

"Kip, we could just walk in there."

"Well, sure. But why would you want to?"

She looked irritated. "I *don't* want to. I was just thinking —I don't know why I never thought of this before—"

He waited, but she seemed to have forgotten about him He touched her on the shoulder.

"Kip, you can spare me for a couple of hours, *can't* you?"

"Well—yeah but what's this about hush-hush—"

"Kip, listen, won't you? I know you're going to lick this thing soon, and then the quarantine will be over. I can't pass this up; I must have been blind—I could kick myself. Don't you see? If I can find out what Magnusson and Sweeney are going to do at the council meeting Thursday—it would mean so much! Is it all right? I'll meet you back at the hotel tonight sometime: okay?"

"Sure," said Kip, trying not to notice how hollow he felt inside. "Hey, wait—you want to take my car?"

She hesitated, then took the keys. "All right, then—you can take the bus from here. See you!" She vanished down the aisle, running, people melting out of her path as she went.

It was a long ride back on the bus, and Nancy sat stiffly with her arm through his all the way.

He didn't want to be alone in any hotel room with Nancy, so he led her on a long tour up Broadway and down Spring, stopping every few yards to try something else, although he was sick of it and had no hope for it at all. They wandered through the five and dime handling the cutlery and tools, looking at goldfish, sniffing cosmetics; they tried oranges and gimcrack jewelry, stopped at a movie for twenty minutes of

Betty Grable, looked at copies of the *Times*, the *Mirror* and the *Christian Science Monitor*, went into a garage for the smells and a ballroom for the noise, smoked rum-flavored cigarettes, watched Edward R. Murrow on television and petted a stray cat. It took them two hours; nothing did any good; and when they got back to the suite Angelica still was not there.

Kip got the Gideon Bible out of his room and read half the begats to Nancy because he was desperate, and some of the ordinances in Leviticus because they had once amused him, and David's lament for Jonathan because he liked it. And a little after midnight Angelica came in.

She was bright-eyed and rosy. She looked as if she had played three fast sets of tennis and swum a mile, and as if she were on her way now, not even breathing hard, to collect murderous looks from women at a cocktail party.

"How was it?" Kip asked.

She sat down beside him on the couch, not the way most women would have done it—in three stages, each preceded by a cautious peek at the area to be honored—but all at once, thump, as poised and sure as a flung javelin. "It was wonderful. I couldn't locate Sweeney; he seems to be out of town. But I found Magnusson talking to Weiss, and I know they're going to meet Sweeney tomorrow morning, and I know where. How did you two make out?"

"Not so good."

"I'm sorry. But you'll get it tomorrow, I know you will. As soon as I get back, we'll hit it together. It won't take long. You believe that, don't you, Kip?"

"Sure."

"If we started now," said Nancy to no one in particular, "it would be quicker."

Angelica glanced at her, frowned, and turned to Kip. "I should have explained before, but there wasn't time—probably it sounds very silly, but this meeting Thursday isn't just an ordinary Council session; the whole election may turn on it . . . and it is, or it could be, awfully important. How do you feel? Is it very bad, can you hold out till tomorrow afternoon?"

It was getting hard for Kip to listen to long sentences; he was like a man straining to hear the telephone at a Saturday night brawl. "*. . . comes up t' me with a mumble piecea pipe innis hand . . . mumble pretty potted, so I grabbed her by the . . . second time, you understand, twice in a row, mumble, and I don't take that kind of mumble . . .*" "It's okay," he said fuzzily. "Tomorrow's swell."

"You're sure."

"Sure."

Angelica went off to bed, meaning to be up and stirring betimes, and after a while Kip went too, but not to sleep. He heard Nancy moving around in the bathroom, and then her door closed, and the silence settled down: the thick, muffled silence that belongs to hotels at night, and is deeper than most because it's built of layer on layer of sounds just too faint to hear.

The voices inside him went on, loud against that background, and he lay blind in the darkness listening to them. How long could you go on like this? After a month or a year, if you lasted that long, could you get so used to that interior gabble that you wouldn't hear it at all?

It didn't seem to matter much. There was a slow shifting and settling in his mind, and it ended with the spark of his awareness on one side, and all the pain on the other: still there, close enough to touch, and just as bad as ever, but it was as if he were looking at it through a window . . . or down into the darkening depths of ocean. . . .

The sedative he'd taken was beginning to work, he realized fuzzily. Then he was adrift, turning slowly in space, while his outlines melted and expanded, and the darkness flowed into him until they were one.

He came awake slowly with the fragment of a dream in his mind. For a moment he thought he was still dreaming, and that the voices were part of it, because they were talking about the blonde girl: but the bright, hot picture faded and the voices didn't.

"(*chortle*) *boy, what a pair of . . . how'd you like to* (*laughter*) . . ."

He was tangled in the bedclothes and clammy with sweat. The air was cool and fresh; the windows were visible as oblongs of gray on black. It must be near morning.

They were watching my dream, he thought, and was suddenly so sickened that he couldn't bear to hear the voices any longer. He set up a competing clamor in his own mind: songs, recorded memories of Sousa marches, football crowds, bowling alleys, anything. Gradually the voices quieted, but he clung to the memories, more coherent and more vivid now: Saturday afternoon, with the air crisp and cool and the bleachers a honeycomb of faces . . . football tumbling slowly down the blue sky over the goalposts . . . Evelyn Nesbitt, sitting across the table from him in the Grog Shop . . . Mary Clyde, the little brunette he'd dated in Snoqualmie . . . and Angelica. Angelica. Angelica. . . .

He was standing barefoot beside the bed with the switch of the bedside lamp in his fingers, blinking at the sudden warm light.

What *about* this?

He had found himself thinking about Angelica lying asleep in the next room: not Angelica the girl who meant "No" when she said it and would never be coy about saying "Yes" if she meant that; and not Angelica the eager politician, but just Angelica, softly and warmly asleep in the darkness.

It was wrong: not because it said so in any book but because it had never been like that between him and Angelica, and perhaps now it never would be.

And even now, he realized with shame and horror, he didn't care.

He didn't care if she fought him. He didn't care if she screamed.

There was a waiting silence inside him, and that somehow made it worse. It would have been easier if they had been talking to him, urging, insinuating; his anger would have helped.

He bent over numbly, found his clothes and began putting them on.

One lamp was glowing at the far end of the sitting room.

Someone was kneeling in front of it, a cusp of light along her her red hair: Nancy. He tried to get past her quietly, but she turned before he reached the door.

"Kip?" She got up awkwardly and came toward him; her dress hung loosely on her, unbelted and unbuttoned. She saw his face, and stopped. "What's the matter, Kip?"

"Nothing." He got the door open. The voices were beginning again; it was intolerable—he hadn't even noticed that Nancy was wearing nothing under her dress, but *they* had. . . . He slammed the door on her "Where you *going?*" and ran for the stairs.

A little rose-pearl light was beginning to filter up over the tops of the buildings to the east. Under it, the city was cold and gray. Kip paused for a moment to look at a ragged man asleep in a doorway. Was anybody inside him, watching his dreams?

Footsteps clattered after him down the pavement. He turned. It was Nancy. She had stopped to put on shoes and a coat, and she was carrying something under her arm.

She halted a few feet away, and held the things out—his raincoat, rolled up into a bundle. "I thought you might need this," she said doubtfully.

"Thanks."

She stood waiting, and he realized that she wasn't going to make a stink, or follow him if he asked her not to. "You really want to help, don't you?" he said.

She nodded soberly. "I'm—trying."

"All right. Come on."

She trotted along beside him. "Where are we going?"

"We're looking for a box," he told her, and kept going, hands swinging clenched at his sides, while the blood beat at his temples *Angelica—'gelica—'gelica. . . .*

It took them a long time, wandering down back alleys, before Kip found what he wanted: a heavy crate, not quite five feet high and about twenty inches wide. He got into it to see if he could, and Nancy stared at him round-eyed but didn't ask any questions.

When he dropped the thing in the middle of the sitting-room carpet and straightened up, he noticed for the first time that his duffel bag was open and the things that ought to have been in it were scattered on the floor—all but one. The incense tray he'd bought yesterday at the drug store was on the end table under the lamp. It was a cheap piece of stamped, black-enameled tin, probably made in Brooklyn, and stuck onto the rim of it was a gold-enameled figurine of a cow.

A gilded cow.

Or a golden calf.

He turned and looked at Nancy. "You weren't—"

"I've prayed," she said, "to everybody else."

There was pain in those fixed eyes, so deep and so full that it hurt him to look, and he couldn't look away.

He put his hands on her shoulders. "Nancy—"

"But nobody answers, ever—do they."

After a moment he let go. "No," he said, "I guess they don't."

Angelica was coming into the room, fresh and rosy, knotting the belt of her robe. Her expression of faint surprise turned to something sharper when she saw the box. "Kip, what's this for?"

