THE MAGAZINE OF

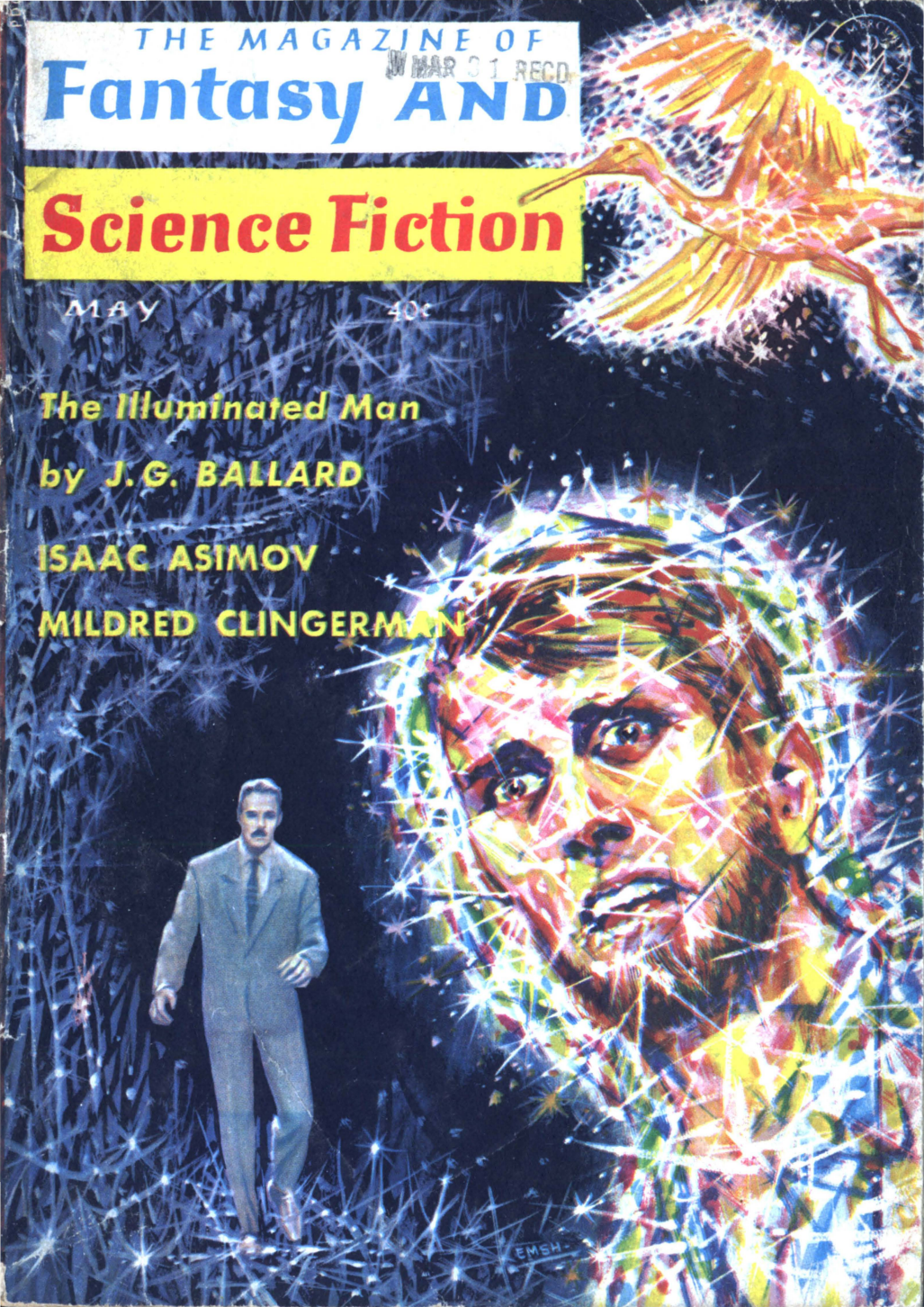
Fantasy AND Science Fiction

MAY 40¢

The Illuminated Man
by J.G. BALLARD

ISAAC ASIMOV

MILDRED CLINGERMAN



Fantasy and Science Fiction

MAY

Including Venture Science Fiction

The Illuminated Man *(novelet)*	J. G. BALLARD	5
Three Times Around	JANE ROBERTS	32
You Have To Stay Inside	CALVIN W. DEMMON	37
No Place Like Where	ROBERT M. GREEN, JR.	38
The Building of a Protein	THEODORE L. THOMAS	49
Invasion *(verse)*	CHRISTOPHER CORSON	50
A Red Heart and Blue Roses	MILDRED CLINGERMAN	51
Books	AVRAM DAVIDSON	67
Sea Wrack *(short novelet)*	EDWARD JESBY	72
Mar-ti-an	ROBERT LORY	89
Science: Ghost Lines in the Sky	ISAAC ASIMOV	93
Touchstone	TERRY CARR	103
The New Encyclopaedist	STEPHEN BECKER	115
Cantabile	JON DECLES	117
Editorial		4
Letters		127
F&SF Marketplace		129

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EDITORIAL

The former Kindly Editor once said, rather wistfully, to the subsequent Cruelly Editor, "What I would like . . . I think . . . I would like a story about a mile-long spaceship . . . it goes into the Coal Sack . . . and it comes out dirty . . ." So would we. Whatever became of them? Are they all going to other magazines? Aren't they even being written? If not, why not? Is it really because rocket ships, even if they aren't yet a mile long, are now Reality? and, hence, assumed to be no longer subjects for Romance? Do SF writers, actual and potential, suffer from an inferiority complex or a sibling rivalry in comparing themselves to Colonel John Glenn? Or has SF leapfrogged the spaceship—and not yet landed on the other side of it? Questions, questions . . . On one of Captain Cook's voyages he put into the remote island of Ontong Java, and there he found a vessel of the Royal Navy which had gone aground fifteen years earlier. The officers had all died or gone mad, and the few remaining crewmen, headed by an ancient Gunner's Mate, shed tears into their long white beards at the thought that Captain Cook would now and at last take them back Home. But he had different ideas. "No, no, my men," he said, briskly. "You are guarding His Majesty's ship, and must remain here till properly relieved by the Admiralty!" We told this to Horace Gold, and his comment, equally briskly, was, "Well, he got his, didn't he?" He did, indeed . . . Are we, perhaps, in a similar position? Are we urging others to continue to guard property (vessels, themes) gone aground and no longer servicable? And, if so, will it be our fate to be clubbed and devoured by speakers of the strange language whom we have yet to encounter? One wonders.

—Avram Davidson

Sounds, seas, jewels, deserts, flowers, crystals . . . these are things which J. G. Ballard in a very short time has made distinctively and peculiarly his—and distinctively and peculiarly beautiful as see, for instance, his THE GARDEN OF TIME (F & SF, Feb. 1962) and NOW WAKES THE SEA (May 1963). He has broken down the walls which Literature, no less than Nature, had seemed to erect between seemingly disparate elements, and from this breech has emerged his own strange beauty. Mr. Ballard is in his early thirties, was born in Shanghai (and interned there during the War), read medicine at Cambridge, has been a copywriter and an RAF pilot. He says, "The biggest development of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is inner *space, not outer, that needs to be explored."—And concludes:* "The only truly alien planet is Earth."

THE ILLUMINATED MAN

by J. G. Ballard

By day fantastic birds flew through the petrified forest, and jewelled alligators glittered like heraldic salamanders on the banks of the crystalline rivers. By night the illuminated man raced among the trees, his arms like golden cartwheels, his head like a spectral crown . . . .

DURING THE LAST YEAR, SINCE the news of what is now variously known as the Hubble Effect, the Rostov-Lysenko Syndrome and the LePage Amplification Synchronoclasmique first gained world-wide attention, there have been so many conflicting reports from the three focal areas in Florida, Byelorussia and Madagascar that I feel it necessary to preface my own account of the phenomenon with the assurance that it is entirely based upon first-hand experience. All the events I describe were witnessed by myself during the re-

cent, almost tragic visit to the Florida Everglades arranged by the United States government for the scientific attachés in Washington. The only facts I was not able to verify are the details of Charles Foster Marquand's life which I obtained from Captain Shelley, the late chief of police at Maynard, and although he was a biassed and untrustworthy witness I feel that in this single case he was almost certainly accurate.

How much longer remains before all of us, wherever we are, become expert authorities upon the exact nature of the Hubble Effect is still open to conjecture. As I write, here within the safety and peace of the garden of the British Embassy at Puerto Rico, I see a report in today's *New York Times* that the whole of the Florida peninsula, with the exception of a single highway to Tampa, has been closed and that to date some three million of the state's inhabitants have been resettled in other parts of the United States. But apart from the estimated losses in real estate values and hotel revenues ("Oh, Miami," I cannot help saying to myself, "you city of a thousand cathedrals to the rainbow sun") the news of this extraordinary human migration seems to have prompted little comment. Such is mankind's innate optimism, our conviction that we can survive any deluge or cataclysm, that we unconsciously dismiss the momentous events in Florida with a shrug, confident that some means will be found to avert the crisis when it comes.

And yet it now seems obvious that the real crisis is long past. Tucked away on a back page of the same *New York Times* is a short report of the sighting of another 'double galaxy' by observers at the Hubble Institute on Mount Palomar. The news is summarised in less than a dozen lines and without comment, although the implication is inescapable that yet another focal area has been set up somewhere on the earth's surface, perhaps in the temple-filled jungles of Cambodia or the haunted amber forests of the Chilean highland. But it is only a year since the Mount Palomar astronomers identified the first double galaxy in the constellation Andromeda, the great oblate diadem that is probably the most beautiful object in the universe, the island galaxy M 31.

Although these sightings by now seem commonplace, and at least half a dozen 'double constellations' can be picked from the night sky on any evening of the week, four months ago when the party of scientific attachés landed at Miami Airport on a conducted tour of the stricken area there was still widespread ignorance of what the Hubble Effect (as the phenomenon had been christened in the Western Hemisphere and the

English-speaking world) actually involved. Apart from a handful of forestry workers and biologists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, few qualified observers had witnessed the phenomenon and there were implausible stories in the newspapers of the forest 'crystallising' and everything 'turning into coloured glass.'

One unfortunate consequence of the Hubble Effect is that it is virtually impossible to photograph anything transformed by it. As any reader of scientific journals knows, glassware is extremely difficult to reproduce, and even blocks of the highest screen on the best quality art papers—let alone the coarse blocks used on newsprint—have failed to reproduce the brilliant multi-facetted lattices of the Hubble Effect, with their myriads of interior prisms, as anything more than a vague blur like half-melted snow.

Perhaps in retaliation, the newspapers had begun to suggest that the secrecy which surrounded the affected area in the Everglades —then no more than three or four acres of forest to the north-east of Maynard—was being deliberately imposed by the administration, and a clamour was raised about the rights of inspection and the unseen horrors concealed from the public. It so happened that the focal area discovered by Professor Auguste LePage in Madagascar—in the Matarre Valley, far into the hinterland of the island—was about 150 miles from the nearest road-head and totally inaccessible, while the Soviet authorities had clamped a security cordon as tight as Los Alamos's around their own affected area in the Pripet Marshes of Byelorussia, where a legion of scientific workers under the leadership of the metabiologist Lysenko (all, incidentally, chasing a complete red herring) was analysing every facet of the inexplicable phenomenon.

Before any political capital could be made from this campaign, the Department of Agriculture in Washington announced that all facilities for inspection would be gladly provided, and the invitation to the scientific attachés proceeded as part of the programme of technical missions and tours.

As we drove westwards from Miami Airport it was immediately obvious that in a sense the newspapers had been right, and that there was far more to the Hubble Effect than the official handouts had let us believe. The highway to Maynard had been closed to general traffic, and our bus twice overtook military convoys within twenty miles of Miami. In addition, as if to remind us of the celestial origin of the phenomenon, the news of yet another manifestation came through on the radio bulletins.

"There's an Associated Press report from New Delhi," George

Schneider, the West German attaché, came aft to tell us. "This time there are millions of reliable witnesses. Apparently it should have been plainly visible in the Western Hemisphere last night. Did none of you see it?"

Paul Mathieu, our French confrère, pulled a droll face. "Last night I was looking at the moon, my dear George, not the Echo satellite. It sounds ominous, but if Venus now has two lamps, so much the better."

Involuntarily we looked out through the windows, searching above the roadside pines for any glimpse of the Echo satellite. According to the AP reports its luminosity had increased by at least ten-fold, transforming the thin pinpoint of light which had burrowed across the night sky for so many faithful years into a brilliant luminary outshone only by the moon. All over Asia, from the refugee camps on the shores of the Jordan to the crowded tenements of Shanghai, it was being observed at the very moment we were making our fifty-mile drive to Maynard.

"Perhaps the balloon is breaking up," I suggested in a lame effort to revive our spirits. "The fragments of aluminium paint will be highly reflective and form a local cloud like a gigantic mirror. It's probably nothing to do with the Hubble Effect."

"I'm sorry, James, I wish we could believe that." Sidney Reston, of the State Department, who was acting as our courier, interrupted his conversation with the U.S. Army major in charge of the bus to sit down with us. "But it looks as if they're very much connected. All the other satellites aloft are showing the same increased albedo, seems more and more like a case of 'Hubble bubble, double trouble.' "

This absurd jingle echoed in my ears as we neared the eastern fringes of Big Cypress Swamp. Five miles from Maynard we left the highway and turned on to a rough track which ran through the date palms towards the Opotoka River. The surface of the road had been churned by scores of tracked vehicles, and a substantial military camp had been set up among the great oaks, the lines of tents hidden by the grey festoons of the spanish moss. Large piles of collapsible metal fencing were being unloaded from the trucks, and I noticed a squad of men painting a number of huge black signs with a vivid luminous paint.

"Are we going on manoeuvres, major?" the Swedish member of our party complained as the dust filled the cabin. "Why have we left the highway?"

"The highway is closed," the major replied evenly. "You'll be taken on a tour of the site, I assure you, gentlemen. The only safe approach is by river."

"*Safe* approach?" I repeated to Reston. "I say, what is this, Sidney?"

"Just the army, James," he assured me, "you know what they're like in emergencies. If a tree moves they declare war on it." With a shake of his head he peered out at the activity around us. "But I admit I can't see why they have to proclaim martial law."

Reaching the bank of the river, where half a dozen amphibious vehicles were moored by a floating quay, we debarked from the bus and were taken into a large quonset used for briefing visitors. Here we found some fifty or sixty other notables—senior members of government laboratories, public health officials and science journalists—who had been brought by bus from Miami earlier that morning. The atmosphere of lighthearted banter barely concealed a growing uneasiness, but the elaborate precautions of the military still seemed ludicrously exaggerated. After an interval for coffee we were officially welcomed and issued with our instructions for the day. These warned us in particular to remain strictly within the marked perimeters, not to attempt to obtain any of the 'contaminated material', and above all never to linger at any one spot but always to remain in rapid motion.

Needless to say, the pantomime humour of all this was lost on none of us and we were in high spirits when we set off down the river in three of the landing craft, the green walls of the forest slipping past on either side. I noticed immediately the quieter mood, by contrast, of the passenger beside me. A slimly built man of about forty, he was wearing a white tropical suit which emphasised the thin rim of dark beard framing his face. His black hair was brushed low over a bony forehead, and with the jaundiced gaze in his small liquid eyes gave him the appearance of a moody D. H. Lawrence. I made one or two attempts to talk to him, but he smiled briefly and looked away across the water. I assumed that he was one of the research chemists or biologists.

Two miles downstream we met a small convoy of motor launches harnessed together behind a landing craft. All of them were crammed with cargo, their decks and cabin roofs loaded with household possessions of every sort, baby carriages and mattresses, washing machines and bundles of linen, so that there were only a few precarious inches of freeboard amidships. Solemn-faced children sat with suitcases on their knees above the freight, and they and their parents gazed at us stonily as we passed.

Now it is a curious thing, but one seldom sees on the faces of Americans the expression of wan

resignation all too familiar to the traveller elsewhere in the world, that sense of cowed helplessness before natural or political disaster seen in the eyes of refugees from Caporetto to Korea, and its unmistakeable stamp upon the families moving past us abruptly put an end to our light-hearted mood. As the last of the craft pushed slowly through the disturbed water we all turned and watched it silently, aware that in a sense it carried ourselves.

"What *is* going on?" I said to the bearded man. "They look as if they're evacuating the town!"

He laughed briefly, finding an unintended irony in my remark. "Agreed—it's pretty pointless! But I guess they'll come back in due course."

Irritated by this elliptical comment, delivered in a curt off-hand voice—he had looked away again, engrossed upon some more interesting inner topic—I turned and joined my colleagues.

"But why is the Russian approach so different?" George Schneider was asking. "Is the Hubble Effect the same as this Lysenko Gyndrome? Perhaps it is a different phenomenon?"

One of the Department of Agriculture biologists, a grey-haired man carrying his jacket over one arm, shook his head. "No, they're almost certainly identical. Lysenko as usual is wasting the Soviets' time. He maintains that crop yields are increased because there's an increase in tissue weight. But the Hubble Effect is much closer to a cancer as far as we can see—and about as curable—a proliferation of the subatomic identity of all matter. It's almost as if a sequence of displaced but identical images were being produced by refraction through a prism, but with the element of time replacing the role of light." As it transpired, these were prophetic words.

We were rounding a bend as the river widened in its approach towards Maynard, and the water around the two landing craft ahead was touched by a curious roseate sheen, as if reflecting a distant sunset or the flames of some vast silent conflagration. The sky, however, remained a bland limpid blue, devoid of all cloud. Then we passed below a small bridge, where the river opened into a wide basin a quarter of a mile in diameter.

With a simultaneous gasp of surprise we all craned forward, staring at the line of jungle facing the white-framed buildings of the town. Instantly I realised that the descriptions of the forest 'crystallising' and 'turning into coloured glass' were exactly truthful. The long arc of trees hanging over the water dripped and glittered with myriads of prisms, the trunks and fronds of the date palms sheathed by bars of livid yellow and car-

mine light that bled away across the surface of the water, so that the whole scene seemed to be reproduced by an over-active technicolor process. The entire length of the opposite shore glittered with this blurred chiaroscuro, the overlapping bands of colour increasing the density of the vegetation, so that it was impossible to see more than a few feet between the front line of trunks.

The sky was clear and motionless, the hot sunlight shining uninterruptedly upon this magnetic shore, but now and then a stir of wind would cross the water and the trees erupted into cascades of rippling colour that lanced away into the air around us. Then, slowly, the coruscation subsided and the images of the individual trunks, each sheathed in its brilliant armour of light, reappeared, their dipping foliage loaded with deliquescing jewels.

Everyone in our craft was gaping at this spectacle, the vivid crystal light dappling our faces and clothes, and even my bearded companion was moved by astonishment. Clasping the seat in front of him, he leaned across the rail, the white fabric of his suit transformed into a brilliant palimpsest.

Our craft moved in a wide arc towards the quay, where a score of power cruisers were being loaded by the townsfolk, and we came within some fifty yards of the prismatic jungle, the hatchwork of coloured bars across our clothes transforming us into a boatload of harlequins. There was a spontaneous round of laughter, more in relief than amusement. Then several arms pointed to the waterline, where we saw that the process had not affected the vegetation alone. Extending outwards for two or three yards from the bank were the long splinters of what appeared to be crystallising water, the angular facets emitting a blue prismatic light washed by the wake from our craft. These splinters were growing in the water like crystals in a chemical solution, accreting more and more material to themselves, so that along the bank there was a congested mass of rhomboidal spears like the lengthening barbs of a reef.

Surprised by the extent of the phenomenon—I had expected, perhaps under the influence of the Lysenko theories, little more than an unusual plant disease, such as tobacco mosaic—I gazed up at the overhanging trees. Unmistakeably each was still alive, its leaves and boughs filled with sap, and yet at the same time each was encased in a mass of crystalline tissue like an immense glacé fruit. Everywhere the branches and fronds were encrusted by the same translucent lattice, through which the sunlight was refracted into rainbows of colour.

A hubbub of speculation broke out in our craft, during which only

myself and the bearded man remained silent. For some reason I suddenly felt less concerned to find a so-called 'scientific' explanation for the strange phenomenon we had seen. The beauty of the spectacle had stirred my memory, and a thousand images of childhood, forgotten for nearly forty years, now filled my mind, recalling the paradisal world of one's earliest years when everything seems illuminated by that prismatic light described so exactly by Wordsworth in his recollections of childhood. Since the death of my wife and three-year-old daughter in a car accident ten years earlier I had deliberately repressed such feelings, and the vivid magical shore before us seemed to glow like the brief forgotten spring of my marriage.

But the presence of so many soldiers and military vehicles, and the wan-faced townsfolk evacuating their homes, ensured that the little enclave of the transfigured forest—by comparison the remainder of the Everglades basin seemed a drab accumulation of peat, muck and marls—would soon be obliterated, the crystal trees dismembered and carried away to a hundred antiseptic laboratories.

At the front of the landing craft the first passengers began to debark. A hand touched my arm, and the white-suited man, apparently aware of my mood, pointed with a smile at the sleeve of his suit, as if encouraging me. To my astonishment a faint multicoloured dappling still remained, despite the shadows of the people getting to their feet around us, as if the light from the forest had contaminated the fabric and set off the process anew. "What on—? Wait!" I called.

But before I could speak to him he stood up and hurried down the gangway, the last pale shimmer from his suit disappearing along the crowded quay.

Our party was divided into several smaller groups, each accompanied by two NCO's, and we moved off past the queue of cars and trucks loaded with the townsfolk's possessions. The families waited their turn patiently, flagged on by the local police, eyeing us without interest. The streets were almost deserted, and these were the last people to go—the houses were empty, shutters sealed across the windows, and soldiers paced in pairs past the closed banks and stores. The sidestreets were packed with abandoned cars, confirming that the river was the only route of escape from the town.

As we walked along the main street, the glowing jungle visible two hundred yards away down the intersections on our left, a police car swerved into the street and came to a halt in front of us. Two men stepped out, a tall blond-haired police captain and a clergyman carrying a small suitcase and

a parcel of books. The latter was about thirty-five, with a high scholar's forehead and tired eyes. He seemed uncertain which way to go, and waited as the police captain strode briskly around the car.

"You'll need your embarkation card, Dr. Thomas." The captain handed a coloured ticket to the minister, and then fished a set of keys attached to a mahogany peg from his pocket. "I took these from the door. You must have left them in the lock."

The priest hesitated, uncertain whether to take the keys. "I left them there deliberately, captain. Someone may want to take refuge in the church."

"I doubt it, Doctor. Wouldn't help them, anyway." The captain waved briefly. "See you in Miami."

Acknowledging the salute, the priest stared at the keys in his palm, then slipped them reluctantly into his cassock. As he walked past us towards the wharf his moist eyes searched our faces with a troubled gaze, as if he suspected that a member of his congregation might be hiding in our midst.

The police captain appeared equally fatigued, and began a sharp dialogue with the officer in charge of our parties. His words were lost in the general conversation, but he pointed impatiently beyond the roof-tops with a wide sweep of one arm, as if indicating the approach of a storm. Although of strong physique, there was something weak and self-centered about his long fleshy face and pale blue eyes, and obviously his one remaining ambition, having emptied the town of its inhabitants, was to clear out at the first opportunity.