"The usual thing," he told her. "I can't wait any more, Angel—I thought I could, last night, but it's a lot worse now. I can't even tell you how bad it is. It's got to be now. I'm sorry."

"You—" she began, and sucked at her lower lip. "All right, if that's how it is, of course, Kip." She looked at the box again. "What are you going to do with this?"

"Just get into it and stay there," he said tightly, "until this gang of ghouls gets out of me. Or until I die."

"But you don't know it will work—"

"It'll work." He bent over and squeezed himself crabwise into the crate. It was just big enough to contain him, head down, knees bent; he couldn't sit down in it, and he couldn't stand. "There was something I forgot—didn't want to remember, maybe. Some things nobody likes, except masochists,

and I haven't got any of them. The old formula. Flagellation. Rack, thumbscrew, water torture." He tried to grin. "This is the same thing, only more modern. Cheaper and just as efficient."

He added, "It takes awhile, though, so if you want to go—"

She hesitated, looking down at him, sober and concerned. "Kip, I *hate* to go— All right. I'll be back," she said, turning, "as soon as I can."

She was dressed and gone in five minutes, and then the room was very quiet. Nancy sat on the couch, feet together, hands in her lap, watching and saying nothing. Kip crouched in his box.

After the first minute his knees and the back of his neck had begun to ache. His head was jammed into the angle between the top and side of the crate; he could lower it a fraction of an inch, but he couldn't raise it; his knees were as far down the narrow space as they would go.

Later the ache spread to his shoulders and chest. It was exactly like a heavy metal chest plate; he could feel the weight of it every time he breathed.

Still later, it was his ankles. He was able to move his feet a little, but each change of position relieved him only for a few seconds; then the knob of pain swelled again in each ankle, worse than before.

Then the cramps began: in calves, thighs, chest, groin.

He was breathing in short, sharp gasps. In his constricted chest his heart thudded irregularly like a trapped thing, and the pulse-beat slammed at his temples, as if it would burst the skin. The weight against his head and shoulders was Atlas' burden, the whole earth.

That's enough, the voice inside him kept saying; *you tried, you did all you could. Give it up—you just couldn't make it, that's all. Nobody could do a thing like this to himself.* His body sagged outward. It would be so easy— *Sure, easy,* the voices said; *just let go—*

Somewhere inside, deeper than the voices, he found a thing to hang onto. He moved his body the fraction of an

inch that meant he was staying in instead of falling out. The torment went on.

After a long time Nancy came over and wiped his forehead with a cool, damp cloth. He squinted up at her.

"All right?" she asked.

"Sure," he said thickly. "Nancy."

"What, Kip?"

"Light me a cigarette."

She went away and came back with one. He could see her fingers shaking as she put the match to it. She held it out, and it was the one thing he wanted most in the world.

"Changed my mind," he said. "You smoke it." After a moment she started to move away, and he said, "No, stay here Smoke it here."

He watched the tip glow and saw the smoke curl out, blue from the burning end, fog-gray from her lips. He smelled it and his racked body went hollow with hunger. She smoked it down to a half-inch of butt before he let her go.

Another idea stirred in him through the pain and the long ing, and he said, "Nancy. Go get me—bottle of rye. A fifth And two quarts, beer. Go ahead." Her skirts rustled away He muttered to himself, "Get swacked on boilermakers Stand anything. Stay here forever, drunk."

She was gone a long time.

She came back hurrying, door slamming behind her, and set the paper bag down clunk on the carpet, breathing hard. She looked at him wordlessly.

"Open it," he said.

She took the bottles out and set them in a row. She reached into the bag again and pulled out a bottle opener. "No," said Kip, and paused for a breath.

"Break 'em."

She stared at him a moment and then stood up with a bottleneck in each hand. Leaning over, holding them away from her skirt, she swung the two bottles together. The fifth shattered at the bottom; whisky splashed her ankles. She dropped what was left of the broken bottle, picked up the other quart of beer and bashed again, harder. Glass flew

Kip heard a piece of it rattle inside his crate, and saw a drop of blood well from the inside of Nancy's calf. She didn't notice it. She looked at the one bottle that was still stubbornly intact, and then she stooped for the opener, wrenched the cap off and held the bottle upside down while the beer glugged out.

Kip closed his eyes involuntarily. When he forced himself to look again, the frothy puddle was already soaking into the carpet. It smelled like all the distilleries and breweries in creation; there were jagged bits of glass and a soaked paper bag mixed up in it. It was a mess, and it was more than that: it was the pure instinctive essence of tragedy; the seized candy, the drowned kitten—

The waste, the waste. . . .

Hot tears leaked out of his eyes. Then he felt a spasm of rage; then nothing but the slow waves of sensation that pulsed up and down his numb body.

Somebody was shaking his shoulder. "Kip, Kip!"

He blinked and squinted. "Wha—?"

"You were falling asleep."

" 'S right." He had been just about to dream something, too—something languorously pleasant, gone now like a burst soap bubble. Danger. That waiting stillness inside him— He scrubbed his face with his palms. "Nancy, gimme pill. The li'l white ones."

"Wait a minute." She came back with the pills, two of them, a glass of water and a straw from God knows where—she must have brought it up with the beer.

The light from outdoors slowly brightened. He had been in the box—how long? Two hours? Three? Elsewhere men had suffered this same torment for days on end, and without breaking. If they could do it, he could.

I'll stay here forever, he told them. *If you get out and then come back, I'll climb into the box again. As long as you stay, as long as I live, it'll be just like this.*

There was a sense of pressures building up inside him . . . and something else, another almost-movement nearby. It was disquieting; he strained to feel what it was, but he couldn't.

The pressures grew.

"All right—sucker," said one of the voices.

Something burst. There was a brief flurry of incorporeal motion.

The second group of tenants was out.

And the third was in.

V

WHEN HE HAD enough liquor in him, like now, he could still hear the voices, all right, but they were a long way away and he didn't have to listen. He saw the little blue faces gibbering wrathfully at him every now and then, when he forgot and looked in a bar mirror. They hated it when he didn't listen, but there wasn't much they could do about it. They *wanted* him to be drunk, most of them; they just didn't like how tough it was to make him do other things.

Funny how he'd never liked to get drunk before—only once or twice a year, maybe, and then more for the hell of it than anything else. This was the way to be, with the high thin singing in his ears, and his brain turning smooth and oily-bright to the pull of some cockeyed star.

And the liquor was free, because nobody knew he was there at all.

He choked and sprayed chewed peanut down the front of his jacket, over an old liquor stain. He rubbed at it automatically, noticing how thin his fingers had got. He'd been losing a lot of weight, the last few days, and his clothes hung on him funny. And he hadn't bothered much with shaving or washing either, but that was all right. That was fine, because when he did forget and look in the back-bar mirror, it wasn't a face he recognized at all, it was some other guy with those little blue monsters squatting on his shoulders.

The only trouble was—

The only *trouble* was—

The, only, trouble, was, there was nobody to fight. That was it. That was one of the things the voices wanted him to do the most, and he couldn't, because— Well, where was the fun in slugging somebody that didn't even know you were there, and couldn't slug back? Fish in a barrel. He could flatten any of them. That big guy in the leather jacket

with his back against the bar, shot glass in his fingers like a thimble. He could stand in front of him and measure him and put him can over teacup over that bar, him and his leather jacket. But he wouldn't.

. . . hit him anyway HIT the lousy . . .

Shut up.

There was another trouble, but he didn't remember what it was. He didn't *want* to remember that he didn't want to know what it was, that was the way it was. And that worked out perfect, because when he was as drunk as this he couldn't remember what it was that he didn't want to remember that he didn't know *what*. Only sometimes it bothered him, and it had something to do with—

Never mind her.

Her who?

Never mind.

Time he was getting out of this rotten joint, anyhow. *Break the mirror.* That's right. He picked up the bar bottle with its plastic spout, still heavy, he'd only had about four shots out of it, and swung it to a swift star of white glass tinkling icy echoes out of itself down among the bottles, clinketa clank. He saw the heads turning on one string all over the room, and that was that. He walked out of the place favoring his bunions in the same little island of clear space in the middle of the crowd that he walked in wherever he went. And the rainwet street was just as dark in between the cold bulbs and as shabby and lonesome as it had been before.

Let them figure that out.

He walked up the street looking in at bars, but they all had busted mirrors; that was how he marked them so he would know not to go in the same crummy joint twice. If they put in a new mirror, all right, he would have a few drinks and bust it again. But lately they were just boarding them up, and he was running out of bars.