I turned to the corporal lounging by a fire hydrant and pointed to the glowing vegetation which seemed to follow us, skirting the perimeter of the town. "Why is everyone leaving, corporal? Surely it's not infectious—there's no danger from close contact?"

The corporal glanced laconically over his shoulder at the crystalline foliage glittering in the meridian sunlight. "It's not infectious. Unless you stay in there too long. When it cut the road both sides of town I guess most people decided it was time to pull out."

"Both sides?" George Schneider echoed. "How big is the affected area, corporal? We were told three or four acres."

The soldier shook his head dourly. "More like three or four hundred. Or thousand, even." He pointed to the helicopter circling the forest a mile or so away, soaring up and down over the date palms, apparently spraying them with some chemical. "Reaches right over there, towards Lake Okeechobee."

"But you have it under control," George said. "You're cutting it back all right?"

"Wouldn't like to say," the corporal replied cryptically. He indicated the blond policeman remonstrating with the supervising officer. "Captain Shelley tried a flame thrower on it a couple of days ago. Didn't help any."

The policeman's objections over-ruled—he slammed the door of his car and drove off in dudgeon—we set off once more and at the next intersection approached the forest, which stood back on either side of the road a quarter of a mile away. The vegetation was sparser, the sawgrass growing in clumps among the sandy soil on the verges, and a mobile laboratory had been set up in a trailer, 'U.S. Department of Agriculture' stencilled on its side. A platoon of soldiers was wandering about, taking cuttings from the palmettos and date palms, which they carefully placed like fragments of stained glass on a series of trestle tables. The main body of the forest curved around us, circling the northern perimeter of the town, and we immediately saw that the corporal had been correct in his estimate of the affected area's extent. Parallel with us one block to the north was the main Maynard-Miami highway, cut off by the glowing forest on both the eastern and western approaches to the town.

Splitting up into two's and three's, we crossed the verge and began to wander among the glacé ferns which rose from the brittle ground. The sandy surface seemed curiously hard and annealed, small spurs of fused sand protruding from the newly formed crust.

Examining the specimens collected on the tables, I touched the smooth glass-like material that sheathed the leaves and branches, following the contours of the original like a displaced image in a defective mirror. Everything appeared to have been dipped in a vat of molten glass, which had then set into a skin fractured by slender veins.

A few yards from the trailer two technicians were spinning several encrusted branches in a centrifuge. There was a continuous glimmer and sparkle as splinters of light glanced out of the bowl and vanished into the brilliant air like an electrical discharge. All over the inspection area, as far as the perimeter fence running like a serrated white bandage around the prismatic wound of the forest, people turned to watch.

When the centrifuge stopped we peered into the bowl, where a handful of limp branches, their blanched leaves clinging damply to the metal bottom, lay stripped of their glacé sheaths. Below the bowl, however, the liquid receptacle remained dry and empty.

Twenty yards from the forest a second helicopter prepared for take-off, its drooping blades rotating like blunted scythes, the

down-drought sending up a shower of light from the disturbed vegetation. With an abrupt lurch it made a laboured ascent, swinging sideways through the air, and then moved away across the forest roof, its churning blades apparently gaining little purchase on the air. There was a confused shout of 'Fire!' from the soldiers below, and we could see clearly the vivid discharge of light which radiated from the blades like St. Elmo's fire. Then, with an agonised roar like the bellow of a stricken animal, the aircraft slid backwards through the air and plunged towards the forest canopy a hundred feet below, the two pilots plainly visible at their controls. Sirens sounded from the staff cars parked around the inspection area, and there was a concerted rush towards the forest as the helicopter disappeared from sight.

As we raced along the road we felt its impact with the ground, and a sudden pulse of light drummed through the trees. The road led towards the point of the crash, a few houses looming at intervals at the ends of empty drives.

"The blades must have crystallised while it was standing near the trees!" George Schneider shouted as we climbed over the perimeter fence. "You could see the crystals melting, but not quickly enough. Let's hope the pilots are all right."

Several soldiers ran ahead of us, waving us back, but we ignored them and hurried on through the trees. After only fifty yards we were well within the body of the forest, and had entered an enchanted world, the spanish moss investing the great oaks with brilliant jewelled trellises. The air was markedly cooler, as if everything were sheathed in ice, but a ceaseless play of radiant light poured through the stained-glass canopy overhead, turning the roof of the forest into a continuous three-dimensional kaleidoscope.

The process of crystallisation was here far more advanced. The white fences along the road were so heavily encrusted that they formed an unbroken palisade, the frost at least a foot thick on either side of the palings. The few houses between the trees glistened like wedding cakes, their plain white roofs and chimneys transformed into exotic minarets and baroque domes. On a lawn of green glass spurs a child's toy, perhaps once a red tricycle with yellow wheels, glittered like a Fabergé gem, the wheels starred into brilliant jasper crowns. Lying there, it reminded me of my daughter's toys scattered on the lawn after my return from the hospital. They had glowed for a last time with the same prismatic light.

The soldiers were still ahead of me, but George and Paul Mathieu had fallen behind. Leaning against

the frosted white fencing, they were plucking the soles of their shoes. By now it was obvious why the Miami-Maynard highway had been closed. The surface of the road was pierced by a continuous carpet of needles, spurs of glass and quartz as much as six inches high, reflecting the coloured light through the leaves above. The spurs tore at my shoes, forcing me to move hand over hand along the verge of the road, where a section of heavier fencing marked the approach to a distant mansion.

Behind me a siren whined, and the police car I had seen earlier plunged along the road, its heavy tires cutting through the crystal surface. Twenty yards ahead it rocked to a halt, its engine stalled, and the police captain jumped out. With an angry shout he waved me back down the road, now a tunnel of yellow light formed by the interlocking canopies overhead.

"Get back! There's another wave coming!" He ran after the soldiers a hundred yards away, his boots crushing the crystal carpet.

Wondering why he should be so keen to clear the forest, I rested for a moment by the police car. A noticeable change had come over the forest, as if dusk had begun to fall prematurely from the sky. Everywhere the glacé sheaths which enveloped the trees and vegetation had become duller and more opaque, and the crystal floor underfoot was grey and occluded, turning the needles into spurs of basalt. The panoply of coloured light had vanished, and a dim amber gloom moved across the trees, shadowing the sequinned lawns.

Simultaneously it had become colder. Leaving the car, I started to make my way down the road—Paul Mathieu and a soldier, hands shielding their faces, were disappearing around a bend—but the icy air blocked my path like a refrigerated wall. Turning up the collar of my tropical suit, I retreated to the car, wondering whether to take refuge inside it. The cold deepened, numbing my face like a spray of acetone, and my hands felt brittle and fleshless. Somewhere I heard the hollow shout of the police captain, and caught a glimpse of someone running at full speed through the ice-grey trees.

On the right-hand side of the road the darkness completely enveloped the forest, masking the outlines of the trees, and then extended in a sudden sweep across the roadway. My eyes smarted with pain, and I brushed away the small crystals of ice which had formed over my eyeballs. Everywhere a heavy frost was forming, accelerating the process of crystallisation. The spurs in the roadway were now over a foot in height, like the spines of a giant porcupine, and the lattices between the tree-trunks were thicker and more translucent, so that the original

trunks seemed to shrink into a mottled thread within them. The interlocking leaves formed a continuous mosaic, the crystal elements thickening and overlaying each other. For the first time I suddenly visualised the possibility of the entire forest freezing solidly into a huge coloured glacier, with myself trapped within its interstices.

The windows of the car and the black body were now sheathed in an ice-like film. Intending to open the door so that I could switch on the heater, I reached for the handle, but my fingers were burned by the intense cold.

"You there! Come on! This way!"

Behind me, the voice echoed down the drive. As the darkness and cold deepened, I saw the police captain waving to me from the colonnade of the mansion. The lawn between us seemed to belong to a less sombre zone. The grass still retained its vivid liquid sparkle and the white eaves of the house were etched clearly against the surrounding darkness, as if this enclave were preserved like an island in the eye of a hurricane.

I ran up the drive towards the house, and with relief found that the air was at least ten degrees warmer. The sunlight shone through the leafy canopy with uninterrupted brilliance. Reaching the portico, I searched for the police captain, but he had run off into the forest again. Uncertain whether to follow him, I watched the approaching wall of darkness slowly cross the lawn, the glittering foliage overhead sinking into its pall. The police car was now encrusted by a thick layer of frozen glass, its windshield blossoming into a thousand fleur-de-lis crystals.

Quickly making my way around the house as the zone of safety moved off through the forest, I crossed the remains of an old vegetable garden, where seed-plants of green glass three feet high rose into the air like exquisite ornamented sculptures. I reached the forest again and waited there as the zone hesitated and veered off, trying to remain within the centre of its focus. I seemed to have entered a subterranean cavern, where jewelled rocks loomed from the spectral gloom like huge marine plants, the sprays of crystal sawgrass like white fountains frozen in time.

For the next hour I raced helplessly through the forest, my sense of direction lost, driven by the swerving walls of the zone of safety as it twisted like a benign tornado among the trees. Several times I crossed the road, where the great spurs were almost waist high, forced to clamber over the brittle stems. Once, as I rested against the trunk of a bifurcated oak, an immense multicoloured bird erupted from a bough over my head and flew off with a wild

screech, an aureole of molten light cascading from its red and yellow wings, like the birth-flames of a phoenix.

At last the strange whirlpool subsided and a pale light filtered through the stained glass canopy, transfiguring everything with its iridescence. Again the forest was a place of rainbows, the deep carmine light glowing from the jewelled grottos. I walked along a narrow road which wound towards a great white house standing like a classical pavilion on a rise in the centre of the forest. Transformed by the crystal frost, it appeared to be an intact fragment of Versailles or Fontainbleu, its ornate pilasters and sculptured friezes spilling from the wide roof which overtopped the forest. From the upper floors I would be able to see the distant water-towers at Maynard, or at least trace the serpentine progress of the river.

The road narrowed, declining the slope which led up to the house, but its annealed crust, like half-fused quartz, offered a more comfortable surface than the crystal teeth of the lawn. Suddenly I came across what was unmistakeably a jewelled rowing boat set solidly into the roadway, a chain of lapis lazuli mooring it to the verge. Then I realised that I was walking along a small tributary of the river. A thin stream of water still ran below the solid crust, and evidently this vestigial motion alone prevented it from erupting into the exotic spur-like forms of the remainder of the forest floor.

As I paused by the boat, feeling the huge topaz and amethyst stones encrusted along its sides, a grotesque four-legged creature half embedded in the surface lurched forwards through the crust, the loosened pieces of the lattice attached to its snout and shoulders shaking like a transparent cuirass. Its jaws mouthed the air silently as it struggled on its hooked legs, unable to clamber more than a few feet from the hollow trough in its own outline now filling with a thin trickle of water. Invested by the glittering sparkle of light that poured from its body, the alligator resembled some fabulous armourial beast. It lunged towards me again with sudden energy, and I kicked its snout, scattering the crystals which choked its mouth.

Leaving it to subside once more into a frozen posture, I climbed the bank and limped across the lawn towards the mansion, whose fairey towers loomed above the prismatic trees. Although out of breath and almost completely exhausted, I had a curious premonition of hope and longing, as if I were some fugitive Adam chancing upon a forgotten gateway to the lost paradise.

High in an upstairs window, a shot-gun cradled in his arm, the bearded man in the white suit watched me reflectively.

Now that ample evidence of the Hubble Effect is available to scientific workers throughout the world, there is general agreement upon its origins and the few temporary measures which can be taken to reverse its progress. Under pressure of necessity during my flight through the forests of the Everglades I had discovered the principal remedy—to remain in rapid motion—but I still assumed that some accelerated genetic mutation was responsible, even though such inanimate objects as cars and metal fencing were equally affected. However, by now even the Lysenkoists have grudgingly accepted the explanation given by workers at the Hubble Institute, that the random transfigurations throughout the world are a reflection of distant cosmic processes of enormous scope and dimensions, first glimpsed in the Andromeda spiral.

We know now that it is time ('Time with the Midas touch,' as Charles Marquand described it) which is responsible for the transformation. The recent discovery of anti-matter in the universe inevitably involves the conception of anti-time as the fourth side of this negatively charged continuum. Where anti-particle and particle collide they not only destroy their own physical identities, but their opposing time-values eliminate each other, subtracting from the universe another quantum from its total store of time. It is random discharges of this type, set off by the creation of anti-galaxies in space, which have led to the depletion of the time-store available to the materials of our own solar system.

Just as a supersaturated solution will discharge itself into a crystalline mass, so the supersaturation of matter in a continuum of depleted time leads to its appearance in a parallel spatial matrix. As more and more time 'leaks' away, the process of supersaturation continues, the original atoms and molecules producing spatial replicas of themselves, substance without mass, in an attempt to increase their foothold upon existence. The process is theoretically without end, and it is possible eventually for a single atom to produce an infinite number of duplicates of itself and so fill the entire universe, from which simultaneously all time has expired, an ultimate macrocosmic zero beyond the wildest dreams of Plato and Democritus.

As I lay back on one of the glass-embroidered chesterfields in the bedroom upstairs, the bearded man in the white suit explained something of this to me in his sharp intermittent voice. He still stood by the open window, peering down at the lawn and the crystal stream where the jewelled boat and the alligator lay embalmed,

driving the butt of his shot-gun through the broken panes as they annealed themselves. His thin beard gave him a fevered and haunted aspect. For some reason he spoke to me as if to an old friend.

"Damn it, B——, it was obvious years ago," he said with disgust. "Look at the viruses with their crystalline structure, neither animate nor inanimate, and their immunity to time." He swept a hand along the sill and scooped up a cluster of the vitreous grains, then scattered them across the floor like smashed marbles. "You and I will be like them soon, and the rest of the world. Neither living nor dead!"

He broke off to raise his shot-gun, his dark eyes searching between the trees. "We must move on," he announced, leaving the window. "When did you last see Captain Shelley?"

"The police captain?" I sat up weakly, my feet slipping on the floor. Several plate glass windows appeared to have been fractured and then fused together above the carpet. The ornate Persian patterns swam below the surface like the floor of some perfumed pool in the Arabian Nights. "Just after we ran to search for the helicopter. Why are you afraid of him?" I asked, but he shook his head irritably at the question.

"He's a venomous man," he replied. "As cunning as a pig."

We made our way down the crystal stairway. Everything in the house was covered by the same glacé sheath, embellished by exquisite curlicues and helixes. In the wide lounges the ornate Louis XV furniture had been transformed into huge pieces of opalescent candy, whose countless reflections glowed like giant chimeras in the cut-glass walls. As we disappeared through the trees towards the stream my companion shouted exultantly, as much to the forest as to myself: "We're running out of time, B——, running out of time!"

Always he was on the look-out for the police captain. Which of them was searching for the other I could not discover, nor the subject of their blood-feud. I had volunteered my name to him, but he brushed aside the introduction. I guessed that he had sensed some spark of kinship as we sat together in the landing craft, and that he was a man who would plunge his entire sympathy or hostility upon such a chance encounter. He told me nothing of himself. Shot-gun cradled under his arm, he moved rapidly along the fossilised stream, his movements neat and deliberate, while I limped behind. Now and then we passed a jewelled power cruiser embedded in the crust, or a petrified alligator would rear upwards and grimace at us noiselessly, its crystalline skin glowing with a thousand prisms

as it shifted in a fault of coloured glass.

Everywhere there was the same fantastic corona of light, transfiguring and identifying all objects. The forest was an endless labyrinth of glass caves, sealed off from the remainder of the world (which, as far as I knew, by now might be similarly affected), lit by subterranean lamps.

"Can't we get back to Maynard?" I shouted after him, my voice echoing among the vaults. "We're going deeper into the forest."

"The town is cut off, my dear B——. Don't worry, I'll take you there in due course." He leapt nimbly over a fissure in the surface of the river. Below the mass of dissolving crystals a thin stream of fluid rilled down a buried channel.

For several hours, led by this strange white-suited figure with his morose preoccupied gaze, we moved through the forest, sometimes in complete circles as if my companion were familiarising himself with the topography of that jewelled twilight world. When I sat down to rest on one of the vitrified trunks and brushed away the crystals now forming on the soles of my shoes, despite our constant movements—the air was always icy, the dark shadows perpetually closing and unfolding around us—he would wait impatiently, watching me with ruminative eyes as if deciding whether to abandon me to the forest.

At last we reached the fringes of a small clearing, bounded on three sides by the fractured dancing floor of a river bend, where a high-gabled summer house pushed its roof towards the sky through a break in the overhead canopy. From the single spire a slender web of opaque strands extended to the surrounding trees, like a diaphanous veil, investing the glass garden and the crystalline summer house with a pale marble sheen, almost sepulchral in its intensity. As if reinforcing this impression, the windows on to the veranda running around the house were now encrusted with elaborate scroll-like designs, like the ornamented stone casements of a tomb.

Waving me back, my companion approached the fringes of the garden, his shot-gun raised before him. He darted from tree to tree, pausing for any sign of movement, then crossed the frozen surface of the river with a feline step. High above him, its wings pinioned by the glass canopy, a golden oriole flexed slowly in the afternoon light, liquid ripples of its aura circling outwards like the rays of a miniature sun.

"Marquand!"

A shot roared into the clearing, its report echoing around the glass trees, and the blond-haired police captain raced towards the summer house, a revolver in his hand. As he fired again the crystal trel-

lises of the spanish moss shattered and frosted, collapsing around me like a house of mirrors. Leaping down from the veranda, the bearded man made off like a hare across the river, bent almost double as he darted over the faults in the surface.

The rapidity with which all this had happened left me standing helplessly by the edge of the clearing, my ears ringing with the two explosions. I searched the forest for any signs of my companion, and then the police captain, standing on the veranda, gestured me towards him with his pistol.

"Come here!" When I tentatively approached he came down the steps, scrutinising me suspiciously. "What are you doing around here? Aren't you one of the visiting party?"

I explained that I had been trapped after the crash of the helicopter. "Can you take me back to the army post? I've been wandering around the forest all day."

A morose frown twisted his long face. "The Army's a long way off. The forest's changing all the time." He pointed across the river. "What about Marquand? Where did you meet him?"

"The bearded man? He was taking shelter in a house near the river. Why did you shoot at him? Is he a criminal?"

Shelley nodded after a pause. His manner was somehow furtive and shifty. "Worse than that. He's a madman, completely crazy." He started to walk up the steps, apparently prepared to let me make my own way into the forest. "You'd better be careful, there's no knowing what the forest is going to do. Keep moving but circle around on yourself, or you'll get lost."

"Wait a minute!" I called after him. "Can't I rest here? I need a map—perhaps you have a spare one?"

"A map? What good's a map now?" He hesitated as my arms fell limply to my sides. "All right, you can come in for five minutes." This concession to humanity was obviously torn from him.

The summer house consisted of a single circular room and a small kitchen at the rear. Heavy shutters had been placed against the windows, now locked to the casements by the interstitial crystals, and the only light entered through the door.

Shelley holstered his pistol and turned the door handle gently. Through the frosted panes were the dim outlines of a high four-poster bed, presumably stolen from one of the nearby mansions. Gilded cupids played about the mahogany canopy, pipes to their lips, and four naked carytids with upraised arms formed the corner posts.

"Mrs. Shelley," the captain explained in a low voice. "She's not too well."

For a moment we gazed down

at the occupant of the bed, who lay back on a large satin bolster, a febrile hand on the silk counterpane. At first I thought I was looking at an elderly woman, probably the captain's mother, and then realised that in fact she was little more than a child, a young woman in her early twenties. Her long platinum hair lay like a white shawl over her shoulders, her thin high-cheeked face raised to the scanty light. Once she might have had a nervous porcelain beauty, but her wasted skin and the fading glow of light in her half-closed eyes gave her the appearance of someone preternaturally aged, reminding me of my own wife in the last minutes before her death.

"Shelley." Her voice cracked faintly in the amber gloom. "Shelley, it's getting cold again. Can't you light a fire?"

"The wood won't burn, Emerelda. It's all turned into glass." The captain stood at the foot of the bed, his peaked hat held in his hands, peering down solicitously as if he were on duty. He unzipped his leather jacket. "I brought you these. They'll help you."

He leaned forwards, hiding something from me, and then spilled several handfuls of red and blue gem-stones across the counterpane. Rubies and sapphires of many sizes, they glittered in the thin light with a fevered power.

"Shelley, thank you. . . ." The girl's free hand scuttled across the counterpane to the stones. Her child-like face had become almost vulpine with greed. Seizing a handful, she brought them up to her neck and pressed them tightly against her skin, where the bruises formed like fingerprints. Their contact seemed to revive her and she stirred slowly, several of the jewels slipping to the floor.

"What were you shooting at, Shelley?" she asked after an interval. "There was a gun going off, it gave me a headache."

"Just an alligator, Emerelda. There are some smart alligators around here, I have to watch them. You get some rest now."

"But, Shelley, I need more of these, you only brought me a few today. . . ." Her hand, like a claw, searched the counterpane. Then she turned away from us and seemed to subside into sleep, the jewels lying like scarabs on the white skin of her breast.

Captain Shelley nudged me and we stepped quietly into the kitchen. The small cubicle was almost empty, a disconnected refrigerator standing on the cold stove. Shelley opened the door and began to empty the remainder of the jewels on to the shelves, where they lay like cherries among the half-dozen cans. A light glacé frost covered the enamel exterior of the refrigerator, as everything else in the kitchen, but the inner walls remained unaffected.

"Who is she?" I asked as Shelley

pried the lid off a can. "Shouldn't you try to get her away from here?"

Shelley stared at me with his ambiguous expression. He seemed always to be concealing something, his blue eyes fractionally lowered from my own. "She's my wife," he said with a curious emphasis, as if unsure of the fact. "Emerelda. She's safer here, as long as I watch out for Marquand."

"Why should he want to hurt her? He seemed sane enough to me."

"He's a psycho!" Shelley said with sudden force. "He spent six months in a straight-jacket! He wants to take Emerelda back to his crazy house in the middle of the swamp." As an afterthought, he added: "She was married to Marquand."

As we ate, forking the cold meat straight from the can, he told me of the strange melancholy architect, Charles Foster Marquand, who had designed several of the largest hotels in Miami and then two years earlier abruptly abandoned his work in disgust. He had married Emerelda, after bribing her parents, within a few hours of seeing her in an amusement park, and then carried her away to a grotesque folly he had built among the sharks and alligators in the swamp. According to Shelley he never spoke to Emerelda after the marriage ceremony, and prevented her from leaving the house or seeing anyone except a blind negro servant. Apparently he saw his bride in a sort of PreRaphaelite dream, caged within his house like the lost spirit of his imagination. When she finally escaped, with Captain Shelley's assistance, he had gone beserk and spent some time as a voluntary patient at an asylum. Now he had returned with the sole ambition of returning with Emerelda to his house in the swamps, and Shelley was convinced, perhaps sincerely, that his morbid and lunatic presence was responsible for Emerelda's lingering malaise.