The burleycue across the street was closed; that was the one where he threw the eggs that time, and then came back next night and squirted seltzer on the broads and started a riot, because they ought to know better than pass off a rotten

sleasy show like that for burleycue. The one up the block was still running, but he'd seen the show and it wasn't much better. World was going to the dogs. Burleycue with three baggy strippers, each one old enough to be the other one's mother, good God, and a little spit of whisky for half a dollar, when it used to be all you could drink in one swallow out of a rubber hose for a nickel, and a man that knew how to hold his breath could fall down dead drunk when he let go. And nobody to fight an honest fight with.

He passed two cops walking tandem and looking fierce the other way, and then half a block later another two. There was the dirty-magazine store closed up and padlocked where he made the snowstorm with paper, and the record shop where he broke all the records. Boards on the pawnshop window; that was the time he saw a wristwatch he wanted, and where the *hell* was that wristwatch now? He felt his bony wrist. Gone. He must have thrown it down a sewer, or something.

Played out. Damn town never was any good, bunch of flatfooted hillbillies in flowered shirts, give a dime for the lot of them and get two cents change. Best thing to do be hop a coaster up to Frisco or Seattle. *Now about those movie studios, though? Go take a look at the starlets . . .*

No. Think I don't know when it's you talking, not me? Don't like how I do, get the hell out, you will anyway—can't even keep track of your names anymore. What am I, a lousy transient hotel?

Yes.

A flophouse? With dirt an inch deep on the old curved banisters, and damp peeling wallpaper, and the smell of cockroaches in the walls?

Yes. Yes. That's what I am. And you're all a bunch of no-good bums, worse than me.

Wasn't for this quarantine there's plenty he could do, he's broke in good . . .

There's no sense to it. If you guys aren't making the quarantine, WHO IS?

Silence.

They wouldn't answer. Scared of something. Stubborn. Unprint 'em. Squabbling with each other now like they usually did, fifteen or twenty of them all at once, drive a man crazy if he wasn't drunk enough not to listen. Scum of the earth. Scum of the earth.

He heard a cracked voice singing and caught a glimpse of somebody silver-spangled down the street, swaying and singing. *A pret-ty girl—is like a—"* That would be Nancy, and he didn't want to see Nancy right now; all things considered, he saw too much of Nancy. So he veered right at the corner and walked down into the darkness until the crowds thinned and his lone footsteps went flap against the housefronts, under a cold star.

And he started hearing the voices again.

The first light he saw, he blundered down into it and it was an empty poolroom with four guys playing cards under a naked bulb in the back. He kibitzed for a while but it was dull, they were playing for nickels and dimes and the cards were running slow, so he livened it up. The dealer dropped an ace bucking for a full house, and the fat-lipped little guy on his left had aces.

So he picked the ace out of the discards and put it back on top of the pack, and when the aces won there was a nice five-minute hassel that ended with the dealer on top of fat-lips choking him purple. But then the other two dragged them apart and took fat-lips away; and the dealer kicked a chair, and finally locked the door and went upstairs, leaving him alone with the mortuary slabs of the pool tables dismal under the one light.

He pitched billiard balls through the plate glass until he had a hole big enough to walk through zigzag, and went on up the street trying to sing a little, himself, but it was too lonely a noise. And the voices were bothering him again.

Then there was nothing for weary blocks until he hit a little art-jewelry store with a light in the window; it was closed, there was nobody there, but right next to it was a doorway with a dim bulb burning over a card that said

"Madam Rayma," and he could see shadows moving against the windows overhead. So he went up the stairs in a hell of a hurry, and the door was unlocked, and he went in.

Somebody was moving around the room turning off lights until there was only the one left, forty watts in an old-fashioned lamp with a blue silk shade, right next to a woman leaning back in an overstuffed chair, chins up and eyes closed. There were other people in the place, men and women, about half a dozen, but they were all keeping quiet.

He was about to get up and go when the woman in the chair began groaning and spitting, and heaving herself around till the skinny guy who'd been turning out the lights had to come and hold her down. She quieted after a while. "Who is there?" asked the skinny guy.

"Twixie," she said in a peanut-whistle soprano, and giggled.

"Are there any others there, who wish to speak to us?"

"Yeff. *Wots* of 'em."

The old malarkey. Soft soap and ectoplasm for the marks. And watch 'em eat it up!

The woman was speaking now in a deep masculine voice. "Things are very different here, Dottie. There's no way to tell you—I couldn't make you understand. But your mother and I are happy, very happy. Some day we'll all be together, and then you'll see. . . ."

He squirmed restlessly. If he could just make them hear him, he'd give them spirit messages that would curl their toenails. But there wasn't any percentage in trying. You could back a man into a corner and holler at him, but he would just faint or go hysterically blind and deaf.

He could do it again. He could leave them laid out like St. Valentine's Day. But there was no percentage in it. Fish in a barrel.

"Twixie" was back as he started to leave. "Theas' fomebody heaw wanf to talk to K. M. Iff im*paw*tant."

"Does anybody here have those initials?" the skinny guy asked.

". . . Well, go ahead anyway, Trixie."

"Thiff if the meffage. One dwink if haffa dwink, *two* dwinkf if a dwink too much, *fwee* dwinkf if *no* dwink. . . ."

Her voice faded to a ratsqueak behind him as he closed the door.

K. M. A coinfidenfe. But one drink was half a drink, all right—or eight, or ten. He went off down the hollow street, looking for a bedtime bottle.

When he got home with it he had to fight his way into the sitting room through a nightmare of twisted paper streamers thumbtacked to the walls, the door, the ceiling, everywhere. There was a kind of thronelike business over at the side of the room that he had to look at twice to recognize as a straight-backed chair on top of the coffee table; it was draped with satin from the windows and crumply sheets of aluminum foil, red giftwrap, pasted-on gold stars and festoons of what could only be pink toilet paper from the bathroom.

Nancy got down off it, switching her silver-spangled hips to make the ostrich plumes wag. She didn't look at him. She slow-marched across the room, arms out stiffly, little fingers curled, and put the playing arm down on a record that was already spinning in a portable phonograph. The volume was up all the way: it blasted at him, "A PRETTY GIRL . . ."

She rustled slowly back to her throne and climbed up again, graceful as an ape in her high heels, and sat there deadpan, her skin powdered white except for two fever spots on her cheekbones, silver-paper crown tipsy on her head, a battered scepter in her hands.

Kip sneezed, fumbled in an empty pocket, and wiped his nose on his sleeve. There were streamers crisscrossing the hall doorway, and it looked like too long a trip anyhow. He sat or fell, got his back to the wall, and scratched the worst and newest of his itches before he tilted the bottle up.

When it swung down again, sooner than he wanted, the door was opening. He got it in focus and tracked it, and it was Angelica coming in, leaning like a masthead over the slanty floor, lost in a mink jacket with the price tag still on it; embroidered slacks under that and the blank black umbilicus of a press camera gawping in between.

Angelica had about a million pictures of local officials in embarrassing poses, some politically compromising, some ludicrous, some lewd; her room was full of them. She had tried leaving them on her boss's desk, in newspaper morgues, on bus seats; nobody ever saw them, they were kicked around and thrown out with the garbage, but she kept on taking them just the same. The rest of her time she spent shopping; all the space in her room that wasn't full of pictures was overflowing with minks and ermines, Paris fashions, solitaires, necklaces, brooches and money, crisp in paper cummerbunds. She talked about moving a lot, but stayed, for the reason they all did: you had to have somebody to talk to, or you'd go crazier than you were.

"What's *this*?" she said, sweeping a strand of streamer aside, and took a long look at Kip and another at Nancy. "The wino and the loony," she said wearily, but with her throat pulsing hard against the banshee blather of the phonograph.

". . . JUST LIKE A PRETTY TUNE," the record screamed. It delivered itself of a final orchestral blurp, shut up, and began to skritch quietly to itself. Nancy climbed down off her throne.

"Turn it *off*," said Angelica.

Nancy kept going, a traveling waxworks. She put the needle back on the lead-in groove and turned around, but before the thing could let out a squawk Angelica was there, lifting it off again. Nancy turned once more and came back.

"Look," said Angelica, "I've had a hard day—"

Nancy put the needle on.

Angelica yanked it off, lifted the record clear and whanged it into a dozen pieces against the phonograph lid. "—and I'm *tired*," she said. "Now do you understand?"

Nancy said nothing. She took the camera in both hands and hopped backwards, the strap pulling Angelica along with it till it slipped over her head. She dropped the camera and got in one kick before Angelica hit her low and they rolled over together, hands clawing for hair, shrieking like broken hinges.

Kip found the doorframe behind him and climbed it unsteadily. He sorted out his directions again, got to the middle of the floor and leaned for a grip on Angelica.

She was slippery as a fish inside that coat, but he got a double handful of fur and heaved her up kicking. Then somebody tripped him and he landed hard on the camera with warm flesh kneeing the daylights out of him. When he tried to sit up an elbow caught him under the chin, and on the way down again fingernails raked across his nose. The floor went crump against his skull, like a carpet-covered brickbat.

When he knew which way was up again, he crawled out from under, but the door he opened was the wrong one and he was sick in the hall.

Somebody kicked a garbage can and the echoes tolled down the dark street.

Kip sat on the cold stone steps with his head in his hands, the night air feathering through his fingers, listening to the emptiness inside him. He was sick lonely drunk, and his head was a bruise, but the voices were gone; he was a hollow house again, grimed and hollow, hollow and cold.

Too much for them. Wanted a fight but couldn't take the lumps; wanted the drunk but not the sick.

Or maybe they were just ready to go. None of them stayed long, any more; he'd had—how many gangs of them since Tuesday? Lost count.

But it never took long to replace them, either.

So he sat, in his five minutes of sanity, and faced the thing he didn't want to remember he didn't want to know.

Angelica.

He knew already what was happening to him; had known for a long time. Every new invasion was scummier than the last; he was getting warts and wrinkles and hickeys and heartburn and dandruff and scabby patches and ingrown toenails and probably worse to come. He was a run-down old mansion, subdivided into cold-water flats and then hall bedrooms full of transients with holes in their socks. He had been

a valuable property once, and his owners had taken care of him. Now he was depreciating.

Down the rocky road to ruin. There was no use trying to kick them out any more; there wasn't time enough and they went when they were ready, anyhow. The way he was now, all he could do was hang onto the little scrap they had left him of himself, fight them off when they had something particularly scurvy for him to do. And soon enough, he wouldn't even be able to do that. Goodbye scrap; hello zombie.

And all that he had accepted. Because he was a coward, probably.

But Angelica.

Angelica had been following him down that road step by step, thoroughbred to cur, saint to slime. And now that he realized he had known it all the time, it was obvious enough: She was possessed too; so was Nancy, and he couldn't prove it, but he knew in his guts that so was nearly everybody. When you thought about how many people had died on this planet since Ug the Caveman, and how few of them would qualify for any heavenly establishment that there happened to be, it was a wonder they weren't swarming in every living human skull like maggots in offal.

How many damned souls could dance on the point of a pinhead?

And what was he going to *do*? Good God, no wonder they had quarantined him; he was a carrier of infection. No. He was a run-down house, and he was lowering the values of all the real estate around him, the whole neighborhood. And the neighborhood was Angelica, and Nancy.

Nancy didn't seem much changed—she was back to subnormal, that was all, after that one day when she'd pulled herself together with both hands to help him. Maybe her tenants were the old maids, too stubborn to move, who live on in the old house when all around them has gone to tenements and weeds. But Angelica's weren't.

Slum clearance.

When a neighborhood starts downhill, can you stop it? Sometimes. Maybe.

If you tear down the right house.

Drunk. . . . Thoughts spinning in his head, smooth and fuzzy-bright, everything clear now except around the edges, but he was topheavy and tangled and when he went to stand up, his knees bent the wrong way. Couldn't find the drugstore without a searchlight . . . couldn't see to read the labels, find out what was poison. And his time was running out.

Up the steps, skinning his knee when he fell. Across the lobby by deadreckoning, mothball and dust smell in his nostrils, and up the stairs because you couldn't get lost on a staircase as long as you could tell up from down; and because there would have to be something in the suite, razor blade, something; and if there wasn't, there would be the window.

And, all right, because he wanted to see them again before he died. Both of them, Angelica and Nancy, the woman he'd loved and the woman who'd loved him. All the world there was.

The sitting room was dark except when the reflected pink glow of a neon sign flickered into it. He lurched around the wreck of Nancy's throne and plunged into the cold hollow behind the couch, padding at the floor for his forgotten duffel bag. Hypo ought to be still in there; good as anything, if he could find the vein—barrelful of air, embolism, stop the heart quick and clean.

There was the bag, and the hypo wasn't in it, nothing but a bottle too big to have anything useful inside. He held it up to the window and squinted at it. Not drugs; what?

Prune juice and vitamin. That was right; he'd put the thing in the bag along with all the other junk for no reason except he didn't want to leave it behind. And here it was.

"One drink is half a drink . . ."

Who—? Oh, sure, the spirit message. Meaning the vitamins? K. M., Kip Morgan, one drink is half a drink—

"Two drinks is a drink too much . . ."

Sure. Why not? Little blue people sitting in the driver's

seat in Madame Rayma's head, too. The wraiths of spiritualists—there was a laugh for you if you had room for it—making up that godawful childish gabble, contradicting each other sixty miles a minute. And once in awhile, once in a long while passing on a message that meant something.

That would be what they wanted, too—"they," the things that made the quarantine to keep him from telling what he knew. A drink too much. The last one. Simple: An overdose of the vitamin would be poison.

With the cap off, he hesitated. Call them in? What for, to make a deathbed speech, ten immortal words with a hiccup in the middle?

The monkeys had died in convulsions. The hell with it, the hell with it he didn't have time to be nice.

He hesitated again. After he corked off, with his soul the dirty gray it no doubt was by now, would he find himself roosting in somebody's fusty cranium, scrabbling among the old habits and desires?

Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies. Never mind where the stuff comes from or what it's going to do to you; it's right off the bathtub; if you've got a weak stomach, hold your nose.

He put the bottle up, filled his mouth and swallowed. It went down like bile coming up, and some of it got caught in his windpipe.

Choking, he reeled to his knees and swept the lamp off the end table, the cord gripping him in the middle as he fell. He let it all go, legs, arms and the whole articulated bundle of guts: sorry now with a choked sorrow and glad with a bitter gladness that he was about to be rid of it.

He was beginning to feel a little dizzy and numb, and if this was dying it wasn't bad. But it seemed to him that this was a way he had felt once before; he was afraid of it without knowing why. Then he heard the murmuring begin, and even then he didn't understand, though he sensed that the voices weren't inside him—

The ceiling light blinked on. Nancy stood in the hall door-

way looking down at him. And on her shoulders crouched four tiny smoke-blue figures.

Two on the left, witchwives with trap-thin mouths, chanting, "It's a sin! It's a sin!"

Two on the right, sluttish and slavering: "Do it! *Do* it!

The voices swelled, more of them and more, from every direction—through the walls, the floor, the ceiling.

Whatever Nancy was saying was drowned in the din. Now he saw Angelica coming up behind her, and *she* had ghostly shapes crowding her shoulders. . . .

A drink too much.

The street was no better. Hands futilely over his ears, mouth open in a silent shout, he ran loose-kneed and wobbling to his parked car, tumbled in headfirst, started the engine on the third try, clashed gears and drove like a madman down Figueroa.

Instinct had chosen the direction; twenty-odd blocks later he came to sanctuary—the U.S.C. campus. He drove into it as far as he could go and stopped, trembling over the wheel.

He was inhabited again. He could hear the nasty little voices yattering away inside him; but that was a thing he was used to, and by contrast it was almost pleasant.

He knew now that there were worse things than being infected by a corporal's guard of barflies, alley thugs and panders. It was a swift short slide down to where he was; there were depths below as black and hollow as a starless night, and people *lived* there, married and had children, paid their rent and taxes, walked in the free air, and nobody hauled them off to shock treatments or manacles.

What it must be like to have the curse of hearing in a hospital for the insane, he was unable to imagine.

It was no longer any cause for wonder that the books most normal people bought and the movies they paid to see were strictly and by definition psychoneurotic, not that the laws made by the people for the people were an Iron Maiden, nor that a streetful of honest citizens could erupt into a

roaring mob. The wonder was that there was any sanity in the universe.

Think. Think.

While one part of his mind scurried like a trapped rat, another part was coldly and curiously turning over the jumbled jigsaw pieces of his world, matching them to make a new pattern:

The curious blankness you saw behind the eyes of John Doe, the colorless, not-smart-not-stupid man who sold you groceries or filled your gas tank: the automatic ABC responses and the meaningless smile. X marks my window: a transient hotel. Too many tenants; too many faces superimposed make a blur.

Compulsive drinkers, rapists, desk-tidiers: they got no pleasure from it. But somebody did.

Dejà vu. You had never been there before; but somebody had.

Allergies, functional disorders, "psychomatic" illnesses. Symptoms of struggle between the possessor and the possessed. Or: the tenant was a cotton farmer and hated wool, a housewife and hated dust, a bird-lover and hated cats.

The even dispositions, the inner assurances of people in caste trades and family seats. Memory is not inherited, but tenants can be, and over generations, inhabiting members of the same family, they might shake down into stable, well-adjusted groups that would cause no trouble.

The high incidence of neurosis, insecurity feelings, melancholia and all the skull-shoppers' bag of tricks in world-cities, where established groups of tenants break and mingle disastrously.

Homosexuality: the result of a sorority housed in a man or a fraternity in a woman?