At dusk I left them, barricaded together in the white sepulcher of the summer house, and set off in the direction of the river which Shelley said was half a mile away, hoping to follow it to Maynard. With luck an army unit would be stationed at the nearest margins of the affected zone, and the soldiers would be able to retrace my steps and rescue the police captain and his dying wife.

Shelley's lack of hospitality did not surprise me. In turning me out into the forest he was using me as a decoy, confident that Marquand would immediately try to reach me for news of his former wife. As I made my way through the dark crystal grottos I listened for his footsteps, but the glass sheaths of the trees sung and crackled with a thousand voices

as the forest cooled in the darkness. Above, through the lattices between the trees, I could see the great fractured bowl of the moon. Around me, in the vitreous walls, the reflected stars glittered like myriads of fireflies.

At this time I noticed that my own clothes had begun to glow in the dark, the fine frost that covered my suit spangled by the starlight. Spurs of crystal grew from the dial of my wrist-watch, imprisoning the hands within a medallion of moonstone.

At midnight I reached the river, a causeway of frozen gas that might have soared high across the Milky Way. Forced to leave it when the surface broke into a succession of giant cataracts, I approached the outskirts of Maynard, passing the mobile laboratory used by the Department of Agriculture. The trailer, and the tables and equipment scattered around it, had been enveloped by the intense frost, and the branches in the centrifuge had blossomed again into brilliant jewelled sprays. I picked up a discarded helmet, now a glass porcupine, and drove it through a window of the trailer.

In the darkness the white-roofed houses of the town gleamed like the funerary temples of a necropolis, their cornices ornamented with countless spires and gargoyles, linked together across the roads by the expanding tracery. A frozen wind moved through the streets, which were waist-high forests of fossil spurs, the abandoned cars embedded within them like armoured saurians on an ancient ocean floor.

Everywhere the process of transformation was accelerating. My feet were encased in huge crystal slippers. It was these long spurs which enabled me to walk along the street, but soon they would fuse together and lock me to the ground.

The eastern entrance to the town was sealed by the forest and the erupting roadway. Limping westwards again, in the hope of returning to Captain Shelley, I passed a small section of the sidewalk that remained clear of all growth, below the broken window of a jewellery store. Handfuls of looted stones were scattered across the pavement, ruby and emerald rings, topaz brooches and pendants, intermingled with countless smaller stones and industrial diamonds that glittered coldly in the starlight.

As I stood among the stones I noticed that the crystal outgrowths from my shoes were dissolving and melting, like icicles exposed to sudden heat. Pieces of the crust fell away and slowly deliquesced, vanishing without trace into the air.

Then I realised why Captain Shelley had brought the jewels to his wife, and why she had seized upon them so eagerly. By some

optical or electromagnetic freak, the intense focus of light within the stones simultaneously produced a compression of time, so that the discharge of light from the surfaces reversed the process of crystallisation. (Perhaps it is this gift of time which accounts for the eternal appeal of precious gems, as well as of all baroque painting and architecture? Their intricate crests and cartouches, occupying more than their own volume of space, so contain a greater ambient time, providing that unmistakable premonition of immortality sensed within St. Peter's or the palace at Nymphenberg. By contrast the architecture of the 20th century, characteristically one of rectangular unornamented facades, of simple Euclidean space and time, is that of the New World, confident of its firm footing in the future and indifferent to those pangs of mortality which haunted the mind of old Europe.)

Quickly I knelt down and filled my pockets with the stones, cramming them into my shirt and cuffs. I sat back against the store front, the semi-circle of smooth pavement like a miniature patio, at whose edges the crystal undergrowth glittered like a spectral garden. Pressed to my cold skin, the hard faces of the jewels seemed to warm me, and within a few seconds I fell into an exhausted sleep.

I woke into brilliant sunshine in a street of golden temples, a thousand rainbows spangling the gilded air with a blaze of prismatic colours. Shielding my eyes, I lay back and looked up at the rooftops, their gold tiles apparently inlaid with thousands of coloured gems, like the temple quarter of Bangkok.

A hand pulled roughly at my shoulder. Trying to sit up, I found that the semicircle of clear sidewalk had vanished, and my body lay sprawled on a bed of sprouting needles. The growth had been most rapid in the entrance to the store, and my right arm was encased in a mass of crystalline spurs, three or four inches long, that reached almost to my shoulder. My hand was sheathed in a huge frozen gauntlet of prismatic crystals, almost too heavy to lift, my fingers outlined by a rainbow of colours.

Overwhelmed by panic, I managed to drag myself on to my knees, and found the bearded man in the white suit crouching behind me, his shot-gun in his hands.

"Marquand!" With a cry, I raised my jewelled arm. "For God's sake!"

My voice distracted him from his scrutiny of the light-filled street. His lean face with its small bright eyes was transfigured by strange colours that mottled his skin and drew out the livid blues and violets of his beard. His suit

radiated a thousand bands of colour.

He moved towards me but before he could speak there was a roar of gunfire and the glass sheet encrusted to the doorway shattered into a shower of crystals. Marquand flinched and hid behind me, then pulled me backwards through the window. As another shot was fired down the street we stumbled past the looted counters into an office where the door of a safe stood open on to a jumble of metal cash boxes. Marquand snapped back the lids on to the empty trays, and then began to scoop together the few jewels scattered across the floor.

Stuffing them into my empty pockets, he pulled me through a window into the rear alley, and from there into the adjacent street, transformed by the overhead lattices into a tunnel of crimson and vermilion light. We stopped at the first turning, and he beckoned to the glistening forest fifty yards away.

"Run, run! Anywhere, through the forest, it's all you can do!"

He pushed me forwards with the butt of his shotgun, whose breach was now encrusted by a mass of silver crystals, like a mediaeval flintlock. I raised my arm helplessly. In the sunlight the jewelled spurs coruscated like a swarm of coloured fireflies. "My arm, Marquand! It's reached my shoulder!"

"Run! Nothing else can help you!" His illuminated face flickered angrily. "Don't waste the stones, they won't last you forever!"

Forcing myself to run, I set off towards the forest, where I entered the first of the caves of light. I whirled my arm like a clumsy propeller, and felt the crystals recede slightly. By luck I soon reached a tributary of the river, and hurled myself like a wild man along its petrified surface.

For how many hours, or days, I raced through the forest I can no longer remember, for all sense of time deserted me. If I stopped for more than a minute the crystal bands would seize my neck and shoulder, and I ran past the trees for hour after hour, only pausing when I slumped exhausted on the glass beaches. Then I pressed the jewels to my face, warding off the glacé sheath. But their power slowly faded, and as their facets blunted they turned into nodes of unpolished silica.

Once, as I ran through the darkness, my arm whirling before me, I passed the summer house where Captain Shelley kept guard over his dying wife, and heard him fire at me from the veranda, perhaps confusing my spectral figure with Charles Marquand.

At last, late one afternoon, when the deepening ruby light of dusk settled through the forest, I entered a small clearing where the

deep sounds of an organ reverberated among the trees. In the centre was a small church, its gilt spire fused to the surrounding trees.

Raising my jewelled arm, I drove back the oak doors and entered the nave. Above me, refracted by the stained glass windows, a brilliant glow of light poured down upon the altar. Listening to the surging music, I leaned against the altar rail and extended my arm to the gold cross set with rubies and emeralds. Immediately the sheath slipped and dissolved like a melting sleeve of ice. As the crystals deliquesced the light poured from my arm like an overflowing fountain.

Turning his head to watch me, the priest sat at the organ, his firm hands drawing from the pipes its great unbroken music, which soared away, interweaved by countless overtones, through the panels of the windows towards the distant dismembered sun.

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

For the next week I stayed with him, as the last crystal spurs dissolved from the tissues of my arm. All day I knelt beside him, working the bellows of the organ with my arm as the rippling graces of Palestrina and Bach echoed around us. At dusk, when the sun sank in a thousand fragments into the western night, he would break off and stand on the porch, looking out at the spectral trees.

I remembered him as Dr. Thomas, the priest Captain Shelley had driven to the harbour. His slim scholar's face and calm eyes, their serenity belied by the nervous movements of his hands, like the false calm of someone recovering from an attack of fever, would gaze at me as we ate our small supper on a foot-stool beside the altar, sheltered from the cold all-embalming wind by the jewels in the cross. At first I thought he regarded my survival as an example of the Almighty's intervention, and I made some token expression of gratitude. At this he smiled ambiguously.

Why he had returned I did not try to guess. By now his church was surrounded on all sides by the crystal trellises, as if overtopped by the mouth of an immense glacier.

One morning he found a blind snake, its eyes transformed into enormous jewels, searching hesitantly at the door of the porch, and carried it in his hands to the altar. He watched it with a wry smile when, its sight returned, it slid away noiselessly among the pews.

On another day I woke to the early morning light and found him, alone, celebrating the Eucha-

rist. He stopped, half-embarrassed, and over breakfast confided: "You probably wonder what I was doing, but it seemed an appropriate moment to test the validity of the sacrament." He gestured at the prismatic colours pouring through the stained glass windows, whose original scruptural scenes had been transformed into paintings of bewildering abstract beauty. "It may sound heretical to say so, but the body of Christ is with us everywhere here—in each prism and rainbow, in the ten thousand faces of the sun." He raised his thin hands, jewelled by the light. "So you see, I fear that the church, like its symbol—" here he pointed to the cross "—may have outlived its function."

I searched for an answer. "I'm sorry. Perhaps if you left here—"

"No!" he insisted, annoyed by my obtuseness. "Can't you understand? Once I was a true apostate —I knew God existed but could not believe in him. Now," he laughed bitterly, "events have overtaken me."

With a gesture he led me down the nave to the open porch, and pointed up to the dome-shaped lattice of crystal beams which reached from the rim of the forest like the buttresses of an immense cupola of diamond and glass. Embedded at various points were the almost motionless forms of birds with outstretched wings, golden orioles and scarlet macaws, shedding brilliant pools of light. The bands of liquid colour rippled outwards through the forest, the reflections of the melting plumage enveloping us in endless concentric patterns. The overlapping arcs hung in the air like the votive windows of a city of cathedrals. Everywhere around us I could see countless smaller birds, butterflies and insects, joining their miniature haloes to the coronation of the forest.

He took my arm. "Here in this forest everything is transfigured and illuminated, joined together in the last marriage of time and space."

Towards the end, when we stood side by side with our backs to the altar, as the aisle transformed itself into an occluding tunnel of glass pillars, his conviction seemed to fail him. With an expression almost of panic he watched the keys of the organ manuals frosting like the coins of a bursting coffer, and I knew that he was searching for some means of escape.

Then at last he rallied, seized the cross from the altar and pressed it into my arms, with a sudden anger born of absolute certainty dragged me roughly to the porch and propelled me to one of the narrowing vaults.

"Go! Get away from here! Find the river!"

When I hesitated, the heavy sceptre weighing upon my arms,

he shouted fiercely: "Tell them I ordered you to take it!"

I last saw him standing arms outstretched to the approaching walls, in the posture of the illuminated birds, his eyes filled with wonder and relief at the first circles of light conjured from his upraised palms.

Struggling with the huge golden incubus of the cross, I made my way towards the river, my tottering figure reflected in the hanging mirrors of the spanish moss like a lost Simon of Cyrene pictured in a medieval manuscript.

I was still sheltering behind it when I reached Captain Shelley's summer house. The door was open, and I looked down at the bed in the centre of a huge fractured jewel, in whose frosted depths, like swimmers asleep on the bottom of an enchanted pool, Emerelda and her husband lay together. The Captain's eyes were closed, and the delicate petals of a blood-red rose blossomed from the hole in his breast like an exquisite marine plant. Beside him Emererelda slept serenely, the unseen motion of her heart sheathing her body in a faint amber glow, the palest residue of life.

Something glittered in the dusk behind me. I turned to see a brilliant chimera, a man with incandescent arms and chest, race past among the trees, a cascade of particles diffusing in the air behind him. I flinched back behind the cross, but he vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, whirling himself away among the crystal vaults. As his luminous wake faded I heard his voice echoing across the frosted air, the plaintive words jewelled and ornamented like everything else in that transmogrified world.

"Emerelda . . . ! Emerelda . . . !"

Here on this calm island of Puerto Rico, in the garden of the British Embassy these few months later, the strange events of that phantasmagoric forest seem a dozen worlds away. Yet in fact I am no more than 1000 miles from Florida as the crow (or should I say, the gryphon) flies, and already there have been numerous other outbreaks at many times this distance from the three focal areas. Somewhere I have seen a report that at the present rate of progress at least a third of the earth's surface will be affected by the end of the next decade, and a score of the world's capital cities petrified beneath layers of prismatic crystal, as Miami has already been—some reporters have described the abandoned resort as a city of a thousand cathedral spires, like a vision of St. John the Divine.

To tell the truth, however, the prospect causes me little worry. It is obvious to me now that the

origins of the Hubble Effect are more than physical. When I stumbled out of the forest into an army cordon ten miles from Maynard two days after seeing the helpless phantom that had once been Charles Marquand, the gold cross clutched in my arms, I was determined never to visit the Everglades again. By one of those ludicrous inversions of logic, I found myself, far from acclaimed as a hero, standing summary trial before a military court and charged with looting. The gold cross had apparently been stripped of its jewels, and in vain did I protest that these vanished stones had been the price of my survival. At last I was rescued by the embassy in Washington under the plea of diplomatic immunity, but my suggestion that a patrol equipped with jewelled crosses should enter the forest and attempt to save the priest and Charles Marquand met with little success. Despite my protests I was sent to San Juan to recuperate.

The intention of my superiors was that I should be cut off from all memory of my experiences—perhaps they sensed some small but significant change in me. Each night, however, the fractured disc of the Echo satellite passes overhead, illuminating the midnight sky like a silver chandelier. And I am convinced that the sun itself has begun to effloresce. At sunset, when its disc is veiled by the crimson dust, it seems to be crossed by a distinctive latticework, a vast portcullis which will one day spread outwards to the planets and the stars, halting them in their courses.

I know now that I shall return to the Everglades. As the example of that brave apostate priest who gave the cross to me illustrates, there is an immense reward to be found in that frozen forest. There in the Everglades the transfiguration of all living and inanimate forms occurs before our eyes, the gift of immortality a direct consequence of the surrender by each of us of our own physical and temporal identity. However apostate we may be in this world, there perforce we become apostles of the prismatic sun.

So, when my convalescence is complete and I return to Washington, I shall seize an opportunity to visit the Florida peninsula again with one of the many scientific expeditions. It should not be too difficult to arrange my escape and then I shall return to the solitary church in that enchanted world, where by day fantastic birds fly through the petrified forest and jewelled alligators glitter like heraldic salamanders on the banks of the crystalline rivers, and where by night the illuminated man races among the trees, his arms like golden cartwheels and his head like a spectral crown. ◄

Jane Roberts is married, lives in upstate New York, and is the author of the memorable THE RED WAGON (F&SF, Dec. 1956), THE CHESTNUT BEADS, (Oct. 1957) and THE BUNDU (March 1958)—what else do you need to know? . . . A time there was when the father of Benvenuto Cellini, goldsmith and autobiographer to the Renaissance and the ages, playing at the viol by the laundry fire, espied in the glowing coals a salamander . . . but those days are long since gone: we shall not see them come again in our time. What we have *seen come in our time are the hideous whirling machines, the horrible heated air, the mesmeric trance into which so many patrons fall, of the automated laundry: for* no *other purpose, these, than the mere cleansing of clothes?*

THREE TIMES AROUND

by Jane Roberts

JERRY FOX PARKED THE STATION wagon in front of the laundromat. It was nine P. M. and the rest of the business section was dark. He eyed the squat building distastefully. Yellow lights from the steamy plate glass windows stained small patches of still unmelted snow. He'd never been in a laundromat before and he wasn't anxious to go in now.

Once inside, he paused to get his bearings. The floor was sloppy with slush carried in on shoes and rubbers. Gummy white detergent lay here and there in hard undissolved mounds. Hot gusts of air rushed at him as he closed the door. High pitched squeals rose from the driers and the whole room seemed filled with vibrations. His head whirled. "Hot in here," he muttered to one one.

A man seated on one of the green park style benches looked up wearily. Sweat ran down his broad forehead. A limp magazine lay discarded on his lap. "Awful," he said.

Jerry Fox put the basketful of clothes down. The special detergent that his wife had given him lay on top. "Wife's sick," he said. "I've been putting off coming here for a week. She finally raised cain —no clean clothes." He grinned

weakly. The other man nodded. Three men and three women sat around the room on benches. They looked up vacantly but no one else spoke.

The air was stifling after the faint crispness of the Spring night. Jerry sat down for a minute, looking around. A variety of finger-marked signs were tacked to the walls. One read: "Don't leave your clothes unattended. Laundromat is not responsible for loss." Jerry bent down to take the laundry out of the basket when another sign in black heavy lettering made him pause anxiously. This sign said: "Danger. Do not put any rubber backed materials in driers. Due to chemical reactions, the machines might explode."

Beneath the sign was a newspaper clipping about a fire in a laundromat caused by a rubberized mat thrown into a drier. Jerry grimaced and pawed through the dirty clothes. He tried to remember—had he seen a mat like that in the laundry—or hadn't he? No one seemed to pay him any attention but he felt sheepish when he found the bathroom rug with the rubber back. Apparently it could be washed but not dried and he made a mental note not to put it in the drier.

A few empty washers stood like eerie white enamel animals. Jerry examined them warily, then put a quarter in one of the slots that stuck out like a metal tongue. A distant greedy drone arose as the machine digested the money. Jerry threw some clothes in, almost frantically, and slammed the lid. Three times he repeated the process. The other people still watched, but absently. An outlay of old sports magazines caught his eye. He picked one up and sat down next to the man with the sweating forehead.

So much steam covered the windows that Jerry couldn't see outside. The high pitched squeals drom the driers hurt his eardrums. He looked over. Towels and sheets spun in the transparent circle of glass, toppled and turned like pieces of paper in a hurricane. He felt dizzy, fascinated and yet oddly horrified by the motion. None of the people spoke. Jerry felt tired himself from the heat and to amuse himself he let his gaze travel from one face to another. No one seemed to notice. Heads were bowed in magazines or newspapers and two women just napped sitting up. They looked half dead, Jerry thought disgustedly. That was what modern civilization did to you—made you flabby—no exercise. At the same time he realized that he was growing more dizzy every minute.

Unsteadily he got up. Every night he took a stint around the block. He'd missed it tonight and Sarah had made him promise not to leave the clothes unattended. But the heat was driving him mad.

He felt imprisoned. Staggering toward the door, he tried the knob. It didn't turn. He tried again, feeling panicky and foolish at the same time. The people had apparently forgotten him. No one seemed to notice. His dizziness grew worse. The door shimmered. Desperately he tried the knob again. "Uh, door doesn't work," he said with silly embarrassment. No one answered. The man with the sweaty forehead seemed asleep.

Just then he heard footsteps outside. The door opened. A woman came in, loaded down with clothes. Quickly Jerry slid through the door as she entered. The cold air sent shivers through him. He was ashamed at his own relief but he stood there gratefully, shaking, taking deep breaths of air. You couldn't see into the laundromat from the outside either. Little rivers of steam ran eternally down the glass windows. He grinned at his earlier panic, and began to trot down the street.

Amazing though, how weak he felt. Everyone, even his wife, seemed flabby lately and that was why he'd started his nightly sprints over a month ago. Boy, you're really out of shape, he told himself disgustedly. Look what working in an office does for you. Nevertheless he felt better. The air was reviving. He passed a few shops and turned up a dark side street where old two story houses shot up from brick sidewalks.

The laundromat was on a corner. He came up to it from the rear. A smell like a million women washing and ironing all at once spread down the street. A neon sign glowed: "Open twenty four hours a day." He paused, dismayed. A sudden return of panic made him weak. He hated like the devil to go back in there again. Walking around to the front, he called himself all kinds of a fool. Granted, the place was worse than he expected. The people in there were as lethargic as idiots and the heat was almost unbearable, but next week if Sarah was still sick, he'd just send the clothes to the laundry no matter what she said. He didn't care if she was right and it was more expensive. So all he had to do was go in now, wait for the clothes, and go home. No one could force him to come here again next week.

Besides, he told himself angrily, the whole thing was ridiculous to begin with. He was a grown man, thirty eight years old and if women could put up with laundromats week after week, it certainly seemed that he could stand it for one night. He straightened his shoulders, opened the door, and went back in. Nothing seemed to have changed. If anything, the heat was worse, and an added pressure weighed down the air. Three angry clicks called out to him and he ran over to the three washers, threw open the doors and

peered in. His clothes were done, now all he had to do was dry them!

He gathered up the damp clothes and put them in the huge driers, remembering at just the last moment to take out the rubberized mat. Already the dizziness was returning, but the drying cycle was only supposed to take ten minutes and he told himself sternly that he guessed he could last that long. Again he looked around, trying not to be bothered because no one looked up to meet his gaze. The woman who had entered when he left for his walk seemed to be in a pleasant stupor now. She sat with a box of detergent on her lap, and a half empty bottle of soda pop beside her.

Jerry moved his head, to check the driers. Sarah's clothing spun round and round in one machine. He caught sight of her blue nightgown, flimsy and light as air, billowing and falling. His head dropped. His eyes were very heavy. The dizziness was almost comforting. He had the odd crazy sensation that the whole room was spinning around.

Beside him, the man with the sweaty forehead dropped over gently with a slight squash. His weight fell against Jerry's shoulder. Jerry grimaced slightly, annoyed at being disturbed. But something in the man's face wouldn't let Jerry relax again. He managed to open his eyes enough to look about. It was an effort to turn his head. The room was very peaceful. The woman with the soda bottle had spilled it. Her hand, looking incredibly white and soft, had fallen over the top of the bottle so that the brownish liquid spilled onto the floor.

Slowly it occurred to Jerry that something was wrong, and yet he couldn't feel concerned. The soda pop went on dripping. The eerie but somehow peaceful noises and clicks of the machines continued. And then he tried to move and a sweet nightmarish fear spread through his bones far beneath consciousness. His mouth was astonishingly dry and his skin burned as if he'd fallen asleep while sunbathing. The alarms reached his brain. He still hadn't made the conscious decision to do anything, but already his body stirred. He made it, on his hands and knees to the nearest steady looking object, the raised platform on which the washers were lined.

With each motion, the heavy air pressed down upon him. Heat came from everywhere. The awful hypnotizing machine noises whirred above him. With determined desperation he reached out for the platform and slowly dragged himself up, keeping one foot on the floor for support. The foot wobbled, strained, pulled. He yanked it up and looked down, bewildered. The whole floor of the room was revolving. Only the plat-

forms were not. He was sure that he was out of his mind, or suffering from hallucinations, or having heat stroke. Worse, the heat itself was growing more intense. He saw a door behind the machines and tried to reach it.

More frightened and confused than he'd ever been in his life, he dragged himself along. Finally he touched the small uneven wooden door. Just then voices caught his attention. He tried to stand up and yell for help, but he couldn't quite make it to his feet and his throat was too dry to make any sound at all.