The unearthly peace that you sometimes found in people who had suffered long and severely. Solution: to be unpossessed, be a house that nobody would want to live in.

Or jump out a window, or cut your throat with a razor blade.

Not yet. Follow the argument, add up the data.

If there isn't an answer, the quarantine was for nothing.

He had been thinking about the bottom half of the human pyramid, because that was where he was now and because the algebraic pressures squeezed out monsters there; it was natural enough. What about the top half?

There were people who had twisted circuits inside their heads, quirks that made them automatically the wrong shape to fit into any situation, square when they ought to be round and round when they ought to be square. And there were people who slipped through life as if all the doors had been cut and hung especially for them. The people who were born to prosperous parents in a prosperous country; who had sound bones and clear skins and white teeth; who never had to worry about the price of a meal; who never missed trains unless there was going to be a wreck; who lived a long time and enjoyed it all. The tall, straight, unwrinkled, lucky people.

The carefully built and tended mansions of the idle dead.

Item: The quarantine was not a thing imposed spontaneously by each new gang of tenants; it couldn't be, it worked too smoothly. It was organized, and that meant that somewhere there had to be an organizer.

Where?

Why, in the handsomest, the healthiest, the richest and happiest human being. . . .

The torrent of voices rustled down over him again as soon as he drove out of the campus. Each tiny crepitant note was distinct and clear; it was no good shutting his ears against them and they knifed through any distraction the mind made; he had to listen, writhing behind the wheel.

Rip her with your
die in agony for they are
dripping raw and eat it
trying to breathe while
where it's dark and the rats
tell him to his face
lights fire and KILL THEM ALL

Thicker and thicker, more and more, as if the street were tilting downward into the more and more intolerable pressures of an ocean of voices. Straight back into the center, to the hotel, because that was where . . .

But he mustn't think that.

Into the lobby, up the stairs against a turbulent river of voices. Lean against the door, heavy and slow, seaweed tendrils of sound weaving around him . . .

In the underwater darkness he found the hard cold shape and put it in his pocket. Forget it.

When the light went on in Angelica's room she sat up in bed, her mouth opening with hard lines around it, but it closed again when she saw his face. He dropped to his knees beside the stacks of photographs and spilled them onto the floor in a glossy kaleidoscope of faces and bosoms.

He pawed one out, then another. He tossed photographs aside in fluttering windrows, scrabbled again, stirred the mass with both hands. At last he had a thin sheaf of pictures in one fist; with the other hand he reached out to the dressing table, dragged Angelica's handbag off and shook it upside down.

He picked a fountain pen out of the resulting tangle, circled a face on each of his photographs, lurched to his feet and shoved the handful at Angelica.

"Addresses," he said. "On the backs."

She hesitated. He leaned closer. "Do it *now*."

She glanced at the top picture, flipped it over, scribbled on the back, and went through the rest of the sheaf in the same way.

When he took them, she gave him a look of unwilling respect and said, "What for?"

He didn't answer. The effort was too much; he was half-drowned again in the surge of voices, staggering out into the hall, down the murmurous stairs, into the night.

The world-famous director was not at home. Neither was the foreign-born, much-married writer, and Angelica's notation for the rising young beauty queen said only "H'wood

Hills, off Cahuenga." But Taylor Spotswood III was asleep in his bed.

Spotswood, dark-haired and muscled like a swimmer, was built on a scale that dwarfed Kip, and the bed was big enough for six of him. Kip inched across the laundry-slick sheets and got the chloroform-soaked pad over his mouth and nose.

When his breathing slackened, the room was very quiet. Silver moonlight dappled the floor. It was a big sturdy house that stood on its own hundred acres, the servants were off in another wing, and the only voices Kip could hear came from the unconscious man's body. ". . . *verna effrenata mmmmmmm tant pis, on ne peut pas mmmm captus membris mmmmmm delenda est.*"

"Come out," said Kip through dry lips. "I want to talk to you." He put the point of his open claspknife to the sleeping giant's chest and exerted a gentle pressure.

Three tiny heads popped into sight, glowing a swampfire blue in the darkness. They might have been brothers: all three had the same spiderweb tracery of microsharp wrinkles, the same lipless mouths, the same brilliant eyes. One turned to the others and remarked. "*Nequissimus.*" Another answered, "*Heu nefas!*" and added a short sentence in a totally unfamiliar language, at which all three briefly showed smiles like half-healed wounds; and the third asked coolly, "What do you wish?"

"You know what I want," said Kip, his hand white-knuckled on the knife handle. "Don't waste time."

"We have all the time in the world," said the spokesman simply. "You cannot cut any of it away with that tool. Therefore, be more respectful." And his eyes glowed like spectral cigarette-ends.

"I can send you househunting, though," said Kip. "But the knife is just to make sure you hold still and listen. This is what I brought to bargain with." He showed them a little bottle that had once contained sedative capsules; now it was full of a murky brown fluid.

The three glared at him, but the spokesman's voice was as

cold and dry as ever. "Even supposing that the power to grant your desire exists, which is absurd, we are only three retired gentlemen; we could not help you. What have you done with the rest of that, by the way?"

"Mailed it to myself," said Kip. "The power to make me and my friends invisible to every living soul in the City of Los Angeles exists, and if that's absurd, laugh now and get it over with. Somebody was afraid I'd tell what this stuff does. The same somebody only has to say frog and every spook in sight jumps twice. And if you're not that somebody, you're as near as I can get and you'll have to do. I think you are. I think the longer a tenant hangs around, the more he he learns about possession and dispossession, till the oldest ones can kick anybody out who doesn't toe the line. I think you're the oldest; if there were ever any older than you, they broke down into ash and stink a long time ago. But whether I'm right or wrong, either there'll be a new system of housing allotments—with everybody getting the tenants who'll do him the least harm and the most good—or I'll pour this stuff down the throat of your friend here. And when you move, as you'll have to, I'll follow you where ever you go. I'll find you. I'll find you and I'll do it again. If I run out of the vitamin, I'll make more. And even if you do get out of my reach, I'll make such a stink and I'll give so many people the sight and the hearing that I'll pull your whole damned applecart down around your ears. Now. Yes or no."

The three whispered together with a sound like dry twigs cracking and rattling in the wind. The spokesman said, "We are disposed to deal gently with you, but a bargain that is all upon one side is no bargain. Next, the terms you propose are beyond reason and your need. We will restore yourself and the two women, no more, in exchange for certain services. Think how you answer; the offer will be made only once. And eternity is long."

"Longer than common to a houseless haunt," said Kip. "Don't talk barroom law to me; this is a *pactum donationis*, since you like Latin, or you can call it blackmail, I don't

care. All or nothing. One." He pried open the sleeping man's jaws. "Two." He lifted the bottle and twirled the cap loose with his thumb.

The three consulted with a glance.

"We agree," said the spokesman.

It was too easy. "Swear," said Kip, "by—" By what?

A whisper stirred in his mind, perhaps from the same—person—who had spoken through Madame Rayma; and he thought: *George?*

"Swear," he said, "by your hope of oblivion."

The old ones had their ounce of revenge, after all; nature abhors a *pactum donationis.* The quarantine lifted when Kip left the house, newly equipped with a set of four chatty but good-natured ghosts; the caretaker spotted him, chased him to his car, and the State cops ran him down just outside the city limits. Nancy and Angelica were discovered by an astonished bellhop, and they were all three a one-day wonder in the newspapers: LAW STUDENT BURGLES ESTATE WHILE SWEETHEARTS SQUAT IN BRIDAL SUITE. Kip and Angelica lost their jobs; Nancy's mother threw seventeen successive catfits and placed herself under the care of a gentleman who combined Scientology with Yoga.

Kip got out of jail last; they hadn't been able to prove that he had entered the building or chloroformed the owner, but they had thrown the book at him for concealed weapons (the claspknife), leaving the scene of an accident (a broken gate) and resisting arrest.

He found Angelica packing. She had, she told him curtly, been offered a wonderful job with a trade mission in Chile. It was a great opportunity; it could lead almost anywhere. She was the same heartsqueezing Angelica, compact, graceful, honest, assured. But there was something wrong. She had hardened; she was a bisque doll with Swiss watchworks inside.

He listened to the voices that came from her—he had been waiting for just that; he wanted to be sure. And there was nothing wrong with the voices.

The bargain had been kept; there was no one inside Angelica whispering songs of ambition to her inner ear.

There never had been.

That was Angelica; that was what she was really like in the deepest deep of herself, and only the difference now was that she was free to be it without scruples or hesitations.

And the ounce of revenge was a pound.

. . . Until he met a redhead waiting in the pro shop at the country club when he went back to collect his things.

She had red hair: not carrot-color, and not henna-color, but the real, dark, glossy mahogany red that you see once in a lifetime. And she had the pale skin that goes with it, clear and fine, with that rose-in-snow flush glowing through it. And her eyes were big and bright and about to brim over.