Footsteps came from somewhere above. Jerry pushed the little door open and shoved himself through. Then he pulled the door almost shut. He was in a narrow passageway behind the machines, obviously used by repairmen. His whole body was shaking, but he knew that he was wide awake now, sick, but in full possession of his senses. The air inside the passageway was dank but it was cool. His head stopped pounding so much, and he tried to collect himself.

He peeked through the door. A man and a woman came into the laundromat from a side entrance he hadn't noticed earlier. Then he remembered that the building had two stories, with the caretakers living upstairs. He started to move, then paused again, uncertain.

The caretakers went up to the first bench. The man touched the woman who'd spilled the soda pop. She fell over so quickly and easily that Jerry caught his breath. Then he looked at the others. They slouched emptily, as if their insides were gone, soft and rubbery and light. "They're all done," the woman said. There was a cool lilt to her voice, a frightening clarity. She and the man picked up the billowy bodies, threw them over their arms like empty garments, washed, spun dried, barely wrinkled. The man pushed a button. The oppressive hot air shot up through vents in the walls. In through other vents came the sweet summer scent of clothes drying. The caretaker said, "Hurry up. We've got to get this place aired out."

The woman threw the airy pile of bodies into a clothesbasket and draped a towel on top, tucking everything in neatly. "Three times around does it every time," she said in a clear cold voice. She and the man smiled at each other. They looked about as if making sure that they hadn't forgotten anything, then picked the basket up, carried it between them and opened the front door. Jerry watched from his hiding place. Then he rushed to the window and cleared away a tiny patch of steam with his hand so he could see out. The man and woman sat in the front seat of an automobile parked right out front. The basket was beside them. As Jerry

stood there, the car pulled out, turned the corner, and was gone.

Jerry ran outside. Something lay, fallen and forgotten on the ground. A glove, he thought automatically, but when he picked it up and felt its limp, soft, skin-like texture, he dropped it with a cry.

YOU HAVE TO STAY INSIDE

SEE, THERE WAS THIS PERSON NAMED Edward, who didn't know very much about anything. Anyway, one day, bacause it was so hot outside, Edward went inside. This may have been the smartest thing he ever did in his life, and, indeed, it was, for when he got inside not only did he get some of the lemonade which his mom had fixed for him, but he escaped the Harris Thing by a good margin of two inches, and then, sipping his lemonade, he could watch it through the window as it nibbled on this other person named William, who was screaming.

His mother gave him some more cool lemonade, and it burned his throat a little but he drank it all because it was so hot outside. He didn't go outdoors anymore that day, because he could hear the Harris Thing snuffling around out there. His mother was afraid to go out too, and she sent for the grocery boy, but he was grabbed on his way up the front stairs and smashed to the sidewalk. He didn't get up, and he bled for a long time until the men in the metal cage came and picked him up.

This person named Edward Harris just sat upstairs at the bowl of water and made faces in it.

—CALVIN W. DEMMON

Early one Spring evening a few pair of years ago, Robert Silverberg and we approached one of those vast, towering, impersonal and repetetive housing "developments" which infest Manhattan Island like a case of shingles. The two of us, by common and unspoken consent, stopped, gazed at its height, length, breadth. "I have a feeling," said Mr. Silverberg, musingly, "that if one were to go into any one of those units he would find it inhabited by duplicates of the same people living in the equivalent apartments of any of the other units." Struck by the extreme likelihood of this we said, "Yes, and probably each set of duplicates functions on only one of a given set of days, and sits immobile in its own apartment on the other days." Mr. S. nodded. . . . "Watching television," he suggested. We agreed. "There's a story in that," he said. "Yes, there is," we said; "and it could be called The Thursday People. *. . ." A truck snorted nearby, seven little girls named Mary Theresa darted down upon us mounted on roller skates, Mr. Silverberg and we started, jumped a bit, continued on our way. So far as we are aware, Robert Silverberg has never written* The Thursday People; *and we* know *that* we *never did. It will never be written now, and why? Because Mr. Robert M. Green, Jr., has taken as his theme just such a conglomerate of human ant-heap, and—without at all having written the same story, no indeed—has nonetheless written a story which obviates the need for it. We feel that we have gained as much as we have lost and we trust that all of you (including Robert Silverberg) will agree.*

NO PLACE LIKE WHERE

by Robert M. Green, Jr.

AT SIX O'CLOCK EVERY EVENING, John Jackson parked his car in the lot and counted his blessings, hollowly, as a ritual to stave off panic.

"Plenty of hot water and the landlord pays the bill," he counted, looking toward the cheerless apartment development he laugh-

ingly called home—six looming, square-cornered beehives, housing some 16,000 people (the population of a bustling prairie city) on barely six acres of land.

"Stores, movies, services—right at your elbow, so to speak," he counted. He looked up to the fifteenth floor of the third beehive from the left. In the row of identical windows there, four looked out from—or in upon—the inadequate livingroom-bedroom-kitchenette-unit in which he, his wife, two daughters and dog lived, or rather, huddled, out of sight of the —roughly—15,996 other inadequately hived bees.

"No upkeep; no roofs to shingle; no paint jobs; no plaster jobs," he counted. Which four of those windows up there were home he could never tell. The bedroom was either seventh or eighth from the southwest corner. Maybe.

He walked like a good soldier into his entryway and took the right hand elevator. The left hand elevator never seemed to work for John. The first time he had tried it he had gone up and up, it seemed, for hours, but when the door opened he was in the basement. The second time had had become stuck between the ninth and tenth floors. This sort of thing didn't seem to happen to anybody else but John, but despite poohs from all sides John remained loyal to the right hand elevator.

Within its limitations, it behaved as well as could be expected. With his customary air of resignation, colored only faintly with despair, John pushed the 15 button and watched the door slide shut. Now he was completely at the mercy of the fanged, malevolent-looking children who always seemed to be in this elevator at this time. Maybe they lived in it.

Sometimes the children pushed all the buttons and ran out at the next stop. This was a nuisance. It meant that the elevator stopped and opened up to discharge invisible passengers at every floor.

Tonight they pushed only the even-numbered buttons, which were all in one vertical row. Then they held up the elevator for about twenty minutes on the fourth floor while they all got off, giggling. John couldn't estimate exactly how many there were. He would have guessed roughly 12½. Two of the little ones seemed to have antennae. The elevator wasn't well-lighted.

John was alone now. The elevator lumbered to a stop next at the sixth floor and the door opened on a view of the half-lit sixth floor hallway. John had ample time to inspect it. It wasn't much.

John also had ample time to inspect the dim hallways of the eighth, tenth, twelfth and fourteenth floors. These differed from the sixth floor hallway in that they were higher up—one presumed. One consolation was that John

was able to keep posted on his progress. There had been days when he had gone the whole way non-stop and wondered whether he was going up, down or sideways. Then about midway he frequently had a feeling that there was a struggle between the elevator and its motive machinery—as though it wanted to turn itself inside out or drift into another dimension.

He didn't know how long it took him tonight to get to 15. Probably not as long as it seemed. In any event, when he stepped out, expecting to feel a certain amount of relief, he felt hugely and incomprehensively confused. He was on the wrong 15th floor. Or he was on the right 15th floor but he was the wrong John Jackson.

He had felt this way before. Nothing had come of it.

He strode to his apartment, 15A, and stood outside the door for awhile, hearing, as he had heard upon other occasions, the tinkling of a piano, which sometimes played "My Isle of Golden Dreams," and sometimes "Beautiful Ohio," but always with lots of sustaining pedal and fat, squashy rolled chords.

He shrugged and opened the door and saw, as usual, his own pianoless apartment unit. His wife was crowding into the kitchenette as well as one person could. His daughters (aged 11 and 12) were, as usual, wrangling at the top of their lungs on the only sofa, while, inches away from them, the Thing was tuned up full blast filling the room with Western dialogue, adult or otherwise; who knew the difference?

John made the drinks. Then, after stepping on the dog, as usual, en route to his customary inch of space on the sofa, he sat and stared at nothing, trying to imagine himself weightless in space.

It took his daughters about half an hour to agree on some sort of armistice, and his wife about an hour to run out of oratory on the subject of standing over a hot stove all day. After the third time of being put out of John's lap, the dog succumbed to the inevitable and went to sleep.

Somebody turned off the Thing.

The second drink began to take hold.

Magically, wife, daughters and dog were alchemized into creatures whom he loved.

Suddenly the front door was thrown open. A lumpy, gap-toothed girl of about seven gawked in.

John sat there and looked at her, waiting for somebody else to say something or do something.

The little girl looked back at him.

"Where's the piano?" she asked.

"You must be crazy," said John Jackson, wishing immediately he had sounded like less of a grouch.

"I mean: where would we put a piano?"

"Who are you?" asked the little girl.

"Good question," said John, not trying to be kind. "You beat me to it."

"Where are my Mommy and Daddy?" asked the little girl. "What are you people doing in my apartment?"

"Oh I see," said John's wife. "The poor little dear has come to the wrong apartment."

"I wouldn't jump to any conclusions," said John. "Maybe we ought to toss a coin or something. It's awfully hard to tell around here. It could easily be us that's wrong."

"I won't either toss any coin," said the little girl. "My daddy pays rent here."

"I know," said the 11-year-old daughter. "She got off the elevator at the wrong floor."

"No, I did not," said the little girl. "I got off at the same floor I always do. 15."

"Well," said the 11-year-old daughter, "maybe you came to the wrong room. What apartment number do you have? 15-B?"

"No," said the 12-year-old daughter. "Somebody goofed. She doesn't live on this floor at all. I know everybody on this floor, and I never saw this little girl in my whole life."

"Pooey," said the 11-year-old daughter. "You don't either know everybody on the 15th floor. You don't know Mr. Potwin, because he leaves here every morning at six o'clock and doesn't come back until after ten o'clock. So how *could* you know him?"

"Is *this* Mr. Potwin," said the 12-year-old, pointing at the little girl. "Anyway I do too know Mr. Potwin, because I got up real early one morning and I peeked out the door and saw him."

"How did you know it was Mr. Potwin if you never—"

John Jackson barely suppressed a faint tremolo in his voice.

"Mr. Potwin has a round bald head with one horn in the middle. It is barbed and poisonous, and his eyes emit a deadly gamma ray. He is green all over except for his torso, which is invisible. The next person who utters an even mildly controversial word will be taken to the room of Mr. Potwin and left there to be eaten."

"But she said—"

"Even mildly controversial. DID YOU HEAR ME?"

John Jackson's wife turned to the strange little girl and said:

"Mr. Jackson is always tired at this time of day. He can't seem to cope with things. Don't be frightened of him."

"Well," said the little girl, "Of course I didn't believe any of that silly stuff about the green man. But I wish somebody would tell me where my Mommy and Daddy are . . . Are you bad people?"

John Jackson went to the kitchenette, poured himself a straight shot of whiskey and gulped it down. Then, being an inveterate counter of things, he counted his fingers (thumbs included). As he neared ten he was conscious of rags of gloom peeling off life and blowing away, leaving specks of naked cheer. At the count of ten he was aware of a growing glow. By great effort he managed to get off a sort of smile.

"Look little girl," he said, almost kindly, "This is 15A. It is the only 15A in this building. Please, God, it is the only 15A in this building."

"Of course it is," said the little girl. "I know that. I live in 15A."

"Oh ho ho," said John's wife. "I see it now! She's in the wrong building. They all look alike. Remember when I went in building number 35 by mistake? This is building number 55, little girl. 55 Watkins Avenue."

"That's right, little girl," said John Jackson. Still flushed with his victory in the matter of the smile, he pushed his luck and essayed a chuckle. It was at any rate distinguishable from a growl. "Where do you live now. 35? 85? They do look alike. They may in fact be exactly the same place with different numbers on the doors to puzzle insurance salesmen."

The little girl was staring in horror now. She stepped backward.

"You *are* a bad man," she said.

"I most certainly am not," said John Jackson.

"Are too," said the little girl, taking another step backward.

"Oh now for Heaven's sake," said John Jackson, sickly-sweet. "We won't get any where this way. I am not a bad man. Sometimes I'm pretty awful, but not really bad. It has even been suggested that I have a heart of gold. Be that as it may, all I really want to do is deliver you to your Mommy and Daddy. Think hard, honey, and see if you can remember the number of your building."

The little girl started to cry. "It's this building. It's Number 55 and apartment 15A, and I know it because my Mommy always makes me say it in case I get lost."

The eleven-year-old said: "I bet I know. I bet she lives in number 55 on some other street."

"Who could be that dumb," said the 12-year-old. "Except you"

"Oh shut up," said the 11-year-old, pushing the 12-year-old onto the dog, who yowped.

John Jackson said "You two girls go to the bedroom at once. Now. Now. Now."

He watched the rags of gloom return to squat on top of the few specks of cheer, while the girls stamped to the bedroom, both complaining at once.

"Now," said John Jackson to the little girl. "Let's explore this last suggestion, witless as it may appear on the surface."

"I live at 55 Watkins Avenue," said the little girl, sullenly.

"Well, dammit to—Listen, little girl, *this* is 55 Watkins Avenue, and *this* is Apartment 15A, and by God you don't live here."

"I don't care," sobbed the little girl. "I do too, and you don't either, and my Daddy's name is George Street, and my telephone num—"

"Aha," said John Jackson and his wife at exactly the same time.

His wife won the race to the telephone book. "Street," she said. "R . . . S. . . . Sk, Sm, Ste, Sty, Stu, Stre, Street William—George! 55 Watkins Avenue!"

"55 Watkins Avenue," said John Jackson. "Ah-hh- well. But not 15A. And I'm sorry about that. I hate pedestrian solutions. There is really no mystery in this workaday world."

He dialed the number of George Street. A woman's voice answered. In the background a piano was playing "My Isle of Golden Dreams." Lot of sustaining pedal. Fat, squashy rolled chords.

"Mrs. Street?" asked John.

"Yes."

"There's a little girl here who says you are her mother—not that I doubt her, understand—but there seems to be some confusion about apartments. That is to say, somebody seems to be in the wrong apartment, and I'm quite sure it isn't I."

"What on earth are you talking about? Why isn't Mary home? It's past her suppertime."

"Well to tell you the truth she is just as anxious to go home as you are to have her there—which is no doubt almost as anxious as I am. There seems to be a hitch in the proceedings."

"Are you by any chance phoning from somewhere in the Watkins Avenue Apartment Development?" asked the voice of Mrs. Street.

"Yes."

"Oh then surely she can find her way here. We live in number 55."

"Pardon me," said John Jackson. "This may sound silly to you. What apartment do you live in?"

"15A. Mary knows that."

"Hold the line," said John Jackson. He turned to his wife, winked toward the window and said: "Let's jump. It's less complicated that way."

She gulped. "That's the coward's way. Let's try screaming our guts out."

"What guts?" John Jackson turned to the phone again. "Mrs. Street," he said, "My name is John Jackson. I live in Apartment 15A, 55 Watkins Avenue. That is where your little girl is at the moment. Want to make something out of it?"

There was a shriek from the bedroom. The 11-year-old was telling the 12-year-old: "It's mine; give it to me," and the 12-year-old was replying oratorically: "No, it

isn't; I saw it first . . ."

John Jackson said to his wife: "Go back there with a bull-whip."

"Are you bull-whipping my daughter?" asked the voice of Mrs. Street.

"I am not," said John Jackson. "Don't you think I have daughters of my own to bullwhip? Here talk to your little girl."

Mary whined into the phone: "He's a bad man. Why aren't you here, Mommy? I came home and you weren't here."

John Jackson snatched away the phone and shouted into it: "I am not a bad man."

There was one of those unplumbable silences, such as one has noticed occasionally at banquets just as one is telling one's neighbor the hostess is a harridan.

A fervent bass voice made itself heard through the radiator pipe aperture leading to the apartment below:

"WHAT DO YOU THINK I'M MADE OF, STUPID: MONEY?"

And a female wail: "No, no. Put it down. Don't hit me."

John Jackson smiled and looked at his watch. "Six-thirty on the button," he said. "The Blemishes are right on time."

"What did you say?" asked the voice of Mrs. Street.

"It wouldn't mean anything to you. I said 'The Blemishes are right on time.' "

A giggle came over the phone.

"Yes," said Mrs. Street, "He always hits her at six-thirty."

"He starts throwing bottles at seven-ten," said John Jackson.

"She calls the police at seven-twenty-five," said Mrs. Street.

"Seven-thirty," said John Jackson.

"Seven-twenty-five," said Mrs. Street. "What do *you* know about the Blemishes?"

"No one," said John Jackson, "can live over the Blemishes and not know *some* things about them."

"And you," said Mrs. Street, "live—over—the Blemishes?"

"Directly."

"——Oh——dear——"

"Let me talk to my Mommy, you bad man," cried little Mary.

"Is that little girl still out there?" cried the 11-year-old from the bedroom. "Why can't we come out?"

"Will you hush?" said John Jackson's wife. "Your Daddy's phoning."

"If you live over the Blemishes," said Mrs. Street, "then we really are in trouble. Please take care of my little girl."

"That's easy to say," said John Jackson.

"I said let me talk to my Mommy. I'll kick you," said the little girl.

"Why do I have to stay cooped up here with meany old stupid?" wailed the 12-year-old.

"Be quiet," said the wife.

"She likes milk and tomatoes es-

pecially," said Mrs. Street, "but she hates cabbage. She has an appointment with the pediatrician next Wednesday. Dr. Hemphill on Ridge Street. She'll go quietly if you promise her a package of lemon drops when she comes home."

"I know something about her too," said John Jackson. "She threatens to kick people. For what it's worth: I tend to kick back."

"You better not," said the little girl.

"I don't know what to do," said Mrs. Street.

"Oh mother," wailed the 12-year-old in the bedroom. "Look what she did to my dress. I'm going to kill her. I really am."

"Look, Mrs. Street," said John Jackson. "Frankly I think we're being defeatist about this thing. Surely there's a way out."

"Haven't you girls got homework to do?" wailed John's wife.

"I could call the police," said Mrs. Street.

"I wonder if this *is* a job for a policeman."

"A policeman is going to arrest *you*," said the little girl.

"How can I do my homework if she takes all my pencils?" said the 12-year-old.

"You keep taking *my* pencils, you mean," said the 11-year-old.

"Maybe I should call the maintenance superintendent of this apartment building," said John Jackson. "I'll call you back."

He hung up the phone.

John's wife said: "If you girls don't stop bickering this instant I'll have your father whip you. You're not too old to be whipped."

"Who *is?*" asked John Jackson. "Or too *young* for that matter." He gave the little girl a long look. She cowered.

John Jackson dialed Slath, the maintenance superintendent, who lived in a room near the furnace. Slath had black bushy eyebrows, a perpetual sneer, and a smell of brimstone. He always wore a tall hat and a pair of oversized coveralls.

"Slath," said John Jackson. "*Who* lives in apartment 15A in this building?"

"You do, Mr. Jackson." Slath's voice was poisonous.

"Is that my Mommy you're talking to?" asked the little girl. "Why do you say 'slap'? You better not."

"Slath!" said John Jackson. "Does the name 'George Street' mean anything to you? Don't lie."

John Jackson thought he heard a silky electric crackle in the earpiece of the phone.

"I'm very busy now," said Slath. "You'll have to call the renting office if you have any complaints to make."

Slath hung up.

"I think you'd better feed those girls," said John Jackson to his wife. "It's the only way I can think of to get peace around here."

"There isn't much to eat. What about the little girl?"

John Jackson sighed. "I suppose you had a bite planned for me. I'll make it on whiskey, I think. Let her have my supper, provided it doesn't include cabbage. She hates cabbage."

"I hate fish too," said the little girl. "Particularly the eyes. And I hate blue cheese with gravy on it."

The phone rang.

"This is the police," said a nasal voice.

"Come and get me," shrilled John Jackson. "You'll never take me alive." He laughed wildly and hung up.

The 11-year-old ran sobbing out of the bedroom and tripped over the dog. The 12-year-old followed immediately, brandising a ruler and tripped over both of them. John Jackson could not decide which had the highest decibel count: the 11-year-old, the 12-year-old, or the dog.

"She took my candy bar out of my drawer," screeched the 12-year-old.

"I did not. I never even saw it," howled the 11-year-old.

"Yip-yip," yipped the dog.

"He's gonna bite me," whinnied the little girl.

The phone rang.

"This is Mrs. Blemish," whined the voice from downstairs. "I wish whatever it is you people up there are doing you'd cut it out. I have a headache."

"Mrs. Blemish," said John Jackson, "If I am not mistaken you will have a worse headache in about half a minute. It is almost ten after seven, at which time, as you well know, you are going to have a bottle thrown at you."

He slammed down the phone.

"John! You shouldn't have!" said John's wife. But she giggled. She turned to the daughters who were reassembling themselves after the wreck. "Take ten cents apiece and go to the store. Do your fighting there."

"Are they gonna get some candy?" asked the little girl.

"Here," said John Jackson to the little girl. "Here's a dime. Go on out with them. If my wife can be a mercenary appeaser, so can I. . . . No! Wait a minute. Don't anybody move."

An electric light bulb with the word "Idea" in it had appeared above his head. Nobody happened to look, however, because the phone picked that moment to ring.

"Listen, wise guy, this is Blemish. Any more cracks out of you and I'll come up there and—"

"You can't get away with it, Blemish. Those cockroaches that keep coming up here from your place—I drill them every night. And arm them. One move out of you and I'll send them down there close-order, column of threes, bayonets fixed, hup-two-thr—"

"Listen, you—"

John Jackson hung up.

"Now listen everybody," he said. "I, John Jackson, will buy the

candy. Nobody goes with me but the little girl."

"Aw, that's not fair," whined the 12-year-old.

"Aw, but Mommy said—" whined the 11-year-old.

"Yeah," said the 12-year-old, pointing to the little girl, "*she* gets to go."

"Tie them. Gag them. Hang them up by the thumbs if necessary," said John Jackson to his wife.

He took the little girl by the hand and strode to the door. The electric light bulb remained above his head, but nobody saw it.

He pushed the elevator button. The right one arrived, and the little girl balked when John tried to steer her into it.

"Mommy says always wait for the other elevator. This one acts goofy."

"Not with me it doesn't," said John. "It likes me. I'm magic."

She came with him, but her eyes were furtive.

They reached the first floor without encountering any of the fanged children who normally inhabited the elevator. Then John walked over to the directory of tenants in the first floor lobby. In the S column there was "Street, George—15A." In the J column there was "Jackson, J—15A."

The light above John's head now bore the legend *inspiration,* instead of *idea.*

He took the little girl back to the elevators. Both the left one and the right one were there, waiting. John pointed to the left one.

"All aboard," he said. "Here's your dime. You don't want any candy now."

"Yes, I do too," said the little girl. "You said . . ."

"I had an idea," said John Jackson. "I thought I might call your mother from the candy store. Invite her to come join us. I don't know. I still wonder if it would have worked. What if she came and we weren't there. Or what if we *were* there but weren't *we.*"

The little girl looked baffled but all game.

"Or what," she said, "if Daddy saw you and Mommy. He's very jealous, my Daddy is."

"Goodbye, little girl," said John Jackson, pushing her into her elevator. She touched her button, the door closed behind her, and the floor-indicator showed that her elevator was moving up. John Jackson waited until it stopped at 15, then stepped into the right hand elevator, almost tripping over an aggregation of about 17.4 fanged little monsters who looked up at him over their lollypops, gum-bubbles and antennae. No doubt they saw murder in his eyes this time. They let him ride all the way to the top, non-stop.

He walked to his apartment smug in the knowledge that this was *his* 15th floor.

He heard no tinkle of piano outside his door. He walked in and sat down at the telephone table.

"Where's the candy?" asked the 11-year-old.

"Mmmmph."

"But you *said*—" began the 11-year-old.

"Let's watch the TV," said the 12-year-old, who was one year smarter.

Mrs. Street answered her phone. In the background somebody was playing "Beautiful Ohio" on the piano. Lots of sustaining pedal. Fat, squashy rolled chords.

"Yes," she said, "Mary is home. Don't try to explain. I'm sure I wouldn't understand. My husband refuses to talk about any of this."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Street," said John Jackson. It seemed so final.

The phone rang and it was Slath.

"Listen, Mr. Jackson," said the crackling silky voice. "About that little mix-up—that Street business —maybe I can explain that."

"Don't," said John Jackson. "I don't think I could stand it if it turned out to be plausible and pedestrian. But look, Slath, about the Blemishes . . . That couldn't be plausible and pedestrian, could it?

"Wouldn't you like to know," said Slath. Thunder rumbled over the southern horizon. Slath hung up.

John opened the paper to the classified section.

"Private houses have lawns that have to be mowed," he muttered.

"And sidewalks that have to be shoveled," said his wife.

"And oil burners that develop short circuits," said John.

"Or coal furnaces that have to be stoked at 6 A.M.," said his wife. "And not enough room to put the trash."

"And undersized hot water heaters that run out on you in the middle of a shower," said John. "Look. Here's a house you can get for $14,000. It doesn't say what kind of a down payment."

He went to the phone.

SF CONVENTION NOTE

For science fiction fans in the Mid-west: the Annual Midwescon will be held in 1964 on the 26th, 27th and 28th of June at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio.

THE BUILDING OF A PROTEIN

by Theodore L. Thomas

ALL YOU DO TO BUILD A PROTEIN molecule is hook together some 500 or more amino acids in the right order, and amino acids are not very complicated compounds. For this reason chemists have readily taken on the job of protein synthesis.

Things are coming along pretty well. Some new clues on how the living cell makes protein have come to light at M. I. T. The whole procedure seems to break down to a chain of command reminiscent of the army.

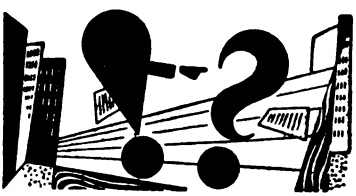
Up at the top, controlling everything, is the double-strand helix called deoxyribonucleic acid, DNA. The other compounds in the living cell take their structure from the pattern set by DNA. The next item in the procedure is messenger ribonucleic acid, messenger RNA for want of a better name. It picks up from the DNA the pattern of the particular protein structure and carries it to the site of the synthesis.

It is now time to get the materials to the site. A single-strand polymer called transfer takes care of this function. It picks up one kind of amino acid—after the amino acid has been activated by a compound called adenosine Triphosphate—and carries it to the production site. A different kind of transfer RNA is needed for each of the 20-odd kinds of amino acids that fit into the protein molecule. And the production site itself is a particle named a ribosome, or more properly, a group of them called a polyribosome. So the transfer RNA plasters the amino acid into position in the protein molecule guided by the polyribosome and the messenger RNA. And pretty soon you have a complete protein molecule. That seems to be how it works.

Well, here we go again. Whenever somebody makes an advance in protein synthesis, somebody else begins talking about synthesizing meat, food. The first such synthesis was carried out more than 50 years ago by Emil Fischer, probably the greatest organic chemist who ever lived. He hooked up 18 amino acids to make a polypeptide molecule. A polypeptide is a compound not big enough or with the wrong properties to be

a protein. Fischer commented then that his compound wasn't quite ready for the dinner table. Chemists still talk that way.

But these modest disclaimers should not obscure the fact that more and more knowledge of protein synthesis is being turned up all the time. This may be the breakthrough that shatters the Malthusian doctrine that tells us that men will propagate themselves beyond the food supply. This may be the way to feed the world in the future. At least for a time.



INVASION

They knew what strange delights would make us mad
And we were helpless to deny our lust
For all their alien liquors, but they had
A music which the mind could never trust
The ear to flawlessly convey; a sound
Which sprang from sound's beginning in the dark
Vibrations of the stars and fell around
Us, tangible as dust. There was no spark
Of weak resistance in us as we heard
Their lonely symphonies, nor could we raise
Our voices madly in a final word
Of banishment. And now we sit for days
Unmoving, while their music makes us sleep.
We have no cities now, nor armies, and we weep.

—CHRISTOPHER CORSON

Through her stories, ranging from MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO (F& SF, Feb. 1952) to MEASURE MY LOVE (Oct. 1962), Mildred Clingerman has as much as any writer become particularly identified with The Magazine. Here in her latest for us she reminds us of the ancient words of the ancient Preacher in his Song, that love is as strong as death . . . that many waters cannot quench it . . . and that, concerning jealousy, he said it was as cruel as the grave. . . .

A RED HEART AND BLUE ROSES

by Mildred Clingerman

I'm awake, I ARGUED WITH THE Spectator who watched all my dreams and commented on them with amusement or distaste. If I were asleep how should I know what time it was? And I did know, clearly. It was that reasonably quiet hour in the hospital after the visitors have all straggled out, when one's dinner is still only a rattling promise far away down the corridor. I was awake. But the Spectator only pointed silently into a deep chasm where a large Hospital still hunted Lewis Carrol's *Snark.*

"They sought it with thimbles", the Spectator urged, "They sought it with care . . ."

I obediently took up the refrain, "They pursued it with forks and hope; they threatened its life with a railway share—"

"My dear, are you very sick?" The warm, motherly Voice called across the dark blue void I was peering into.

"Oh no," I was cheerful about it. "They charmed it with smiles and soap." I opened my eyes, and after a moment or two I woke up. In the next bed a large pink woman had raised herself up to stare at me.

"You were asleep again," she accused me in a playful tone. "Off and on you've said some queer things today, but I haven't minded a bit. It's taken my mind off my troubles. Did you know your husband was here, and you slept right through the whole visiting hour?"

I considered this fact, turning

it around and around to look at it. "He wore the wrong tie with that striped shirt." I was triumphant and positively awake.

"You were quite brutal about it," she agreed, "but he seemed awfully pleased."

I lay quietly for a while, as if I were resting smugly after immense effort.

"When did you come in?" I struggled to stay awake long enough to hear the answer, but her first words eluded me.

"—days ago," the woman was saying, "but they only moved me in here with you this morning. You were asleep. They had me in a private room, but they finally decided what I needed *least* was to be alone. I keep having nightmares, you see, about a tattooed —"

"—tapioca pudding, or you could have Jello, if you'd rather." The nurse was being firm about something. Her arms were faintly yellow and stringy with muscle. I sat up and ate the tapioca pudding.

The woman in the other bed was eating heartily from a loaded tray. She kept dipping her fork into something dark brown and succulent looking, and I suddenly felt quite pitiably betrayed and hungry. I drank a cup of tea, well sugared. "I'll have the Jello, too," I said, but the nurse and the tray were both gone.

". . . son in the Navy." It was morning, and the woman was shrugging into a pink bedjacket.

"Why, my son's in the Navy, too!" I hauled myself up to lean woozily against the pillow, and stared at her as if the hairbrush she was flourishing were a fairy wand.

"I know, dear, that's just what I was saying. Your husband told me. *My* son isn't in the Navy. He's in the Army. They think that may be the source of half my trouble. The nightmares, you know. You see, my father and all my uncles were Navy. I married outside the Service, but I'd always supposed our son would choose to be Navy when the time came. Well, he didn't, at all." She sighed and picked stray hairs out of the brush. "He's been rather a disappointment in some ways. His Math wasn't good enough for Annapolis or West Point. Next year when he finishes his tour of duty he wants to apprentice to a mortician. Now, really, what kind of ambition would you call that?"

"An eminently respectable one?" I hazarded.

She shook the hairbrush at me admonishingly. "My, we *are* feeling better, aren't we?"

We were. After I'd wolfed a meagre breakfast I was buoyed up enough to tell my room mate all (and more) than she wanted to know about my son in the Navy. "He's on one of the new Polaris submarines," I bragged. "Born

and brought up on the desert, as he was, that boy lived and breathed Navy from babyhood, almost. And as for being underwater, we could never make him swim on the surface, and then in high school he joined a skindiving club, and they all sat around for hours on the bottom of a swimming pool."

"Does he get home very often?" She was frowning down at her fingernails.

"Not often," I said mournfully. "And he's dreadful about writing letters. But far too handy with the long distance telephone. Collect, of course."

"Of course. Clay's exactly the same." We nodded at each other solemnly, two middle-aged mothers with equally enormous phone bills.

"But tell me, does your boy ever bring any of his service buddies home? To stay, I mean, in your house."

"He hasn't so far," I said. "But I wouldn't mind if he did."

"That's what you think", she said darkly. "You'll need to be *very* careful. I daresay there's more than one orphan in the Navy. If that's what he was . . ."

"Who?"

"Surely I mentioned him yesterday? That boy—that man—that *thing* Clay brought home with him Christmas before last."

"I can remember Christmas before last," I said, "but yesterday . . ."

She looked at me in astonishment. "But you had your eyes open, and you even made one or two rather pungent comments. Do you mean to tell me you were asleep all day?"

"Oh, hardly asleep. What I was doing, I think, was concentrating on holding now, without allowing the last now and the next now to get away. It was very difficult. It took two hands to hold one now, and the other two kept falling away. I'm really very sorry. And the funny thing is I can actually juggle three oranges . . ." I hesitated and decided to be honest. "Sometimes."

She snorted, but I knew I was forgiven. "My dear, think nothing of it. It's entirely appropriate that only a six-handed woman could hear and understand the truth about Damon Lucas. I think he was some kind of fiend. My husband thinks he was a natural-born sponger. Rhoda—that's my daughter, she's nineteen and extremely pretty—thinks he's one of those weirdies who preys on older women. Clay says simply—and I quote—'the guy's a kook.' You see? Even the people he happened to can't agree on what he was. Maybe, in different ways, we're all biased." She paused to rub out the frown between her eyes. "I wouldn't care a bit if that could just be the end of it—a family mystery—with all of us sitting about now and then idly specu-

lating about him. Why, he might even, in time, have turned into a family joke."

"Why hasn't he?" I was bitterly regretting all those hours yesterday devoted to that silly juggling game, when I might have been fitting together highly-colored bits of a jigsaw puzzle.

"How could we possibly turn him into a joke when he keeps turning up again? And each time getting younger and younger?"

I was getting desperate. "Will you be very kind," I said, "and start all over again at the very beginning and go along slowly, because I'm beginning to need six hands again."

"Of course I will. You poor darling, how thoughtless I've been." Her face smoothed out and she smiled at me as if I were three years old with all my buttons buttoned into the wrong holes. She looked so much like everybody's secret ideal of motherhood I suddenly wanted to lay my head on her full bosom and cry away a heartful of tears. Moreover, I was starving in this horrible hospital and nobody cared. I blew my nose and blinked my eyes clear and spoke coldly to the ceiling.

"You realize, I hope, that they have forgotten to give us any lunch."

Well, dear, it's only nine o'clock." She got out of bed and fished in the drawer of her nightstand, then padded barefoot across the space between the beds. "Do have some of these chocolates. In fact, it would be a great favor to me if you'd eat all of them. I'm getting much too fat. But hide them from the nurse, won't you?" She leapt hurriedly back into bed, keeping a sharp watch on the door.

"I don't even know your name." I had eaten three chocolates before she'd stopped sighing and settling herself in bed.

"It's Pemberton. Katie Pemberton, age over forty and hips to match. You'd think, wouldn't you, that with a figure like mine I'd be perfectly safe from strange young men for the rest of my days? Well, I thought so, too, till Damon Lucas started following me around like a lap dog. At first sight we all thought he was handsome, in a blond and bland kind of way. Rhoda was prepared to be quite taken with him, I know, but after he'd been staying with us a few hours it became painfully clear that he wasn't taken with her. In fact, I don't believe he ever actually looked at her. Now, you can't call that normal, not for an unattached young man of twenty-six, and certainly not when the girl is as pretty as Rhoda. Philip thought—he's my husband—well, Philip got to worrying that maybe he was one of those you-know-whats, but after questioning Clay very closely

and watching Damon when Clay was around, he soon saw that Damon was, if possible, even less taken with Clay than he was with Rhoda. It began to look as if he positively disliked Clay, and with every day that passed he seemed to dislike Clay more and more. By that time we were all uneasy about Damon, for one reason or another. Sometimes, for no discernible reason, at all."

Mrs. Pemberton sighed, and stared at the only picture in the room, a doe-eyed Christ blessing little children. "It was a queer kind of Christmas, I assure you."

"Why did Clay ever invite him? Were they good friends?"

"Oh, no. Clay had never seen him before they met in the waiting room at the bus station. You see, it was this way: Clay hadn't seriously expected to get a Christmas furlough, but at the last minute it came through, just too late for him to get any plane reservations. Two airlines were tied up by strikes, and the others had waiting lists miles long, so Clay phoned home—collect, of course—to tell me he'd take a bus. He told me later the bus station was mobbed by servicemen of all branches, all trying to get home for Christmas. Here and there in the crowd were soldiers and sailors who owned cars and who were wandering about looking for riders going in their direction to help pay driving expenses.

"Clay thought he might get home faster that way and began to look around for a ride going west. Finally, a fellow in civilian clothes came up to Clay and said he was driving to Phoenix, which of course was perfect for Clay, who jumped at the offer. But for once Clay used enough common sense to look over the car—an almost new racing Corvette—to take down the license plate number, get the fellow's name, and phone home again to tell me his plans and relay the details. Even if I'd openly disapproved, I doubt if Clay *could* have turned down that ride. On the phone he was lyrical about his chance to drive such a car—they were to spell each other at the wheel. I didn't approve, really. Call it instinct or simply my conviction that they'd drive much too fast for safety. Anyway, I didn't like it. But it was Christmas time, and Clay's still such a child, in some ways. I just told him to be careful and then started praying the minute he hung up."

"Was there an accident?" I sincerely hoped not, but the fact remained that I was full of chocolates and contentment. It was blissful to lie in bed while a large pink mother told me stories.

"Not a serious accident. In New Mexico it was snowing, and Clay, who was driving and has had no experience of icy roads, skidded them into a ditch. They

were stuck there seven hours till the Highway Patrol came along and lent them a shovel to dig themselves out. Even with that delay they made the trip—over two thousand miles—in an incredibly short time. I gather they barely paused for food and gasoline, and the only sleep they had was what one could snatch while the other drove. When they arrived on Saturday afternoon they were both red-eyed, muddy, and exhausted. It would have been inhuman of us not to offer Damon, along with Clay, a hot bath, food, and some sleep.

"Philip hurried to set up a camp cot in Clay's room and got out Clay's old sleeping bag to make an extra bed in a hurry. Clay's room is small, you see, and is built like a sea captain's cabin, very compact and shipshape—when he isn't in it—but with just the one bed. We'd remodeled the room that way when Clay was only ten, and I still hoped he'd be Navy. Well, never mind that. . . . After they'd showered and shaved and demolished ham sandwiches and several quarts of milk they both went to bed, and we didn't see them any more till late that evening. I had given up hovering around their closed door when finally Clay emerged, blinking and grinning and starved to death. Damon was still asleep in Clay's bed. While I broiled Clay a steak he told me a bit about Damon—all Clay had learned about him during the long hours of driving.

"Damon, he told me, was just out of the Navy, twenty-six years old, single, and planning to settle in Arizona, preferably up in Phoenix, where he had a distant relative, a second cousin, I think it was, whom he'd never met. The only relative he had left since his parents had been killed in a highway accident a few months back—a Labor Day accident, in fact. Clay, I could see, was quite haunted, as I was, by Damon's lonely future and particularly by the bleakness of this first Christmas since his parents' death. Their estate had been settled quickly and their home sold almost immediately after the double funeral. Damon had purchased the car with part of the insurance money and had enough left to spend a few months looking around for the right job and the place where he wanted to live.

"While he was telling me all this Clay ate the steak, a large green salad, and half a pecan pie. Long before he got to the pie and coffee I knew I was going to ask Damon to spend Christmas with us. I also knew that Clay would have been horrified at any other conclusion, in spite of the fact that he admitted he was not in any way drawn to Damon personally. Damon had been in another service, was several years

older, and in Clay's own words was 'kinda funny-peculiar'. Clay's unspoken attitude was simplicity itself: Homeless cats, dogs, and humans had to be fed, warmed, and comforted at any season of the year. At Christmas they were to be especially cherished, 'just because'. It is this 'just because' quality in Clay that keeps me wavering between parental despair and delight. . . . I wouldn't have let him down for worlds."

Mrs. Pemberton found a tissue and blew her nose. She glanced sharply at me to make sure, I think, that I was still awake. I nodded at her urgently and after a moment she continued.

"Most house guests are disturbing, in my opinion. Even when they're the considerate kind. There's a different feeling about the rooms. There's a . . . well . . . a different smell in the air, almost. One's possessions begin either to look dreadfully shabby or too shinily new. And all at once family habits and customs begin to seem slovenly or just plain silly. I'll admit that there are two or possibly three people I know who can stay in my house and not affect my life in any way except to increase my pleasure and excitement. But even that can be wearing. You know the old saying about fish and guests beginning to smell after the third day. In Damon's case I should say he began to smell three seconds after he finally woke up and joined us all in the living room.

"To begin with, after brief nods to Philip and Rhoda—he ignored Clay—he addressed himself solely to me. 'That's a pretty good bed', he said. 'The room's okay, too, but that cot sorta crowds it up. I took it down. Junior, here, can sleep in that other bedroom I found at the end of the hall. The bed in there's loaded with Christmas junk, but I guess he's big enough to unload it.' Then he rubbed his hands together briskly and gestured with his chin towards the kitchen. I suppose I was just sitting there staring at him with my mouth dropped open, because he walked over and chucked me under the chin. 'Well, *c'mon,* Mom', says he. 'Feed me, your new boy's hungry!' "

"I hope you told him off *good,*" I said. "I think I'd have stamped on his toes and ordered him out of the house."

"I wanted to," Mrs. Pemberton said grimly. "There was a long silence while each of us waited for somebody else to do or say something, but we were so appalled that finally all we did was giggle a little, and then pretend we hadn't. Then, hardly knowing what I meant to do, I got up and left the room, with Damon following close behind me. Philip got up and followed Damon. I went straight

back to Clay's room, gathered up the folded camp cot, carried it into the spare bedroom, set it up—with Philip's help—and then unloaded all the wrapped Christmas gifts off the spare room bed onto the cot. Then with Philip and Damon still watching every move I made I carried Damon's suitcase into the spare room and plopped it down hard. 'You'll sleep here', I said. That's the kind of stupid mistake people make when they're angry and off-balance."

"Why do you say that? I think it was a very natural thing to do."

"Don't you see? I gave Damon a foothold . . . implied he was staying. I suppose ever since I'd talked to Clay about asking him for Christmas I'd been idly thinking how I'd put Damon into the spare bedroom, and under the stress of the moment I just did the next thing I'd planned to do. It was automatic, like picking a stray thread off the living room rug when the house is on fire. I saw at once by the look on Philip's face that I'd done the wrong thing.

" 'Tonight,' Philip told Damon, 'You can stay here tonight. In the morning no doubt you'll want to continue your trip.' There was no mistaking Philip's meaning. Damon straightened up and stopped grinning. He turned rather pale, and his eyes looked hurt and bewildered. 'I hope I haven't stepped out of line, sir', he said. 'It was a joke—a funny—I planned it in the room when I woke up. My folks and I used to kid a lot that way. I guess it was being in a real home again that got me going like that.' He started to say something about 'Mom' and choked up and stopped talking.

"I could see Philip was softening. Philip comes of a very gentle breed with a traditional of hospitality that's all-embracing. It must have cost him a great deal of effort to speak out to Damon in the way he had. 'Very well, Damon', he said, 'Come along now and we'll find you something to eat'. Philip left the room, and for just a second or two Damon and I were alone. We stared at each other and Damon shuffled his feet in a queer kind of little dance step, and started grinning again. 'Pop's a real nice little man', he said softly. 'Real nice'. Then he winked at me and walked out. Later, when Philip and I were getting ready for bed, I tried to tell him about that wink and something of my dislike and distrust of the man, but none of it sounded very menacing to Philip. 'He's been badly brought up,' Philip said, 'but it's Christmas, and he's lonely and lost. You can see that. He isn't exactly our kind, as you say, though that does sound very snobbish, Katie. I think we ought to let him stay, so long as he behaves respectfully to you.' It

was Damon's lack of respect for Philip that was bothering me, but I didn't say that. It isn't the kind of thing you like to point out to your husband.

"All this took place just five days before Christmas. Nobody ever actually asked Damon to stay. It just seemed to be taken for granted by all of us, including Damon. I was very busy cooking and cleaning. The children were out a great deal . . . Clay, tearing around in my car seeing his friends, and Rhoda, doing research in the University library for a paper she had to hand in after vacation, or else shopping for me. Philip, of course, was at work all day. Damon scarcely left the house at all, though the children asked him along, often. He treated their invitations with such obvious contempt, I marvelled at their good manners towards him. But, then, all of us were strangely patient with him. I should certainly call it patience, in the beginning. Later, I thought it looked more like fear. . . . He slouched around after me most of the day, wearing a tight, skimpy T-shirt and an old pair of Clay's Levis. His own clothes were at the drycleaner's, and he seemed to have just the one set of civilian clothes. We never saw any sign that he still had his Navy uniforms. He never talked about the Navy, either. The only way you could tell which service he'd been in was by the repulsive tattoo on his left arm. It was a big, dripping red heart, enclosing a blue anchor, and underneath it the word, MOM, in red letters entwined with blue roses. He seemed very proud of it."

Mrs. Pemberton lay quietly for a while, as if stricken by the memory of the bleeding heart. Before she could rally herself to continue, our doctors arrived together, hearty and jocular, and both in a tearing hurry. With some prodding from the nurse who accompanied him, I managed to give my doctor a halting report of my behavior for the past twenty-four hours. He seemed to be as bored with it as I was, but as he left he gave me a paternal pat on the head, by way of forgiveness.

"Tomorrow we'll get *up*," he caroled, and left.

I scrupulously tried not to hear the conversation going on five feet away from me, but I couldn't help overhearing the parting remarks which Mrs. Pemberton's doctor was delivering in louder tones, as if reassurance for his patient lay mainly in drowning out her own faintly protesting voice.

"Fine, *fine*," he was roaring. "And if all goes well again tonight you can go home tomorrow. There's not a thing on earth wrong with you that time won't take care of, Haw, Haw. Time and a leetle self-discipline, Katie. Now, buck

up and take your medicine like the big girl you are, and put that silly notion of yours right out of your mind. F'gawd's sake, girl, you're saner than I am and healthy as a horse. Control! That's all you need. . . . Well, then, *stop* thinking!" He plunged out of the room, flashing a fine set of teeth in my direction.