He took a step toward her; there was a hurting in his throat. He said, *"Nancy?"*

She said, "Kip," the one word, and he knew; it was all there. It was the same voice that had said *"f* of *t"* when it meant more than "the love of God"; those where the same hands, hardly changed though they were slender now where they had been thin, that had been about him all the time, praying, yearning to help. It was the same love, not bottled up now but flowing free.

A little later, he took the bottle out of his pocket; the police had given it back to him finally, not being able to find any poison, illegal drug or other contraband in it. It had just about a mouthful in it: one drink.

He had listened to Nancy's voices; he knew all he had to know.

He swallowed it.

Three drinks is no drink. . . .

The voices stopped.

GOD'S NOSE

"GOD'S NOSE," said my Zen Catholic friend, waving her expressive little hands, "to begin with, must be the biggest nose you can imagine. In fact, theology and mathematics teach us that it must be infinite in size. Just think—bigger than the Sun, bigger than comets, galaxies—and still . . a nose."

The idea pleased her; she closed her eyes and smiled, squinting blindly up at the ceiling. Her neck was not quite clean. She was charming, black-haired, brown skinned, with a compact little body that was feminine without being unnecessarily soft. Her hands were like some small, friendly animal's—the palms wide, fingers and thumbs short, soft-padded, with sharp-pointed nails from which the red lacquer was peeling.

We were waiting in a friend's apartment for her lover to arrive, a man I had not met. We were sitting on cushions, tailor-fashion, since our absent friend owned no furniture. We had each had several glasses of Smirnoff's vodka mixed with orange soda. How the subject of God's nose had come up, I do not at this moment recall.

"Picture it in your mind," she said. "A good way to begin is to think of George Washington's nose."

"Washington's nose?"

"On Mount Rushmore," she answered impatiently. "That big sunlit stone nose, tall as a building, with a little man swinging on a scaffolding beside it—looking like a fly. Now: think of that nose, only enormously bigger, out there in the light of the stars—a nose so huge that our whole solar system would be like a wart." Eyes still closed, she shivered with pleasure.

"Does God's nose, then, have warts?" I asked her.

"No, evidently not, because a wart is an imperfection, and God's nose must be perfect. But pores? Hairs in the nostrils? Yes, obviously! And each pore, each hair, must be an absolutely perfect hair, or pore."

"I'm not sure I like the idea of God having a nose," I said.

"Then you're not getting the picture. Imagine being out there in a spaceship, near enough to see that nose looming over you—eternal, mysterious. You steer your spaceship parallel to the nose"—her hands showed me how—"trying to get from the tip to the bridge. But you know you never can, because it would take too long—you'd die of old age first."

She opened her eyes. "Doesn't that make you feel pretty humble?"

"It certainly does," I said. The tasteless vodka, or else the sickly sweet orange soda, had given everything in the room an unusual color and sharpness of outline. I felt that my Zen Catholic friend's words were nonsense, but a special, very valuable kind of nonsense which I must try to hang onto.

"People spend so much time worrying about the Creation," she said abruptly.

"I don't."

She made an impatient gesture. "People who think, I mean. Where did all the stars and planets come from, they ask? All the clouds of gas in the Milky Way? All the comets and meteorites?"

"Well, where did they come from?"

"Do you know what I think?" she asked intensely, leaning forward. I half expected to see that her eyes had slitted yellow pupils, like a cat's, but they were brown, so nearly black that you could not tell where the iris left off and the pupil began. They seemed all pupil—two enormous round black holes staring at me.

"I think," she said reverently, "that God sneezed."

There was a click and a sound of footsteps in the hall. My friend got to her feet in one eager motion. "Hello!" she called.

"Hello!" a deeper voice echoed. A man came into the room, smiling, dressed in a torn white shirt, sandals, faded dungarees.

My friend put her arm around him, smiling. "This is Godfrey," she said.

We shook hands, and I am afraid I stared in fascination. Godfrey had the largest, most overbearing nose I have ever seen. It was nobly arched, thin, sensitive, with flaring nostrils. The rest of his face, with its pale brown mustache and beard, was hardly large enough to support it.

"We have to go now," my friend said, smiling, holding Godfrey's bicep with one possessive hand. After a few minutes, discovering that I did not want any more vodka or orange soda, I followed them down the stairs into the warm sunlight, thinking very curious and pleasant thoughts.

CATCH THAT MARTIAN

THE first person who got on the Martian's nerves, according to a survey I made just recently, was a Mrs. Frances Economy, about 42, five foot three, heavy-set, with prominent mole on left cheek, formerly of 302 West 46th Street, Manhattan. Mrs. Economy went to a neighborhood movie on the night of September 5th, and halfway through the first feature, just as she was scrabbling for the last of her popcorn, zip—she wasn't there any more.

That is, she was only half there. She could still see the screen, but it was like a television set with the sound off. The way she realized something had happened to her, she started stomping her feet, like you do when the sound goes off or the picture stops, and her feet didn't make any noise.

In fact, she couldn't feel the floor, just some kind of rubbery

arms of her chair. They weren't there, as far as her feeling them went.

Everything was dead still. She could hear her own breathing, and the gulp when she swallowed that last mouthful, and her heart beating if she listened close. That was all. When she got up and went out, she didn't step on anybody's feet—and she *tried* to.

Of course I asked her who was sitting next to her when it happened, but she doesn't remember. She didn't notice. It was like that with everybody.

Not to keep you in suspense, the Martian did it. We figured that out later. There still isn't any proof, but it has to be that way. This Martian, the way it figures, looks just like anybody else. He could be the little guy with the derby hat and the sour expression, or the girl with the china-blue eyes, or the old gent with the chin spinach and glasses on a string. Anybody.

But he's a Martian. I don't see what else he *could* be. And being a Martian, he's got this power that people haven't got. If he feels like it, he just looks at you cockeyed, and zip—you're in some other dimension. I don't know what the scientists would call it, the Fourth or Fifth Dimension or what, but I call it the next-door dimension because it seems like it's right next door—you can see into it. In other words, it's a place where other people can see you, but they can't hear you or touch you, unless they're ghosts too, and there's nothing but some kind of cloudy stuff to walk around on. I don't know if that sounds good or what. It stinks. It's just plain dull.

One more thing, he annoys easy. You crunch popcorn in his ear, he doesn't like that. You step on his toe, same thing. Say, "Hot enough for you?" or slap him on the back when he's got sunburn, serve him a plate of soup with your finger in it—zip.

The way we figured out it's a Martian was that it couldn't be one of us. No human can do a thing like that. Right? So what else could he be but a Martian? It figures. And nobody

ever noticed him, so it must be he looks like anybody else. Some humans, they look like everybody else, but not because they want to. He *wants* to, I bet.

The way we know he annoys easy, there were eighteen "ghosts" wandering around when the public first noticed, which was during the early morning of September 6th. That was about eleven hours after he got Mrs. Economy.

Thirteen of them were up at Broadway and 49th, walking through traffic. They went right through the cars. By nine o'clock there were two wrecks on that corner and a busted hydrant gushing water all over. The ghost people walked through the water and didn't get wet.

Three more showed up in front of a big delicatessen near 72nd Street and Amsterdam Avenue, just looking in the window. Every once in a while one of them would reach in through the glass and grab for something, but his hand went through the pastrami and chopped liver, so none of them got anything. That was fine for store windows, but it wasn't so fine for the ghost people.

The other two were sailors. They were out in the harbor, walking on water and thumbing their noses at naval officers aboard the ships that were anchored out there. It was hell on discipline.

The first eight patrolmen who reported all this got told they would be fired if they ever came on duty drunk again. But by ten-thirty it was on the radio, and then WPIX sent a camera crew up, and by the time the afternoon papers came out there were so many people in Times Square that we had to put a cordon around the ghosts and divert traffic.

The delicatessen window up on Amsterdam got busted from the crowd leaning against it, or some guy trying to put his hand through the way the three ghosts did; we never figured out which. There were about sixty tugs, launches and rowboats in the harbor, and three helicopters, trying to get close enough to talk to the sailors.

One thing we know, the Martian must have been in that crowd on Times Square, because between one and one-thirty P. M. seven more ghosts wandered through the barrier and

joined the other ones. You could tell they were mad, but of course you couldn't tell what they were saying unless you could read lips.

Then there were some more down by Macy's in the afternoon, and a few in Greenwich Village, and by evening we had lost count. The guesses in the papers that night ran from three hundred to a thousand. It was the *Times* that said three hundred. The cops didn't give out any estimate at all.

The next day, there was just nothing else at all in the papers, or on the radio or TV. Bars did an all-time record business. So did churches.

The Mayor appointed a committee to investigate. The Police Commissioner called out special reserves to handle the mobs. The Governor was understood to say he was thinking about declaring a statewide emergency, but all he got in most papers was half a column among the ads. Later on he denied the whole thing.