For some minutes I refrained from looking at Mrs. Pemberton. From the sounds of tissues being pulled from the box and various little sniffings, I felt sure she was crying. After a while, though, she poured herself a glass of water with so much banging of the vacuum pitcher, and then plumped her pillow so viciously I knew she'd recovered from her tears and was in the process of passing through anger to resignation. It didn't take her very long.

"Oh, well . . ." she sighed. "Jim always was a tactless idiot, but he is a good doctor. And it's true—I'm feeling better. Last night is the first night in weeks I haven't screamed my lungs out, waking from that nightmare. You're lucky not to have heard me. They say I wail like a banshee, enough to lift the hair right off your head."

I was suddenly enlightened. "Has the nightmare anything to do with Damon?"

"It has everything to do with Damon," Mrs. Pemberton said. "When I finally told him to go I hoped and prayed that would be the last of him, but it hasn't been."

"You kicked him out?"

"On Christmas Eve," she nodded. "We had a ghastly scene . . . just Damon and I. The children were out, and Philip was in bed asleep. Of course, that scene had been building up in me for days. It takes a lot to make me explode that way, and a lot is what I'd been taking. . . .

"Mealtime, for instance. While I was preparing the meals, Damon would hang over me and watch every move I made. He was always sampling and meddling. If I wanted a certain butcher knife, Damon was sure to be fiddling with it, testing its sharpness or poking it into my chopping block. Sometimes he sang bloody ballads in a high voice—all about drowning somebody in a river after choking her to death, and most troubling of all, there were times when he'd giggle steadily for long, long minutes about nothing at all. At the table he talked very little, which was a blessing, but he ate so greedily and with so much noise that it was difficult to carry on a conversation. He *grabbed,* you see, and he took food right off Clay's plate, while Clay was talking. And suddenly, out of the silence, he'd laugh in that queer way, and always he kept his feet moving, as if he were dancing, even as he sat. Then, if somebody commented on the food . . .

like, 'This pie is delicous', Damon would swell visibly and say, 'My Mom made it. She likes to cook for her sailor boy.' What kind of answer do you make to a remark like that? One, I mean, that doesn't sound surly and ungracious. I'm not really old enough to be Damon's mother, and the way he kept calling me 'Mom' grated on me. More than anything else, it kept suspicion stirring in me. If your mother had been dead only four months, do you think you could call any other woman 'Mom' so easily?"

"Probably not," I said.

"Then there was the incident of the Christmas tree. The children have always decorated it so carefully. They take a great deal of pride in some of the old ornaments we have. Some are lovely. Some are rather awful. . . . There's a celluloid doll, for one thing, that has to have a prominent place on the tree, simply because we've always had it. Damon stepped on it and smashed it flat. Not quite an accident. . . . When Rhoda hung it, anyway, Damon got very loud and scornful. He kept sneering at their work and finally announced that next year we were going to have an aluminum tree with no ornaments at all, just lights. Before I could remind him that next year he wouldn't be with us, he slammed out of the room.

"There were dozens of little incidents of that kind. Little things, maybe, but all together, very disturbing. When Clay and I tried to talk he was always butting in, always there, trying to draw my attention away from Clay, growing louder and louder and more excited. Clay only had a ten-day furlough, and I began to despair of ever having a moment alone with him. Often Clay would give up trying to talk to me and go to his room to nap behind a locked door. Somehow, in that house of always-open doors, we'd all begun to shut ourselves in. In Clay's case I could see reason in it. Damon had begun to raid Clay's wardrobe of all his civilian clothes, even after Damon's own clothes had been cleaned. Clay would be trying to dress for a party and would discover his best white shirt stuffed away, soiled, in Damon's room. Knowing Damon would be there for Christmas, I did extra shopping, of course, so he'd have some gifts under the tree. I bought clothes for him, since he seemed to need them. One afternoon I locked myself in my bedroom so I could wrap them nicely. I also wrapped a lovely, bulky gold-colored sweater for Clay as an extra surprise—one he'd especially admired in a store window, one day when he was with Rhoda in town. When I finished I put all those gifts with the others under the tree.

"I had baking to do that day,

and for once Damon was somewhere else in the house, and I was thankful. Just before dinner he came swaggering in, wearing all the clothes I'd wrapped for his Christmas gifts, plus the gold sweater I'd bought for Clay. 'I don't like waiting, Mom', he said. 'I saw my name on the packages'. I was so rattled I began to doubt myself. Maybe I *had* put Damon's name on Clay's sweater. Anyway, I wasn't sure, so I let it go. But the next morning I sent Rhoda to town to buy an identical sweater for Clay.

"By Christmas Eve I was strung up as tight as the strings on a fiddle. The children left with a crowd of young people to go caroling and to a party later. Philip and I turned out all the lights but the tree lights, drew up our chairs to the fireplace, and listened to Christmas music on the hi-fi. Damon, to our surprise, had roared away in his Corvette almost immediately after dinner. The house was beautifully peaceful without him. My doubts and fears began to melt away. About ten o'clock Philip went on to bed, but I decided to sit up awhile to savor more of the Christmas peace. Around eleven o'clock Damon walked in. I admit what I was doing may have looked silly by some standards. . . . The children have these old, beat-up, felt Christmas stockings they still hang up at the fireplace every year. I had already stuffed Rhoda's with cosmetics and hair-rollers and things like that. For Clay's I had shaving things, combs, pencils, and other odds and ends. I was standing there smiling at Clay's sock, which was stuck together inside the toe, where years ago he'd deposited some half-chewed candy he didn't like.

"Damon sidled over, wrenched the sock out of my hand and dropped it on the fire. Before I had time to feel shock or anger, I rescued the sock and saw that it wasn't scorched much, then I whirled on Damon as if I were a buzz saw. What did he mean by acting like that, I wanted to know. And what in *hell* gave him the idea he could move into my house and ruin my Christmas? I wasn't very ladylike about it. I may have used even stronger language. . . . When I reached the point at last where I could hear again and see, Damon was trembling and mumbling, as pale as a ghost. He was trying, I think, to say something about Clay's being too old to hang up a stocking. That was enough to set me off again, and I can't remember all the things I said. When I ran down a little, Damon was still mumbling and had shucked out of the gold sweater and was rolling up his shirt sleeve to show me his left arm. It took a while for me to focus my eyes and see what he

was trying to show me. He'd spent the evening in some nasty little tattoo parlor, having an addition made to that horror on his arm. It now read: *Mom, I love you.*

"He was saying over and over, 'I did it for you, see? Your Christmas present. . . . I did it for you.' Well, I simply broke down and howled. I still don't know if I was laughing or crying. Damon danced around me sort of tentatively, talking so fast I could scarcely make out what he was saying. After my hysteria subsided a little I began to listen very carefully, and this is the kind of thing I heard: He had it all planned out; my children were almost grown up, ready to leave home for good. He would take their place. He would get a job and take care of me, always. Even if the 'old man' died I wouldn't have to be alone, ever. Nothing could make him leave me, ever, ever, ever. I was his Mom. He had chosen me. Out of the whole world, he had chosen me. I was his, and he was mine, for the rest of our lives.

"It was like a chant. He kept repeating himself, and the horror kept growing in me till I thought I'd scream. When I couldn't stand it any longer I ran out of the room, wildly, just to get away from his voice. I was terrified that he would follow, but he didn't. I could hear him in the living room, still chanting. I washed my face in cold water at the kitchen sink and dried it with a paper towel. Then I went to the spare room and packed his things. I let myself out the back door and piled all his stuff into the Corvette. Then—quietly—I came back into the house and woke Philip. Eventually the two of us were able to persuade Damon to leave, but there were some hideous minutes when I thought we'd have to call the police . . . or an ambulance complete with straight-jacket. I couldn't sleep that night, I was so afraid he'd come back."

"Did he?"

"No. He never came back to the house. I don't know where he went that night. He must have left town. For weeks we kept watching in traffic for his red Corvette, but we never saw it again. And for weeks I kept remembering his words—like a threat—just before he drove away. 'You'll see me again, Mom. You ain't ever gonna be rid of me, one way or another'."

"Have you seen him again?"

Mrs. Pemberton bit her lower lip and looked at me with troubled eyes. "Not exactly," she said at last. "I may as well tell you the rest and if you decide I'm crazy, well—"

"I heard your doctor say you were saner than he is. I'll take the chance," I said.

"Very well then, dear. Six months later, when we'd just begun to forget Damon, or to get over him, at any rate, Philip got a long-distance phone call one night from the San Diego police. Our twelve year old runaway son, they said, had been picked up hanging around outside a tattoo parlor, and would we please come and get him or send the fares for him and an accompanying social worker. The boy had told them his name was Damon Pemberton, and that he was our son . . . our name and our address, everything. It took time to convince them we had no such son. We even had our local police department phone them to verify our statements. In the meantime, we learned, the boy had escaped from the detention home they'd put him in. We don't know to this day who or what the child was . . . or who put him up to it.

"The San Diego episode happened in June. In August Philip and I spent a weekend at the Grand Canyon. We were staying at that lodge right on the rim of the canyon. It was after dinner, and Philip was reading his paper in the lobby. I went out to watch the sunset, and I was strolling down the path along the rim. Behind me I heard somebody running in my direction. Then I could tell it was a child, gasping and crying, being chased by someone. I turned around just in time to brace myself as the little boy in front threw his arms around me, hiding his face in my skirt. He grabbed me with such force I almost lost my balance. A bigger boy had slowed down when he saw me and was hanging back. The little boy peered around at the big one who'd been chasing him. 'My Mom will fix you', he said. 'You big old dumb nut'. The big boy turned and ran off, out of sight. The child gave me a big squeeze, then, and said, 'Mom, I love you'. While I was taking that in, he just sort of melted away into the dusk, but I could hear his running feet, and could hear him laughing. He was wearing a sailor cap, and just as he twisted away I saw he had an enormous tattoo on his left arm."

"Oh, surely not!" I said. "Or it was probably one of those transfers little boys delight in plastering themselves with. They do look like tattoos."

"Maybe," Mrs. Pemberton said. "Then last September Philip and I went fishing in the White Mountains. Now that we're older we don't bother about camping out. We rent a motel room in Show Low and Philip drives out very early to the trout streams and lakes. On this day I stayed behind, because I wanted to write some letters and wash my hair. It was still very early in the morning, not many people about. I'd had coffee with Philip at an all-

night place on the highway and walked back to our motel alone. I hadn't been back in our room long before I heard a kind of scrabbling noise outside the door. I thought it was a maid, perhaps, though it was far too early for them to be coming around, or a yardman, raking the car park. I was sitting at the little desk, watching the door, when I saw a piece of paper come sliding under. Some kind of advertising, I thought. But when I picked it up I saw it was lined paper torn from a child's school tablet. On it was drawn, in red crayon, a dripping heart, and in staggering block letters, like those of a child in the second grade, it read *Mom I love you*. I don't know how long I stood there staring at it. I remember how the paper shook in my hands. I opened the door and looked out. There wasn't a soul stirring in the courtyard of the motel. I left my door open and ran out to look up and down the main street. Almost a block away a very small boy in a sailor suit was just turning the corner, crying as if his heart would break. By the time I got to the corner, he was no longer in sight."

Mrs. Pemberton was sitting up in bed, half turned towards me, her eyes pleading with me for some answering word.

"Oh," I said reluctantly, and then hunted for something to add to it. "Coincidence?" I offered.

"I don't believe it," Mrs. Pemberton said sadly. "Oh, I *want* to. You don't know how much I'd like to think that I'm reading dark significance into unimportant little happenings. A few weeks ago I started having nightmares . . . brought on, I know, by far too many of these so-called coincidences, far too frequently occurring, and far too shattering in their impact on me. I haven't dared to tell anybody, even Philip, all the things I've half-seen and half-heard."

"Do you feel . . . well . . . persecuted?" I asked.

"I did for a long time. I felt hunted, and I was angry. And at last I was afraid. Afraid to walk down a street, afraid to answer the telephone, even afraid to sleep after the nightmares began."

"What is it in the nightmare that frightens you so much you scream?"

Mrs. Pemberton glanced at me in surprise. "Why, it's the baby, of course. I find it, you see, on my doorstep, and it's so sweet, so warm and talcum-powdery, and I'm so delighted with it. Then, as I hold it and rearrange its clothing—such delicate, lovely clothing—the blanket falls away and reveals that hideous tattoo on the baby's arm. . . ."

We didn't talk much more that day. Luncheon trays arrived and were carried away—mine, at least, very much lightened. Flow-

ers were delivered and exclaimed over. Visitors sidled through our doorway, rested uneasily on the two chairs, or stood first on one foot and then the other, and finally, in great relief, hurried away. When the long day brought us once again to that fairly quiet hour before dinner, I asked Mrs. Pemberton the question that had been troubling me.

"If you no longer feel resentful or persecuted, how *do* you feel?"

"I've been puzzling about that," she said. "You know, the nightmare has changed. That's why you've never heard me scream. It isn't a real nightmare anymore. It's just a dream about a gift. Something fragile and of great value, which somebody has brought to me after great exertions and dangers. I accept it, but with immense reservations. My fingers refuse to close around it. I drop it, and it breaks. But it doesn't shatter like glass. It just lies there and bleeds. . . . All that's left with me when the dream ends—the residue, you might say, for the daylight hours—is just sadness. Weary sadness, that's all."

After breakfast the next morning a pretty nurse's aide brought in the wheelchair for Mrs. Pemberton's departure. While the girl waited and watched, smiling at us, Mrs. Pemberton told me goodbye.

"I don't really need this," Mrs. Pemberton gestured to the wheelchair. "But this hospital is sinisterly determined that no discharged patient walk out of here on his own two feet."

"More Snark hunting," I said. She patted my hand warmly and was wheeled away.

"I'll be back in a moment," the nurse's aide called to me from the doorway. "To get you up in a chair. And I hear you're to go home tomorrow, too."

When she returned I asked anxiously. "Do you think Mrs. Pemberton will be all right?"

"Right as rain," the girl said. "She was only in here for some tests and observation. After all, she *is* a little old to be starting another baby."

"Oh . . . yes." I said.

"She's a little scared, I think. But, you'll see, she'll perk up more and more, by the time that baby arrives, she'll be convinced there's not another baby like hers, anywhere in the world."

"Oh, dear Lord," I said. "I hope not."

BOOKS

THE POST READER OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, the editors of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Doubleday, $3.95.

The cover describes this as "20 exciting stories by Conrad Richter, Robert A. Heinlein, Stephen Vincent Benét, Geoffrey Household, Philip Wylie, and others . . ." I'm afraid that I do not think most of us will be likely to find most of them exciting. In some cases they have faded a bit by age, in others they are based on themes which are old hat in our field, and in other cases (these three classes somewhat overlap) they are . . . well . . . just not exciting. Conrad Richter is represented by two stories; one is Nostalgia vs. The Bomb, and the other is a surprisingly inept diatribe against social security (the general philosophical concept, not the particular agency of that name). Heinlein's here with, not surprisingly, *The Green Hills of Earth,* which I think must be considered a good story; Benét's *The Place of the Gods* holds up rather well considering that it was a pre-Atomic Age tale of post-Atomic Doom; Geoffrey Household's *The Lost Continent,* though well-written (it is, after all, by Geoffrey Household), trails off rather vaguely; and I fear that Philip Wylie's *The Answer* merely engenders another question.

There are other stories, too. Robert Standish's *Test-Tube Terror* (surely not the author's title) is a sort of prelude to *No Blade of Grass* (a SEP novel), and William Sambrot's *Island of Fear* is a different treatment of the notion behind *The Eyes of Phorkos* (F&SF, Nov. 1963). Although no hunter, I much liked Robert Murphy's *The Phantom Setter*—it gave me an idea for a story—alas, it turned out that Mr. Murphy's was the story his story had given me the idea for. There is an intriguing fantasy about classic cars, by Fred McMorrow; Gerald Kersh is his almost-never-failing richly ingenious and amusing self; Ward Moore has a good one about Her Majesty's Dominion of Mars; and the penultimate and antepenultimate stories—by Will F. (Old Faithful) Jenkins—alias Murray Leinster—and William Roy Skelton are also intriguing, in very dif-

ferent ways. And there are others which you may like more than I do. Only maybe not.

PICTURE MUSEUM OF SORCERY, MAGIC AND ALCHEMY, Emile Grillot de Givry, trans. by J. Courtenay Locke, University Books, $17.50

Seventeen and a half grumpkins is a whopping big price, but this is a whopping big book, with three hundred and seventy-six illustrations, many of them not available elsewhere. The late author is said, like the Rev. Montague Summers (*History* and *Geography of Witchcraft*), to be a staunch Catholic and (should I add "also"?) to believe in the reality of much of the phenomena he writes about. Unlike Summers, however, he is never offensive—and, frankly, I think he must be pulling any numbers of sacerdotal legs; there are passages I simply cannot believe he wrote other than ironically. At any rate, he covers the scene both philosophically and physically, from antinomy to antimony (and I hope the printers get that right); if he has never heard of or never mentions recent theories on the subject he still introduces some interesting ones of his own— For example, the role of art in making the diabolical both vivid and universally known, the role of the church in unwittingly promoting diabolism by continually harping upon it, the role of spiritualism in helping scepticism diminish the old necromancy, and others. The book might well be subtitled, in the author's words, *An Iconography of Occultism.*

There is a painting by Goya, *Transformation of Sorcerers,* reproduced, and I can do no better than agree with de Givry that it shows "a terrible realism [and] a disturbing sincerity." Of the rearmost figure, only the back of the head is shown, and this is hideously convincing—neither human or bestial, but both. The reports are not without their ludicrous side, though. We've all heard how diabolists kissed the devil's fundament, but I didn't know they claimed it was a second face that he has under his tail!" or that he rewarded the kiss with the gift of a silver louse. Then, too, there was poor haunted Monsieur A.V.C.B. de Terreneuve du Thym, whose 3-volume bio., *The Goblins, or, All The Demons Are Not Of The Other World,* appeared in 1821. He illustrated it with his own lithographs and—if you can imagine it—the style of these drawings is like that of Hugh Lofting's *Dr. Dolittle* books!

There are copious sections on the Cabbalists, Jewish and Christian; Astrology and the Macrocosm and Microcosm, Metoposcopy, Physiognomy, Cheiromancy, Cartomancy and the Tarot, Divination, the Divining-Rod, Talismans, and Alchemy. The writing is

good, but the great wealth of curious and beautiful pictures is the book's chief treasure.

COLLECTED POEMS, HP. Lovecraft, Arkham House, $4.00

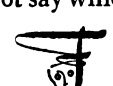
Here is the traditional "slim little volume" of verse, but only a part of it is traditional in tone . . . curiously, the only part which might surprise those who think they know Lovecraft only as a wordy mumbler of Nameless Horrors. He was more. And yet, in *Early Poems,* he is less. Some of them are no worse than some of Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier; but they themselves could be pretty bad at times. There's a line in one of these early Lovecraft poesies which sums him up rather well: *"The past is there—yet I stand on the shore/In the cold present, alien and alone."* And his disgusting contempt of poor foreigners—*"swarthy . . . freaks of alien blood, . . . base foreign hoors . . . low lives . . . monkeys . . . wretched aliens . . . A vicious crew, that mock the name of 'man' . . ."*But I'll not go on.The title poem of the second section, *The Alien Track,* is not bad; but most of the rest here are, at best, Poe and water . . . Swineburne and water . . . Kipling and water—though *Brick Row* is nice. And the last section, despite its ridiculous title—*Fungi From Yuggoth*—is Lovecraft, as poet, at his best, if one can accept his obsessive subject-matter. Frank Utpatel's woodcuts for jacket and interior illustrations are abolutely first-rate.

THE GREAT AUK, Allan W. Eckert, Little, Brown, $4.75

This is called "a novel" and I suppose it is, in a way, being a fictional account of the life and death of the last great auk. I should have thought a factual account of the species would be more interesting—and more successful, too. Mr. Eckert's style is as awkward as the staggering gait of the bird itself, "with"—to employ his own infelicitous phrase—"with frequent flops"; but the subject carries it along nonetheless. The gare-fowl, as it was also called, looked somewhat like a penguin, though its bill was much longer; and in size was about as big as a goose. It bred and summered (Mr. Eckert deals only with the Western Hemisphere flocks) in Iceland, Greenland, and Newfoundland; and wintered on the capes of North Carolina—a migratory journey of 3,000 miles, made in 86 days and—since the great auk could no more fly than the dodo—entirely by sea. On land it was almost completely helpless; the single, huge annual egg was "Creamy white in color . . . liberally splotched with irregular streaks of a deep burnt umber and cinnamon . . ."; and these two circum-

stances perhaps contributed more than any others towards its extermination. Like most creatures it had its natural enemies and was subject to disease and bad weather; like many, it was attacked by commercial hunters; unlike any other I know of it, it probably decreased also by the refusal of those birds whose mates died ever to mate again.

But, absolutely unlike any other creature to my knowledge, it owed its final end—its extinction—not to Commerce, but to Science: "*. . . the latest survivors of the species were caught and killed by expeditions expressly organized with the view of supplying the demands of caterers to the various museums of Europe*" (John Wolley, quoted by Alfred Newton in the 11th Britannica). Mr. Eckert describes and pinpoints the ultimate dread deed. "On June 3, 1844, on the island of Eldey . . . off the southwestern coast of Iceland . . . the last two living [great auks] were killed by Jon Brandsson and Sigourour Isleffson and the egg . . . was smashed by Ketil Ketilsson." Only a decade before, there had been half a million of them. Mr. Eckert closes with a plea and a warning. Other species are in immediate and similar danger of extinction; regretfully, he does not say which.



THE DARK MAN AND OTHERS, Robert E. Howard, Arkham House, $5.00

When I was thirteen years old I read (I think in WEIRD TALES) that Robert E. Howard, unable to face his mother's impending death, had fatally fired a shotgun into his stomach. That was the right age for reading him; I had read nothing by him since . . . until this. He is perhaps chiefly known today for having created Conan the Barbarian, whose adventures with sword and sorcery in a mythical past have been continued by L. Sprague de Camp. None of the Conan tales are here included, though there are several like them, and Mr. August Derleth almost disarms criticism with his introductory statement that the book's contents are, "on the whole, secondary . . ." Almost; but not quite.