Everybody had to be asked what he thought, from Einstein to Martin and Lewis. Some people said mass hysteria, some said the end of the world, some said the Russians.

Winchell was the first one to say in print that it was a Martian. I had the same idea myself, but by the time I got it all worked out I was too late to get the credit.

I was handicapped, because all this time I still hadn't seen one of the ghosts yet. I was on Safe, Loft and Truck—just promoted last spring from a patrolman—and while I was on duty I never got near any of the places where they were congregating. In the evenings, I had to take care of my mother.

But my brain was working. I had this Martian idea, and I kept thinking, thinking, all the time.

I knew better than to mention this to Captain Rifkowicz. All I would have to do was mention to him that I was thinking, and he would say, "With what, Dunlop, with what?" or something sarcastic like that. As for asking him to get me transferred to Homicide or Missing Persons, where I might get assigned to the ghost case, that was out. Rifkowicz says I should have been kept on a beat long enough for my arches

to fall, in order to leave more room on top for brains.

So I was on my own. And that evening, when they started announcing the rewards, I knew I had to get that Martian. There was fifteen hundred dollars, voted by the City Council that afternoon, for whoever would find out what was making the ghosts and stop it. Because if it didn't stop, there would be eighteen thousand ghosts in a month, and over two hundred thousand in a year.

Then there was a bunch of private rewards, running from twenty-five bucks to five hundred, offered by people that had relatives among the departed. There was a catch to those, though—you had to get the relatives back.

All together, they added up to nearly five thousand. With that dough, I could afford to hire somebody to take care of Ma and maybe have some private life of my own. There was a cute waitress down on Varick Street, where I had lunch every day. For a long time I had been thinking if I asked her to go out, maybe she would say yes. But what was the use of me asking her, if all I could do was have her over to listen to Ma talk? All Ma talked about was how sick she was and how nobody cared.

First thing I did, I got together all the newspaper stuff about the ghosts. I spread it out on the living room table and sorted it and started pasting it into a scrapbook. Right away I saw I had to have more information. What was in the papers was mostly stories about the crowds and the accidents and traffic tie-ups, plus interviews with people that didn't know anything.

What I wanted to know was—what were all these people doing when the Martian got them? If I knew that, maybe I could figure out some kind of a pattern, like if the Martian's pet peeve was back-slappers, or people who make you jump a foot when they sneeze, or whatever.

Another thing, I wanted to know all the times and places. From that, I could figure out what the Martian's habits were, if he had any, and with all of it together I could maybe arrange to be on the spot whenever he got sore. Then any-

body except me who was there every time would have to be him.

I explained all this to Ma, hoping she would make a sacrifice and let me get Mrs. Proctor from across the hall to sit with her a few evenings. She didn't seem to get the idea. Ma never believes anything she reads in the papers, anyway, except the astrology column. The way it struck her, the whole thing was some kind of a scheme, like gangsters or publicity, and I would be better to stay away from it.

I made one more try, talking up the money I would get, but all she said was,"Well, then why don't you just *tell* that Captain Rifkowicz he's got to *let* you earn that reward?"

Ma has funny ideas about a lot of things. She came over here from England when she was a girl, and it looks like she never did get to understand America. I knew that if I kept after her, she would start crying and telling me about all the things she did for me when I was a baby. You can't argue against that.

So what I did next, I took the bull by the horns. I waited till Ma went to sleep and then I just walked out and hopped an uptown bus on Seventh Avenue. If I couldn't get off during the daytime, I would cut down my sleep for a while, that was all.

I was heading for Times Square, but at Twenty-seventh I saw a crowd on the sidewalk. I got out and ran over there. Sure enough, in the middle of the crowd was two of the ghosts, a fat man with a soupstrainer mustache and a skinny woman with cherries on her hat. You could tell they were ghosts because the people were waving their hands through them. Aside from that, there was no difference.

I took the lady first, to be polite. I flashed the badge, and then I hauled out my notebook and wrote, "Name and address please," and shoved it at her.

She got the idea and looked through her bag for a pencil and an envelope. She scribbled, "Mrs. Walter F. Walters, Schenectady, N. Y."

I asked her, "When did this happen to you and where?"

She wrote it was about one P.M. the afternoon before, and

she was in Schrafft's on Broadway near 37th, eating her lunch with her husband, and I asked her if the fat man was her husband, and she said he was.

I then asked her if she could remember exactly what the two of them were doing right at the moment it happened. She thought a while and then said she was talking and her husband was dunking his doughnut in his coffee. I asked her if it was the kind with powdered sugar and she said yes.

I knew then that I was on the right track. She was one of those little women with big jaws that generally seem to have loud voices and like to use them; and I always hated people who dunk those kind of doughnuts, myself. The powdered sugar gets wet and gluey and the dunkers have to lick their fingers right in public.

I thanked them and went on uptown. When I got back home that night, about four A.M. the next morning, I had fifteen interviews in my book. The incidents had taken place all over the mid-town area. Six got theirs for talking, four on crowded sidewalks—probably for jostling or stepping on corns—two for yelling on a quiet street at two in the morning, one for dunking, one for singing to himself on a subway, one, judging by the look of him, for not being washed, and one for coming in late to a Broadway play. The six talkers broke down to three in restaurants, two in a newsreel movie, and one in Carnegie Hall while a concert was going on.

Nobody remembered who they were next to at the time, but I was greatly encouraged. I had a hunch I was getting somewhere already.

I got through the next day, the eighth, in a kind of daze, and don't think Rifkowicz didn't call my attention to it. I suppose I wasn't worth more than a nickel to the City that day, but I promised myself I would make it up later. For the moment, I ignored Rifkowicz.

On the radio and TV, there were two new developments. In my head, there was one.

First, the radio and TV. I ate lunch in a saloon so as to catch the latest news, even though I had to give up my

daily glimpse of the waitress in the beanery. Two things were new. One, people had started noticing that a few things had turned into ghosts—besides people, I mean. Things like a barrel organ, and an automobile that had its horn stuck, and like that.

That made things twice as bad, of course, because anybody was liable to try to touch one of these ghost things and jump to the conclusion they were a ghost, themselves.

Two, the TV reporters were interviewing the ghosts, the same way I did, with paper and pencil. I picked up four more sets of questions and answers just while I was eating lunch.

The ghosts came over fine on TV, by the way. Somehow it looked even creepier on the screen, when you saw somebody's hand disappear into them, than it did when you saw it with your own eyes.

The development in my head was like this. Out of the fifteen cases I already had, and the four I got from TV, there were eight that happened on the street or in subways or buses, five in restaurants, and six in places of entertainment. Four *different* places of entertainment. Now, at first glance, that may not look like it means much. But I said to myself, "What does this Martian do? He travels around from one place to another—that's normal. He eats—that's normal. But he goes to four different shows that I know about in three days—and I know just nineteen cases out of maybe a thousand!"

It all fitted together. Here is this Martian. He's never been here before. We know that because he just now started making trouble. The way I see it, these Martians look us over for a while from a distance, and then they decide to send one Martian down to New York to study us close up. Well, what's the first thing he does, being that he wants to find out all about us? He goes to the movies. And concerts and stage plays too, of course, because he wants to try everything once. But probably he sees two or three double features a day. It stands to reason.

So there he is in the movie, watching and listening so he shouldn't miss anything important, and some customer around him starts making loud comments to somebody else,

rattling cellophane, and snapping a pocketbook open and shut every five seconds to find a kleenex. So he flips them into the next dimension, where they can make all the noise they want without bothering him.

And that's the reason why there are so many ghosts that got theirs in the movies and places like that. On the streets of any city you can walk for miles without running into more than two or three really obnoxious characters, but in any kind of theater there's *always* somebody talking, or coughing, or rattling paper. You've noticed that.

I went even further than that. I checked with my notes and then looked in a copy of *Cue* magazine to find out what was playing at each of those theaters when the Martian was there.

I found out that the play was a long-run musical—the concert was musical, naturally—and one of the two movies was a Hollywood remake of a musical comedy. The other was a newsreel.

There it was. I as good as had him. Then I got another idea and went back through my notes to find out where the theater victims had been sitting. The guy in Carnegie Hall had been in the balcony; that's where you hear best, I guess. But the other five had all been sitting down front, in the first four rows.

The little guy was nearsighted.

That's the way I was thinking about him now—a little near-sighted guy who liked music better than Westerns, and was used to some place where everybody's careful not to bother anybody else. It was hard not to feel sorry for him; after all, some people that come from places closer than Mars have a hard time in New York.

But it was me against him. That night the total rewards were up to almost twenty thousand dollars.

I thought of one thing I could do right away. I could write to the Mayor to make an announcement that if people didn't want to be ghosts, they should keep from making unnecessary noise or being pests, especially in theaters. But one, he prob-

ably wouldn't pay any attention to me, and two, if he did, twenty thousand other guys would be following my lead before I could turn around, and one of them would probably catch the Martian before I did.

That night, I did the same as before. I waited till Ma was sleeping, then went out to a movie on Broadway. It was a first-run house, they had a musical playing, and I sat down front.

But nothing happened. The Martian wasn't there.

I felt pretty discouraged when I got home. My time was running out and there are over three hundred theaters in Manhattan. I had to start working faster.

I lay awake for a long while, worrying and thinking about it, and finally I came to one of the most important decisions in my life. The next morning I was going to do something I never did before—call in and pretend like I was sick. And I was going to stay sick until I found the Martian.

I felt bad about it and I felt even worse in the morning, when Rifkowicz told me to take it easy till I got well.

After breakfast, I got the papers and made a list of shows on my way uptown. I went to one on 42nd Street first—it was a musical picture about some composer named Handle, and the second feature was a comedy, but it had Hoagy Carmichael in it, so I figured I should stay for that too. I sat in the fifth row. There was plenty of coughing going on, only nobody got turned into a ghost.

Then I had lunch and went to another musical, on Broadway. I drew another blank.

My eyes were beginning to bother me a little from sitting so close to the screen, so I thought I would just go to a newsreel movie and then walk around a while before dinner. But when I got out of the newsreel I began to feel jittery, and I went straight to another double feature. The Martian wasn't there, either.

I had seen plenty of ghosts standing around on the streets, but they were all just standing there looking kind of lost and bewildered, the way they did after a while. You could tell a new victim because he would be rushing here and there,

shoving his hands through things, trying to talk to people, and acting all upset.

One thing I forgot to mention. Everybody was wondering now how these ghosts got along without eating. In this dimension where they were, there wasn't *anything*, just the stuff like rubbery clouds that they were standing on. But they all claimed they weren't hungry or thirsty, and they all seemed to be in good shape. Even the ones that had been ghosts now for four days.

When I got out of that last movie, it was about eight in the evening. I was feeling low in my mind, but I still had a healthy appetite. I started wandering around the side streets of Broadway, looking for a restaurant that wasn't too crowded or too expensive. I passed a theater that was on my list, except I knew I was too late to get a ticket for it. It was the premiere of the newest Rodgers and Hammerstein show, and the lobby and half the sidewalk were full of customers.

I went on past, feeling gloomier because of all the bright lights and excitement, and then I heard something funny. Without paying any attention, I had been listening to one of these raspy-voiced barkers inside the lobby going, "GETcha program here." Now, all of a sudden, he said "GETch—" and stopped.

I turned around, with a funny prickling up the back of my spine. The voice didn't start up again. Just as I started back toward the lobby, a ghost came out of the crowd. There was no doubt about him being a ghost—he ran through the people.

He had a bunch of big booklets with slick covers under his arm, and his mouth was wide open like he was shouting. Then he showed his teeth, and his face got all red, and he lifted the booklets in both hands and threw them away as hard as he could. *They* went through people, too.

The ghost walked away with his hands shoved into his pockets.

Running into that lobby, I shoved my badge at the ticket taker, and told him to find me the manager, quick.

When the manager came up I grabbed him by the lapels and said, "I got reason to believe there's a dangerous criminal going to be in this audience tonight. With your cooperation, we'll get him." He looked worried, so I said, "There won't be any trouble. You just put me where I can see the front rows and leave the rest to me."

He said, "I can't give you a seat. The house is completely sold out."

I told him, "Okay, put me back in the wings, or whatever you call them."

He argued, but he did what I asked. We went down the side aisle, through the orchestra pit and through a little door that went under the stage. Then we went up a little stairway to backstage, and he put me right at the edge of the stage, up front, where I could peek out at the audience.

There was a crowd of people running around back there behind the curtains, actors and chorus girls, guys in their shirt sleeves and guys in overalls. I could hear the hum out front—people were beginning to fill the seats—and I wanted that curtain to go up. I just couldn't wait.

Finally the actors took their places, and the band suddenly started playing, and the curtain went up.

I understand that show is still playing to standing room only, even with all the trouble that's happened since then, but I didn't pay any attention to it and I couldn't even tell you what it was about. I was watching the front four rows, trying to memorize every face I saw.

Right in the middle there were three that I paid more attention to than the rest. One of them was a young blonde girl with blue eyes like the color of Ma's fancy china that she brought with her from the old country. Another was an old gent with a chin spinach and glasses on a string. The third was a little guy with a sour expression and a derby hat.

I don't know why I picked out those three, except maybe it was a hunch. Maybe I was looking at the blonde girl just because she was pretty, but then again, I never saw eyes that color before or since. It could be that Martians have china-blue eyes; how would I know? I might have had some

wild idea that the old guy could be the Martian and was wearing the frizzy white whiskers because Martians don't have chins exactly like us. And I think I picked on the little guy because he fitted the picture I already had in my head. And the way he was clutching that derby in his lap, like it was made of gold—I was thinking to myself, maybe he's got some kind of ray gun built into that hat; maybe that's how he does it.

I admit that I wasn't thinking very logical—I was too excited—but I never took my eyes off that audience for a second.

I was waiting for somebody to start coughing or sneezing and get turned into a ghost. When that happened, I would be watching the people, and if I was lucky I might see who was looking at the victim when it happened.

That's what I was waiting for. What I got was a sniff of smoke and then somebody started screaming and yelling, *"Fire!"*

Half the audience was on their feet in a second. I looked up, and sure enough there was smoke pouring out at the back of the room. Some more women screamed and the stampede was on.

The girls on stage stopped dancing and the band stopped playing. Somebody—some actor—ran out on the stage and started saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please. *Walk,* do not run, to the nearest exit. There is no danger. *Walk,* do not run—"

I lost my head. Not on account of the fire. I knew the actor was right and the only bad thing that could happen would be people trampling each other to death to get out of there. But the seats were emptying fast and it struck me all of a sudden that I didn't know my way through that tangle of scenery backstage. By the time I got down the stairs and out into the auditorium, the Martian might be gone.

I felt cold all over. I didn't even stop to remember that I didn't have to go back the way I came, because there were little steps right at the side of the stage. I ran out from behind

the wings and started to jump over the musicians. At that, I would have made it if I hadn't caught my toe in that little trough where the footlights are.

I had worse luck than that, even. I landed smack in the middle of the bass drum.

You never heard such a noise in your life. It sounded as if the ceiling caved in. Sitting there, with my legs and arms sticking out of that drum, I saw the people turn around and look at me like they had been shot. I saw them all, the girl with the china-blue eyes, the old gent with the whiskers, the little guy with the derby, and a lot more. And then, suddenly, all the sound stopped, same as when you turn off a radio.

The guy who owned the drum leaned over and tried to pull me out of it. He couldn't.

His hands went right through me.

Like I said, this Martian annoys easy. I don't know what he did about all those women screaming—maybe he figured there was a good reason for that and left them alone. But when I hit that bass drum, it must have burned him good. You know, when you're excited already, a loud noise will make you jump twice as far.

That's about the only satisfaction I got—that I probably annoyed him the worst of anybody in New York City.

That and being so close to catching him.

The company here is nothing to brag about—women that will talk your arm off and half your shoulder, and guys that say, "Peaceful enough for you?" and back-slappers, and people that hum to themselves—

Besides that, the place is so damned dull. Clouds to stand on, nothing to eat even if you wanted to eat, and nothing to do except stand around and watch the new ones come through. We can't see much of New York any more, because it keeps getting mistier all the time—fading away, kind of, like maybe this dimension is getting a little farther away from the ordinary one every day.

I asked Mr. Dauth yesterday how he thought the whole thing would wind up. Mr. Dauth isn't bad. He's a big, cheer-

ful guy, about fifty. The kind that likes good food and good beer and a lot of it. But he doesn't complain. He admits that his habit of sucking his teeth out real loud is aggravating and says maybe he deserved what he got, which you'll admit is big of him. So I talk to him a lot, and the other day, when we were watching a new batch that had just come through, I asked him where he thought it would all end, because we can hear each other, you see, being in the same dimension.

He pursed his lips and frowned like he was thinking it over, and then said that as far as he could see, there wasn't any human being that was perfect. Anybody is liable to do something aggravating sooner or later. That's the way people are.

"And this Martian of yours seems to be thorough," he said. "Very thorough. It might take him years to get through studying the Earth."

"And then what?" I asked him.

"Well," he said, "eventually, if he keeps it up long enough, we'll *all* be over here."

I hope he's right. Now that I come to think of it, that cute waitress I mentioned has a habit of setting down a coffee cup so half of it slops into the saucer. If Mr. Dauth is right, all I've got to do is wait.

It stands to reason.

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