It is difficult to understand how a modern and sophisticated reader who has read even fairly widely in this *genre* can really enjoy these stories. The themes are almost without exception clichés (Lost Cities and Beautiful Barbaric Babes in Africa, Haunted Houses, Zombies, Elder Gods à la Lovecraft, Suddenly-I-Found-Myself-in-The-Body-of-An-Ancient-Warrior, Revengeful Spirit Snakes, The Devil Claims His Own, etc.), and the *writing*, Heavens to Betsy! the writing! It . . . well . . . I suppose . . . I guess it has to

be the writing. Even though the Howard Hero *quaffed his liquor hastily,* he did find *things that no white man has ever dreamed of*— and what, exactly, did he dream of? why—*sky-towering minarets . . . long ranks of bowing, brown-skinned worshippers . . . purple-canopied peacock thrones and thundering golden chariots.*

Thus, Howard, imitating Haggard. He imitates Lovecraft, too: ". . . *that great grim house perched like a bird of evil on the crest of the hill, bulking black and stark against the stars. In the west pulsed a single dull red smear where the young moon had just sunk from view behind the low black hills. The whole night seemed full of brooding evil, and the persistant swishing of a bat's wings somewhere overhead caused my taut nerves to jerk and thrum.*

Well, actually, most of it isn't that good. —AVRAM DAVIDSON

PUBLICATION NOTED:

Anderson, Poul. *Time And Stars.* Doubleday. $3.95. Six novelets, one of which *(No Truce With Kings)* originally appeared her; the others are reprints from other magazines. Very good jacket design by Tom Chibbaro.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Back to the Stone Age.* Ace, 40¢

Chandler, A. Bertram. *The Hamelin Plague.* Monarch, 35¢

Gatland, K. W. *Spaceflight Today.* Aero Publishers, $7.50. illus.

Heuscher, J. E. *A Psychiatric Study of Fairy Tales.* Thomas, $7.75. illus.

Howard, Ivan, ed. *Escape to Earth.* Belmont, 50¢, 6 novelets.

Knight, Damon. *Beyond The Barrier.* Doubleday. $3.50. A novel. The original, shorter version appeared in this Magazine under the title of THE TREE OF TIME. Excellent jacket design by Tom Chibbaro.

Lehman, Milton. *This High Man: Robert H. Goddard.* Farrar, Strauss, $6.50. Biography of "The Father of Space Travel" illus.

Lord, Russell. *The Care of the Earth.* New Amer. Library, 95¢ Husbandry, ecology, and conservation.

McLaughlin, Chas. *Space Age Dictionary.* Van Nostrand, $7.95

Norton, Andre. *Lord of Thunder. Ace,* 40¢

Nourse, Alan E. *The Counterfeit Man.* David McKay. $3.50. Eleven stories, two of which (*The Canvas Bag* and *The Expert Touch*) originally appeared here; the others are reprints from other magazines. Mel Hunter's interesting jacket design is marred by a dull background.

Shaw, Larry T. *Great Science Fiction Adventures* (Edmond Hamilton, John Brunner, Harry Harrison, Robert Silverberg) Lancer, 50¢

Simak, Clifford D. *They Walked Like Men.* Macfadden, 50¢

Shepard, Francis P. *The Earth Beneath The Sea.* Atheneum, $1.65 illus. Oceanography

No story which we have read recently so immediately and consistently conveyed an air of essential alienness . . . almost as if it had been written by its hyperhuman protagonist. Was *the author, we enquired, of our own species? Indeed he was—and is. "Originally I'm from Brooklyn," says Edward Jesby, whose first published SF story is here below; "Bay Ridge, which is a Scandinavian section; and my parents are both from Copenhagen. The 'alien tone' you comment on is the result of Lutheranism, the Social-Democratic state, and Nordic paranoia. I flatter myself with the thought that this peculiar environmental set is the same as the one that caused a commentator (Heilbroner?) to say that Thorstein Veblen had a Martian's view of our society. I'm married, have two children, am thirty-one, and work as an electronic technician in the local Western Electric Plant . . . [at] North Andover, Mass." Mr. Jesby says that he has written, but hidden, other SF stories, is working on a "straight" novel, "attempting to refurbish an 85 year old house, and developing bursitis from painting textured tin ceilings." He concludes with the general and particular comment that "pathos in order to have an element of horror must merely be stated as pathos and then surrounded by general images that the sufficient horrors of imagination can operate upon."* The sufficient horrors of imagination . . . *A good phrase, and, we think you'll agree, a good story.*

SEA WRACK

by Edward Jesby

GRETA HIJUKAWA-ROSEN SAT on the beach watching her escort maneuver a compression hover board above the waters of the Mediterranean. He stood on the small round platform, balancing it a few inches above the spilling tops of the wind-driven waves with small movements of his legs. The board operated on the power sent to it

from the antennae above the chateau, but he operated on his own.

"Viterrible," Greta thought, stretching to lift the underside of her small breasts to the full heat of the sun. She giggled, wondering what her sisters would think of her use of a commercial word, and then shrugged and looked at her own golden tan comparing it to her escort's dark color. Abuwolowo was humus brown. "Deep as leaf mold," she said speaking aloud, and stood up to watch him lift the thin platform to its maximum altitude of six or seven meters. His figure rapidly diminished in size as he sent it wobbling in gull-like swoops out over the Mediterranean. Ultimately it was boring, she decided, there was no real danger. He had a caller fitted into his swim belt, and if he fell into the water the board he rode on would save him, diving into the water and lifting him to safety. Now he was very far out, and all that was visible above the wave tops was the black bobbing ball of his head.

"I suppose I should have a feeling of loss." There was contempt in her voice, and it came from her knowledge that all she knew of loss was what she had read about in a recent television seminar on great books, but she gasped, losing reality, when she saw the head in close to the beach.

Looking desperately for her binocular lornette she asked, "Abuwolowo?" in a shout, but the head was white, and not merely the color of untanned skin, but a flat artificial white, like the marble statues in the garden of the summer home. Now, to her further horror, the rest of the apparition appeared out of the shallows. Above the blue sea, silhouetted against the paler sky, was a black figure with a dead white head. It staggered through the chopping waves with efforts to lift its legs free. When the creature succeeded in lifting its feet clear she was reassured. It was wearing swim fins, and she ran forward to help.

After she had gotten her hand onto the large soft arm she asked, "Are you all right?" The man nodded and kindly leaned a bit of his weight onto her. She was thankful, the figure stood a foot above her six foot three inch height, and its shoulders were broader than Abuwolowo's Nigerian span.

Firmly enscounced on the sand the man made a magician's pass at his neck and lifted the covering away from his face. He shot a quick look at the sky with black eyes that filled huge sockets and said, "Bright." He looked down at the sand, and after a few stertoreous breaths spoke. "Thank you," he paused reaching into his armpit, and continued, "Basker hit me out there."

Breathing more easily he was easy to understand. The liquid

mumbling of his first words had disappeared, and he looked directly at her. "Pretty," he said, "Pretty deserves an explanation. A basker drove me into the bottom. Something scared it from in the air and it dove."

"Basker?" she asked, wanting to hear the strange soft cadences of the voice that issued from the round head with its huge eyes.

"Basking shark," he said, "lying on the surface and it dove. I had no time to signal or to warn." He fell forward, breathing easily, but she saw blood welling from a cut on his back as he slumped onto his knees. "Excuse," he mouthed, when she gave a small touched cry. There was a long gash traversing his back from the left shoulder blade to his waist at his right side, and the rubbery material of his suit had rolled back and pulled the wound open. She tried to lift him, but his weight was too great, and all she succeeded in doing was to push him over into the sand. She straddled him and pulled at his long thick arm, trying to turn him over, but that too was impossible. Flat as he looked spread out on the sand, with long thin legs and a midsection that had no depth, he was still enormously heavy. She jumped away from him and looked out into the sea. Abuwolowo was coming in toward the shore and she frantically waved and shouted, throwing her long pigtail and the points of her body in spastic jerks until he rode his board up onto the beach. "There's a man hurt here," she said, turning her back to him until the sand blasting up from the vehicle's air jets had subsided.

"Man?" Abuwolowo questioned, but he heaved at the collapsed figure. "He's as heavy as a whale. It's no use, I'll go up to the house and get help." He ran off in long loping strides that brought him to the elevator in the cliff with an instantaneous violation of distance that was dreamlike. She stayed to watch her charge, fascinated by the long breaths he took. Easy inhalations that moved down his length in a wave from his chest to midriff in a series that seemed to never stop. One breath starting before the other had finished.

She waited silently, forgoing her usual monkey chatter to herself, eschewing fashion in the presence of the impassive white straw colored hair, whose only life showed in the delicate flutter of petal nostrils. Finally, after no time had passed for her, Abuwolowo returned with four of the servants, strong squat men from neighboring Aegean islands. Puffing, their legs bowed under the weight, they half carried, half dragged the wounded man to the elevator and folded him into it under Abuwolowo's direction. Abuwolowo climbed over him, and braced between the walls,

walked up the sides of the car until he was perched above the body. He held the up button down with a strong toe, the doors closed, and the elevator whirred invisibly away.

Greta had prepared for dinner, dressing and making her face up with unusual care, and was coming down the great ramp that swept into the entrance hall when she heard her brother-in-law talking to some of the guests. She stopped, amused, he was not really talking, but lecturing in a voice that his Kirghiz accent made even more didactic than he intended.

"Amazing," he was saying, "the recuperative powers they have. After we had gotten him off the kitchen truck, and onto the largest reclining ottoman in the casual room, he sat right up. He smiled at me. He stretched." Her brother-in-law paused, either overcome with amazement or staring down someone who appeared to be about to interrupt. "As I was saying," he went on in measured periods, "He stretched."

Greta could not resist her chance, she slipped down the ramp, and crossed to the speaker. "He stretched, and then what?"

Hauptman-Everetsky gave her the limited courtesy of his chill smile. "He stretched, and his water suit opened up and came off like a banana skin. He checked under his arm, the gill slit, you know, and climbed off the ottoman. He ignored me and turned around, and the cut was healed. There was only a thin line to show where it had been."

Greta moved away, not waiting to hear the inevitable repetition and embellishments her brother-in-law would give to his reactions. She passed through the archway that led to the casual room, undisturbed by the slight malfunction of the pressure curtain that allowed a current of air to lift the hem of her long skirt.

The man from the sea was standing in front of the panoramic glass watching the slow turning of the sights from the islands perimeter. A passing flow of scenery that was magnified and diminished by the tastes programmed into the machine. Just at this moment it was dwelling on the lights of the skyscrapers of Salonika. He was engrossed, but her cousin Rolf was questioning him with his usual inquisitiveness. Dwarfed by the figure next to him he blurted questions in his fluting high American tones.

The question she heard as she approached was, "And you came all that way?" Rolf's voice did not hold disbelief, it held pleasure, a childish love for a reaccounting of adventure.

"Surely," the huge man said, "I have said it. I came from outside Stavangafjiord. I was following an earth current. I hoped it might

teach me something about the halibut's breeding. But I felt that was foolish, and so I hunted down the coast until I came to here." He turned back to the glass to catch the artistic dwindling of the city as the machine withdrew his view to a great height. "And," he said, coming politely back to his interrogator, "And the dolphins told me, when they were racing off Normandy, that the waters here were warm, and" he paused, noticing Greta, "and the women beautiful, with yellow hair, and brown limbs."

Greta nodded. "You're very kind. But I do not have your name."

"Gunnar Bjornstrom-Cousteau, of the dome Walshavn." He bowed, and she noticed how curious he looked covered by evening clothes. The short open jacket that barely reached the stretch tights exposed the rectangular expanse of his chest, a smooth fall of flesh without muscle definition that made her remember the tallowy layer of fat his wound had exposed. She shuddered, and he asked, "Does my face disturb you?" and for the first time she noticed that his skin was peeling, and there were angry red welts under his chin. "I was careless to take such a long trip without going under the lamps at home first. But then I did not intend to come into the air then. I am not used to the sunlight."

"Into the air?" Rolf was off again, but Greta stopped him.

"Dinner must be ready." She took the stranger's arm. "Will you take me in?" With Rolf tagging along behind, shaking his head, and bouncing every few steps to see if he could bring himself to the sea giant's height, they entered the dining room.

The dining room was at the top of the chateau. It was open on all sides, and protected from the weather by polarised static fields that were all but invisible and brought the stars too plainly close.

"That fish," Hauptman-Everetsky had passed from awe to condescension, as he answered someone's question, "I could not throw him back like an undersized trout." He gestured, "and it's about time we had some amusement. We are beginning to bore one another."

Greta felt her companion stiffen, and hold onto his arm tighter. He bent his head to her, and said, "Do not fear, I will not fall. It is long since I have walked. I must become accustomed to being unsupported by the friendly weight of the water." She noticed that he stressed the word friendly, and remembered that one of the few things she had heard about the underwater people was that they had brought back dueling. In the infinite reaches of the sea the enforcement of organized law was difficult, encounters with the orca and the shark common, and the lessons they taught strong.

Yet her companion was smiling at Everetsky and his circle of friends, shaking hands with him firmly, and appraising the women. "At least I will not be bored," he said staring at her sister Margreta's painted chest. Greta took his arm again, relieved, and glad she had chosen to wear her blue gown that completely covered all of her except her hands and face.

"Are we going to sit down now, Carl?" she said to Everetsky, and he led the way to the table, placing Gunnar at his right and her at his left.

The dinner went smoothly enough at first, the early conversation centered around the futility of investing money in the moon mines, and the necessity of mollifying the government with sums small enough to be economic and yet larger than mere tokens. All of the men from the rich steppes and Russian mountain regions had recommendations: lobbyists to recommend, purveyors of formuli to complain about, and complaining tales of corruption. While Rolf was concluding a story that centered on a bribed official who refused to honor his obligations without further payments that would have nullified the capital payments he had agreed to save, he rediscovered Gunnar's spherical face amid the contrasting ground of the tanned guests with their pointed chins.

"Nasty little fellow he was—dishonest as the day is long." Rolf stopped. "But you my seaman friend, you don't understand any of this?"

"I," Biornstrom-Cousteau burbled laughter, "do not understand these problems, but we have our own with the government." He seemed to like Rolf, but he spoke to his host. "They are difficult to explain."

"I suppose so," Abuwolowo spoke, "but tell us anyway."

Gunnar shrugged, and the massive table trembled slightly as he shifted his knees. "They want us to farm more, and hunt less."

"Why not?" Abuwolowo challenged, "In the past my people adjusted to the changing times. They learned to farm and to work in factories."

"Yes." He was quiet for a moment. "I suppose some day we must, but as Hagar the poet sang —"

"Poets." Abuwolowo dismissed them. "We were talking of the government here."

"Hagar said," the sea guest went on inevitable as the tides, pleasurably quoting a beloved line, "The sea change suffered by we; Cannot make the airmen think free." He chanted on, squaring his shoulders to expose more of his pale flesh, "For we have chosen deep being, not the ease of their far seeing." He stopped to stare out into the night with the depthless stare of his great dilated pupils.

Rolf, always jolly, rubbed his hands together, sniffing at the next course. "Ah, domestic venison," he said, changing the subject, cutting Abuwolowo's rejoinder short. "But our new guest doesn't seem to be eating much, and mine host's cook is excellent."

"The food is cooked," Gunnar said, as if it explained everything. It explained too much, and when he caught the expression on Hauptman-Everetsky's face he stood up and excused himself. "I am still tired from healing my hurts. You will excuse me." The last was a statement, not a question, and he left, moving with a tired lagging stride. His powerful body pushed down by the force of unrelieved gravity.

Morning came, and the first thing Greta did was to look for Gunnar. She had left the dinner party soon after him and started for his room, but Abuwolowo had overtaken her, and she had gone with him. Now she searched the gardens, moving through the regions of climate. She found him in the subtropical section standing in front of a red rubber plant grown to treelike proportions. He was fingering a paddle sized leaf, pressing his finger tips deep into it as he regarded it with slightly parted lips.

"Like meat," he said. "Whale meat," he said smiling at the picture she made coming down the cedar chip path between the walls of greenery. "You look very pretty this morning."

"And you looked like a child when you were touching that plant, with your mouth open as if you wanted to taste it."

"It does look edible," he gave the leaf a last squeeze that pressed liquid out onto his hands. He licked the juice and made a face, and she laughed happily to see the soft corrugations that wrinkled around his head. "Well it *is* bitter," he said defensively, and reaching out lifted her off her feet and into the tree. "Bite it and see."

Satisfied after she had clicked her teeth several times with mock gusto he set her down again, and she rubbed her sides. Seriously she looked up at him, appraising his bulk. "I was reading about you this morning," she said, looking down with a strained intensity as if performing the unfamiliar task of following lines of print.

"So now I have become famous."

"Oh, no," she said, "In the encyclopedia. It says you are homo aquati—."

"Homo aquaticus, one of the old words." He touched her bare shoulder, "Yes, and one of the better."

"That's it," she said, dwelling on the pronounciation, "Homo Aquaticus. And a long time ago a man named Cousteau said that you were to be."

"Cousteau."

"Yes," she altered her pronounciation, "Cousteau. A relative?"

"He is dead, and my surname is said the way you pronounced it the first time."

"No matter," she said, "I will show you the grounds now," and took his arm. She started out chattering to him about the shrubbery, but she soon discovered that it was another subject she knew very little about. He was naturally silent, and her thoughts turned to the things she had found in the encyclopedia. It had said that the first colonies were set up in the Mediterranean. The warm water was perfect for man, and the sudden mistral born storms were no trouble ten fathoms in the sea. The underwater colonies raised sea slugs, and clams, farmed algae and adapted fruits, and hunted the smaller whales with hand weapons. She had read very quickly, scanning down the page in s-curves in her hurry to go and meet him, but womanlike, she did remember some things about human births under the sea. The children were born into the pressures they would live under, fitted with gill mechanisms that took oxygen from the water, and subjected to chemotherapies that prepared them for their lives.

"But why do you live in the cold seas in the north?" she asked. The question was an outgrowth of her thoughts, yet he seemed to know what she meant.

"Because so many of our people live here?" he went on without needing to have an answer. "My greatgrandfather felt the bottoms were becoming too crowded, that the life would become too easy, and so, we left." He swiveled his head to sniff at the sea offering her a view of the seal foldings of his neck. "And now we could not live here at all. We have changed our bodies, and we have learned to love the hunt."

"But you come to the waters off this island."

"I came only for a short hunt. I would have returned very soon."

Further conversation was cut short by the interesting spectacle of wide eyed gardeners dodging into the bushes to avoid their advance. The servants variously crossed themselves, or made the sign of the horns, some of them did both. They knew, if Greta did not, that there was a conflict between the sea peoples and the dwellers on the land. Servants listened to political conversations, but eighteen year old girls of good family were expert in oblivious attention. The gardeners had heard from the house staff how the world government in New Kiev, on the Baltic, was demanding more taxes in algae proteins from the independent sea states. Some of the servants relatives had served in the fleets of small boats equipped with grapple buckets that were sent in punitive expedi-

tions against the algae beds and the sea slug pens. The duty was dangerous, the seamen darted to the surface in spurting pushes from shallows to rocks and overturned boats, they cut the grapple cables, and tied derisive messages to their severed ends. What the raiders did capture was diseased, or of thin stock that had gone to seed.

The servants did not hate the seamen, they feared them as they feared the storms, and rages of nature. They did not respect them as they did their masters: the seamen were unnatural facts of nature. Not to be dealt with except through the practice of the magics that had come back in the few short years of barbarism after the Two Months War.

Gunnar had some idea of what the men who had run away were thinking, but that part of the problem did not concern him. After all, his dome did not farm enough to be involved in the commercial disputes. He looked at Greta. She was still caught up in the uniqueness of the servants' scuttling disappearance.

"It has been a long time since we went into the sea," he said, touching her on the shoulder again, knowing that physical contacts reassured her, "and they do not remember us. We are strangers." She leaned her weight against his side, as soon as he had touched her, he noticed, and she made many movements with her hips and torso, but he attached no significance to her wriggling.

Greta became silent and swayed away from him. She had worked the individual muscles her governesses had trained her to use. Trained in long gymnasium sessions when she was young for the pleasurable obligations of adulthood, she accepted her expertness, and was piqued by his callous indifference. She almost believed that the sea women were more expert, but, on second thought, she disregarded that. Her instructors, and Abuwolowo, had assured her that she was perfectly trained in the amatory arts.

Hadji Abuwolowo Smyth watched them from a free standing balcony that projected, fingerlike, out over the gardens. "The girl is infatuated with the Fish," he thought. "It is nothing more than his difference." Abuwolowo remembered the long hours of dancing that had trained him. The great factories that his parents managed, and Greta's brother-in-law's desire for new markets for his heavy machinery, and concluded that he had nothing to worry about. He went into the house to have a suppling rubdown to prepare him for the prelunch wrestling.

Every day all the young men but Rolf wrestled for the amusement of the other guests. They fought in a combination of styles, jui-jitsu

coupled with the less dangerous holds of Greco-Roman wrestling. They were full of energy, had little to do, and they passed the time waiting for the day when they would assume the managerial offices their parents held in the automatic factories.

Gunnar and Greta emerged from the tree lined walk as the matches were about to start. Gunnar blinked, and rocked his head as the forenoon heat bit into his sunburn. Halting he made an effort; Greta felt oil under her hand, and saw his skin flex and knead. His pores opened and a smooth layer of clear oil covered his body. He took several more of his curiously peristaltic breaths, and with each one squeezed more protective fluid onto his skin.

"Now," he said, as she let go of him, "We can go on, but first tell me what is happening here."

"They are wrestling," Greta said shortly, either still angry at his unresponsiveness, or caught up in the combat.

They watched Hadji Abuwolowo win the first fight easily. Throwing his opponent with a hip toss and pinning him with a leap. The Nigerian nodded to Greta with a victory grin on his face. "And you Fish," he said, "Do you wrestle?"

"Not with you," Gunnar said politely, intending to imply that Smyth was too practiced a hand for his small skill.

"I am not a worthy opponent," Abuwolowo chose to misunderstand him. "Or perhaps you are afraid?"

Gunnar felt Greta's small hand in his back and walked forward onto the sanded turf looming more and more over Abuwolowo as he went. The Nigerian regreted his impetuousness for a split second, but compensated with a bound that was intended to carry him to the seaman's head. The leap was successful, but his ear-grab hold was not. There was nothing to grip. Gunnar's ears were tiny, and set deep into his skull. Their pavilions were vestigal, the auditory canals covered by membranes, and the skin oil slippery.. Abuwolowo's planned knee drive spun him over on his back, and he lay spraddled with his ludicrous failure driving his anger. Rolling backward he bounced up once and came down to jump flat through the air with his legs doubled. Just as he straightened to strike his adversary with the full force of his flight, and kicking legs, Gunnar dropped under the trajectory, folding with the flexibility of an eel. Abuwolowo skidded along the ground, and rolled over to rub sand into his hands. He looked up, and found himself looking at Gunnar's back, certain that the man had not moved his feet. It was too much for him, but his urge to kill made him calculating. He stood up and ran, with short hunter's steps, si-

lently to Gunnar's back, and unleashed an axe-like swing at the neck using the full strength of his wide shoulders. The edge of his hand struck and rebounded, but he was gratified to note that he had staggered Gunnar.

"You forget your title, Hdji," Gunnar said in deeper tones than he had used before. Abuwolowo moved forward a shuffling half step and was thrown four or five feet backwards by an open handed slap he did not see start. When he recovered himself, Gunnar was standing stock still waiting. It was too late to go back, and he charged hopelessly. He felt the long flexible arms, as thick at the wrist as the shoulder, reach out to pick him up, but he could do nothing about it, even though they appeared to be moving very slowly. For a minute Gunnar held him in a strangely compassionate embrace, but then threw him into the air straight up. He felt himself rise, and he floated for a long interval, but when he fell he could remember no more.

Hauptman-Everetsky leaped to his feet and ran forward, but Gunnar was there before him. He knelt by Abuwolowo's side and twisted him in his hands.

"Guards," Everetsky screamed, and fearlessly rushed toward the seaman.

"Stop," Gunnar's words were commanding, either out of their awesome depth, or because of the certainty of knowledge. "He will be all right. His back was hurt, but I have fixed it." These last words were the ones that broke Everetsky's code of hospitality. They were too much like a repair man speaking about a robot toy.

He stammered, peering out of slitted eyes that accentuated his Mongol blood, but Gunnar could only commend his control. His first thought was to stop the guards.

"Back, quiet now," Everetsky's diction was irregular, but his pitch was properly adjusted to the command tone of the mastiffs. The dogs, with the metallic crowns of their augmented skulls glittering, turned back and sat in their places under the chateau wall, once more becoming statues. Now that his first duty was accomplished, he could come back to the business of Gunnar.

"Sir," he said, and now his voice was under control, "You have injured one of my guests. That would be permissible, but it is certain to happen again. There is enmity between you and him, and," he paused, to collect himself, "I must be truthful, I do not like your kind myself. I ask you to leave. If you feel yourself insulted I offer you satisfaction."

"You are a brave man," Gunnar said, and with a sudden baring of his teeth, "Well fleshed too, so the spoils might be worth the fight, but your way is not ours. I cannot

ask you to sport with me." He showed Everetsky his teeth, opening his lips back to his neck, and dropping the hinges of his jaw. "I would have to ask you into the water so that we could play, and," he asked with icy rhetoric humor, that amused no one but him, "what chance would you take?"

"Thank you," Everetsky said, not holding his contempt, "But I must nevertheless ask you when you will leave my house."

"I ask your indulgence to wait until tonight when the tide is good." Everetsky nodded, and the seaman turned and walked toward the beach path as if he remembered using it before.

Down on the beach Gunnar studied the water, watching for the signs of the incoming tide: seawrack would soon be tossed up onto the shore, pieces of the sea's jetsam, thrown there to waste away on the cleansing shore. The dead seaweeds, fish and bubbles would soon push ahead of the growing combers to outline the demarcation between his domain and Everetsky's. "Lubber," he said, "you do not understand," and stopped, putting his hand, palm down, flat on the sand. He felt the vibrations of approaching feet.

Two servants appeared carrying his water suit, signaling their trepidation with stiff backs and firm jaws. Behind them came two more servingmen, and a kitchen maid. The bearers put his suit down at his feet, at a distance they thought out of the radius of his arms. They backed off and squatted on their heels to wait for the others to come up, remaining, guardedly watching him, until the woman and her companions reached them.

"Greetings to you," Gunnar said when the woman had come to a halt, spreading her legs to balance the weight of a waist thickened by years of carrying full water jars up steps cut from island rock.

"Greetings," she said, in a Greek dialect as bastardized as the letters that appeared on ancient Scythian coins. She alone observed him with equanimity.

"Speak," he said, viewing a full half circle of the beach and horizon, moving his eyes independently. He knew what was coming, three times now he had performed this rite.

She waddled up to him pointing the forefinger of her left hand at his face. When it touched his closed mouth a rapturous look transformed her thickened features and the Attic awe encompassed her functioning. Obediently he opened his lips, and, with a sharp snap, clipped the end of her finger off. The nauseating taste of warm blood, and dirty fingernail, filled his mouth, but he swallowed quickly and spoke again.

"I have accepted. Speak."

The woman could not resist looking back at her entourage with

triumph, and Gunnar thought, "Poor fellows, now she is a full fledged witch, ugly and to be obeyed in all things." She would have the ultimate power over her fellows. Commands were to be her normal mode of speech. The mere pointing of her maimed hand, a gesture of pollarded horns, could call a man to her bed, or a maid to his; but, more important, it would fuse the serfs into a unit. They would be a group that would respond to the messages of Gunnar's people when the time came. He knew that the inheritors and owners of the earth understood their world very well from its blueprints; but they could not find the switches and valves and all the simple tools to work them.

"Did you speak your true thoughts when you promised to eat the master, Great Fish?"

Gunnar made the obligatory answer. "You have prayed to us."

"Demon of Poisidon, my people would be saved." She too was familiar with the ritual.

"I am no demon, but a servant," he rose to his feet, and gave the toothy yawn that had impressed Everetsky. "Poisidon wants more servants who love the sea."

"We will accept."

Gunnar bit a piece of blubber from his forearm and spit it into the cup of her waiting hands. Immediately she kissed it ritually and squirreled it into the dirty fold of her blouse.

"When the appointed time is come I will return." He watched them go, the woman leading, and the men with their heads inclined to the woman.

Gunnar was ashamed of himself, not for his threats to his host and their outcome. He had planned that series of happenings, and, had in fact, played this role many times before. His people could not hope to fight the land dwellers if the war was to be fought on the basis of numbers and equipment. The sea cities were very vunerable, the simplest sort of guided torpedo could destroy the domes, and economic sanctions would quickly disrupt the lives of the ocean bed farmers and their cities. He was not ashamed of his tactics, but of the unmanly squeamishness which had overtaken him. To feel his stomach turn at the mere taste of human kind. It was true that the heavy starch diet of the airbreathers and the dark cooked meats they are gave their flesh an unpleasant, alien taste, but it was not so different from the savor of enemies he had killed in the days long hunting duels in his homeground.

He stopped his train of thought, and studied the sea with heightened awareness. Wondering what disturbed him would do no good. He knew it would be better to relax, but the strange dislocation of his abilities was still with him. He

breathed deeply, sucking great mouthfuls of air, and held them until his chest and diaphram puffed out in a rotund bladder. Slowly he let the air escape through his nostrils, a silent flow of aspiration, until any observer would have noticed the change in his posture. Everything about his body was lax, his legs lay separately on the sand, and his head lolled, but the eyes were alive. They turned in their sockets independently scanning the surface of the sea. It was a look born in the middle twentieth century studies of frogs' nervous systems. There were circuits spliced into the optical nerves that bypassed the brain and fed the sorted visual stimuli back to the eye muscles. Only the significant motions on the surface of the sea were allowed to reach the brain.

After a few seconds of this activity Gunnar's legs twitched, his eyelids drooped, and the eyes themselves seemed to withdraw back into the skull. He brought his knees up, and hugged them, sitting in this childlike posture with a broad grin on his face.

"Hauptman-Everetsky was foolish," he thought as he changed his position to stand, moving in a serpentine flow that ended in a run toward the surf. His last thoughts before he hit the water in a flat dive were of his hunger, and a mental note to come back to the beach to see if his calculations about Greta were correct. He hit near the bottom of a wave and let the undertow carry him toward the sudden deep just beyond the breakers. Turning in a free somersault he pushed for the boulder filled bottom and found a current that carried him between the rocks. As he estimated his speed he slowed himself by pressing his heels into the sand, touching at chosen points much like a professional polo player guides his pony with touches of his spurs. When he saw the bathysphere that Everetsky had ordered sunk, he momentarily regreted not wearing his swim fins, but he did not dwell on the thought. It could hold no more than three men, he thought, and swam toward its hatch.

The three guards saw him as soon as he came into the bathysphere's circle of light. They started out the open hatch. Gunnar caught the first man by the scruff of his neck as he came out, but they had expected to use the vanguard as a delay to allow others to come up on him. What they had not allowed for was the simplicity of Gunnar's tactics. He held the man like a kitten and plucked the mouthpiece of his oxygen recirculator out of his face, pointed him toward the bottom, and, with a wide hand spread across his buttocks, pushed him under trampling feet. The second man tried to divert him with a shot from his speargun. Gunnar, feeling foolish-

ly inept for his slowness, ducked and caught it just over his shoulder, and drove the blunt staff into the marksman's solar plexus. He hauled this opponent out by a flopping arm, without time to watch his agonized contortions. The third member of Everetsky's murder party refused to join the combat. Gunnar showed his grinning face at an illuminated port, and disappeared to the top of the sphere. He took the cable ring in his hands and threshing his legs swam the bathysphere over onto its side. With a little adjustment the hatch fitted neatly into the bottom and Gunnar surveyed his handiwork before he swam to the man curled on the bottom with his legs doubled up over his stomach. No matter how he struggled, the man felt himself being drawn straight out. A round face, suspended inches from his mask, gently studied his last reactions.

The beach was deserted when Greta finally escaped from the chateau to look for the seaman. She kicked a puff of sand into the night breeze in exasperation and would have left, but she saw something break out of the water amid the froth of incoming waves. A second later she could see Gunnar's figure wading ashore. He bent and reached under the water, and taking a handful of sand wiped it across his mouth. As he drew closer she could see the flicker of his tongue picking at the crevices in his teeth.

"Hello," she said, not finding anything else to say for the moment, and wrapped her long cloak tighter around her.

"Hello," he said, noticing her shivers. "Come, you are not used to the night air without screens to protect you." He led the way to the shelter of the cliff, and continued. "What are you doing here?"

Greta did not know, except that she was attracted to him, and that he was the first man she could remember feeling anything but familiarity for, but she said, "Well, you beat Abuwolowo so easily."

"In the jousts of love," Gunnar said declaritively, having thought better of finishing his statement questioningly.

Greta gave him her best arch smile. "But I could talk my brother-in-law into letting you stay. He owes something to me."

Gunnar would have told her about the affair he had just ended in the sea, but the strange repugnance overtook him again. "He would not really want me," he said, but even he, not given to nuances of this sort, noticed the hesitant tone in his own voice.

"But his concern is always for the amusement of his guests," Greta said, and giggled fetchingly at some private joke, "and they are getting bored. Very bored," she said masterfully.

"And I would soon be boring

too, Little Greta." He rumpled her hair with a touch of rough power, and she stepped closer to him.

"You couldn't bore me. Ever." She turned her face up and Gunnar saw the plumb line of her throat. Thin, but adolesently rounded with a touching surplus of young fat. The stringest rules of his dialectic told him that he should destroy her as an incipient breeder.

"No," he said, "I can do better." He explained himself to the elders in the dome under the sea.

Greta was tired of waiting for an embrace that never came. She changed her posture, and spoke with irritation. "What was that?"

"Nothing." Plausibly, he said, "I must go back to my family. I have been gone very long."

"Your wife you mean."

"I am too young to swim in the breeding tides."

The metaphor's meaning escaped Greta, but the surface of the statement could be turned into the small victory of a compliment.

"You will come back when you are ready?"

Gunnar found the source of his weakness. Somehow she had taught him to find the meaning behind simple words. He smiled.

"Of course. Where else would there be for me to go now?"

Greta had forgotten all her careful training: the sophistications that her governesses had taught her. She beamed, threw her arms around his waist, and leaned her head on his sternum. "Thank you," she said, appreciating a compliment with cocquettery.

"You are very welcome," Gunnar said, and managed to keep his laughter out of his voice. "But you can do me a favor." Before he spoke he studied the water. Now he must leave, he decided, and turned back to her. "It is very simple." He said, "Remember to tell your brother-in-law this: war will be fought in places he has not yet thought of."

"Yes?" Greta said, bewildered.

"No more." Gunnar patted her head kindly, and sat down, smoothed his suit onto his body, and put his fins on his feet. When he had his mask in place he could no longer speak and he walked silently into the breakers to vanish. Later that same night he talked with the porpoises, chased a school of silvery fish out into the moonlight and then dove to flirt in swirls in a whirlpool current that spun him out in the direction of home.

Greta gave Hauptman-Everetsky her cryptic message; he took little notice of it, and she remembered less and less of Gunnar with the passing years. When she did recall, it was too late, the figures coming out of the surf, to be greeted by the servants, were not Gunnar, but triumphant victors. The island was without power, the servants in revolt, and nostal-

gia was not a shield.

The war had been fought; neither she nor her brother-in-law had known it. In the subterranean tunnels the ripped ends of power cables spluttered hopeless sparks, water poured from torn mains, and bells and voices, however loud, brought no servants back from their welcoming songs. The always obedient chattels only watched, with blank dark eyes, as the fish came to play their game with Greta.

Does anyone besides your centenarian Editor remember Irwin S. Cobb? He was a Kentuckian, a humorist of the old—or pre-pre-sick—school; and once told the story of a man, who being unwise enough to go out in the woods wearing khakis during Deer Season, was immediately wounded by a zealous hunter who "thought he was a deer." The unlucky man recovered, had a suit made for him out of green-and-white striped awning material; and, thus protectively colored, went out in the woods again during the following Deer Season. He was at once shot again: this time, fatally. "No one believes you did it on purpose," the coroner said to the unhappy killer. "But how in blazes could you have thought he was a deer? *"I didn't," was the answer . . . "I thought he was a zebra. . . ."*

MAR-TI-AN

by Robert Lory

In the office of the Superintendent of Prisons, the warden saluted smartly. "Engas has gone, sir. The escape went off as planned," he reported.

The white-haired man seated at the desk nodded. "He found the ship?"

"Yes sir."

"The fuel level. Was it—"

"Yes sir, just enough to reach Earth. He's sure to realize that."

The older man looked thoughtfully at the warden for a moment. "You don't approve of this, do you?"

"It's—not exactly that, sir. I understand your reasoning, and I agree that a mass murderer like Engas deserves death, even though our new laws prohibit capital punishment. But suppose—"

"Suppose we're wrong and Engas isn't killed—is that it?"

"I'm bothered first by Engas's para-genius intelligence, coupled with his megalomania and complete lack of conscience. Secondly, Earthmen have long suspected life on other planets. They might well now be hospitable to a non-Terran visitor. Is it *fair* to them—"

The superintendent smiled, bleakly. "Reflect a moment on your reading of Terran history and anthropology. We have little to worry about them. Engas and the Earth deserve one another."

"Hey, Paw—look whut I got ye, all tied up like a weddin present." Lafe slammed the door, causing Paw's chair to slide down the wall.

Paw woke abruptly with the subsequent crash. "Boy, how many times do I—whut's that there?"

"Found him up by the still."

"That's some kind of uniform . . . By the *still*? He a revenooer, maybe?"

Lafe shrugged. "He come down in one of them airyoplanes."

Paw's eyebrows lifted. "A *airyoplane*?"

"Yup, but this one didn't have no wings. That's probably why it came down in such a big heap. Wings fell off."

"I *have* heard of revenooers flying in airyoplanes before," Paw said, slowly. "Lookin for smoke."

"Should we shoot him?"

Paw uncorked a jug. "Not just yit. Put him square in your shotgun sights, though, and take that kerchief out'n his mouth."

Lafe pushed his bound captive against the shack's wall with the nose of his shotgun. He yanked the dirty red bandana free.

Paw took a swig of moon. "You a revenooer, stranger?"

"I don't understand the term *revenooer*. It wasn't taught to us in English classes," Engas said.

Lafe cocked the shotgun. "He's lyin, Paw. *Ever*'body knows about revenooers."

"Hold on, boy—where you from, mister?"

Engas's mind was calculating. He'd known from the moment the boy picked him up that he was in trouble. Stupidity always meant a certain amount of trouble. The boy was bad enough, but the father had, in the mensuration of Engas's world, an Intelligence Quotient of about 3. A creature this low on the scale would have to be impressed by something he didn't understand, something beyond his experience. A little truth might be justified . . . at first.

"I've come from Mars," he said.

" 'Mars'," Paw repeated, thoughtfully. "Where—*Lafe!* You set that jug right back on the table. You're too young for corn."

"Aw, Paw—I'll be twenty-nine next plantin season."

"Too young. Your Maw never would've allowed it. You know where this Mars place is at, boy?"

"Dunno. Over in Clebo County, maybe?"

The synapses in Engas's brain shuddered, but they jumped back on the offensive. *Impress them. Impressive, but not too unusual. Play up urgency. 3 I.Q., dammit! Fear—start with known, expand to unknown.*

"No, you don't understand. I'm from the *planet* Mars. I'm a Martian."

"A what, you say?" asked Paw.

"Martian. *Martian.*"

"A Mar-ti-an?" Paw repeated.

Engas said violently, "Yes, and I've got to get to Washington immediately. I was heading there when—"

"Washinton, Paw! He's talking about Washinton City—where the revenooers come from."

"Look, I know nothing about your *revenooers,* but I simply *must* get to Washington!"

Paw looked hard at Lafe, who backed away from the jug on the table. Then he returned his gaze to the stranger. "If you're no revenooer, how come you's in such a hurry to get to Washinton City?"

Because, unspeakable fool, that's where I was headed when the fuel ran out—because that's where I'll be welcomed and where I'll start my take-over. First, this country; next, the planet, and finally the whole solar system.

"Because," he said urgently, "I've been sent to warn your government—and through it, all this planet's governments—of a deadly menace. Out in space right now and coming toward Earth is a gigantic cloud, carrying a gas that will kill all life here. I can show your engineers how to build defenses against it, but they must be warned *quickly.*"

"He's fibbin, Paw. Clouds don't tote *gas,* they tote *water.* I learned that up at the schoolhouse. And I never heard nothin about them engineer things, neither."

Paw thought a bit. "It's true, boy, that you've got the only fourth grade schoolin in the family, but I figure you better run up to Gran'pap's and ask *him* what to do. He knows a lot of things, bein long-lived and havin gone twice to the county seat. Ask him what we should do with this Mar-ti-an."

"Heck, Paw—Gran'pap's is an awful long walk from here. Can't we just shoot the crittur now?"

"Git movin, boy!" Paw said, taking the shotgun and the jug of corn from Lafe. "Swig?" he asked Engas. There was no point in *cruelty* . . .

"From *where*?"

"Mars, Gran'pap. Figger, over round Clebo County, maybe."

"Well, I don't know about all this here cloud business. Clouds are up in the *air*—can't hurt nobody down *here*. What's the name of this tale-teller?"

"Calls himself a . . . Mar-ti-an."

The old man kicked over his table in jumping up. "A *what*?"

"Mar-ti-an. That's what he says, anyway."

"What in tarnation's the matter with you and your Paw? Why ain't you blasted him to kingdom come?"

"I *wanted* to, but Paw said—"

"Never mind. I sure didn't figure there'd be none of 'em left. It was when I was your age, boy. A real war, we had us. Thought we'd got 'em all. They was right good fighters, but we finally had 'em licked. Lost one more man than they did, if I remember rightly. I still got a score-talley round here someplace."

The old man opened a cupboard door and began rummaging through pots and pans, dried herbs, broken dishes, old almanacs and shotgun shells. A slurping noise made him wheel around.

"Boy, set that jug back down. You're too young for corn. Now git yourself home and give that feller both barrels. Can't let him git away, or there'll be no tellin *whut* he'll be up to—no good, that's for sure. Now, *git!*"

Lafe had been gone twenty minutes when the old man found a piece of black slate with markings on it. In another ten minutes he had located a small piece of dirty chalk. About the same time as Lafe and Paw were marveling over Engas's green blood, Gran'pap was mumbling with pleasure at the score the slate now recorded:

MARTINS	COYS
XXXXX	XXXXX
XXXXX	XXXXX

"Took a long time," he cackled, "but we's finally even!"

GHOST LINES IN THE SKY

by Isaac Asimov

My son is bearing, with strained patience, the quasi-humorous changes being rung upon his last name by his grade-school classmates. My explanation to him that the name "Asimov," properly pronounced, has a noble resonance like the distant clash of sword on shield in the age of chivalry, leaves him unmoved. The hostile look in his eyes tells me quite plainly that he considers it my duty as a father to change my name to "Smith" forthwith.

Of course, I sympathize with him, for in my time, I, too, have been victimized in this fashion. The ordinary mis-spellings of the uninformed I lay to one side. The odd quirk of mind that causes Lester del Rey (a science fiction writer of whom you may possibly have once heard) to greet me as "Asenion" upon every meeting and then fall into convulsions of laughter, I forgive. However, there was one time—

It was when I was in the army and working out my stint in basic training. One of the courses to which we were exposed was map-reading, which had the great advantage of being better than drilling and hiking. And then, like a bolt of lightning, the sergeant in charge pronounced the fatal word "azimuth" and all faces turned toward me.

I stared back at those stalwart soldier-boys in horror, for I realized that behind every pair of beady little eyes, a small brain had suddenly discovered a source of infinite fun.

You're right. For what seemed months, I was Isaac Azimuth to every comic on the post, and every soldier on the post considered himself a comic. But, as I told myself (paraphrasing a great American poet), "This is the army, Mr. Azimuth." Somehow, I survived.

And, as fitting revenge, what better than to tell all you inoffensive Gentle Readers, in full and leisurely detail, exactly what azimuth is?

It all starts with direction. The first, most primitive and most useful way of indicating direction is to point. "They went that-a-way." Or, you can make use of some landmark known to one and all, "Let's head them off at the gulch."

This is all right if you are concerned with a small section of the earth's surface; one with which you and your friends are intimately familiar. Once the horizons widen, however, there is a search for methods of giving directions that do not depend in any way on local terrain, but are the same everywhere on the earth.

An obvious method is to make use of the direction of the rising sun and that of the setting sun. (These directions change from day to day, but you can take the average over the period of a year.) These are opposite directions, of course, which we call "east" and "west." Another pair of opposites can be set up perpendicular to these and be called "north" and "south."

If, at any place, north, east, south and west are determined (and this could be done accurately enough, even in prehistoric times by careful observations of the sun) there is nothing, in principle, to prevent still finer directions from being established. We can have northeast, northnortheast, northeast by north and so on.

With a compass, you can accept directions of this sort, follow them for specified distances, or via specified landmarks, and go wherever you are told to go. Furthermore, if you want to map the earth, you can start at some point, travel a known distance in a known direction to another point, and locate that point (to scale) on the map. You can then do the same for a third point, and a fourth, and a fifth, and so on. In principal, the entire surface of the planet can be laid out in this manner, as accurately as you wish, upon a globe.

However, the fact that a thing can be done "in principal" is cold comfort if it is unbearably tedious and would take a million men a million years. Besides, the compass was unknown to western man till the 13th Century and the Greek geographers, in trying to map the world, had to try other dodges.

One method was to note the position of the sun at midday; that is at the moment just half-way between sunrise and sunset. On any particular day, there will be some spots on earth where the sun will be directly overhead at midday. The ancient Greeks knew this to be true of southern Egypt in late June, for instance. In Europe, however, the sun at midday always fell short of the overhead point.

This could easily be explained once it was realized that the earth was a sphere. It could furthermore be shown without difficulty that all points

on earth at which the sun, on some particular day, fell equally short of the overhead point at midday, were on a single east-west line. Such a line could be drawn on the map and used as a reference for the location of other points. The first to do so was a Greek geographer named Dicaearchus, who lived from about 355 to 258 B.C. and was one of Aristotle's pupils.

Such a line is called a line of "latitude" from a Latin word meaning broad or wide, for when making use of the usual convention of putting north at the top of a map, the east-west lines run in the direction of its width.

Naturally, a number of different lines of latitude can be determined. All run east-west and all circle the sphere of the earth at constant differences from each other, and so are parallel. They are therefore referred to as "parallels of latitude."

The nearer the parallels of latitude to either pole, the smaller the circles they make. (If you have a globe, look at it and see.) The longest parallel is equidistant from the poles and makes the largest circle, taking in the maximum girth of the earth. Since it divides the earth into two equal halves, north and south, it is called the "equator" (from a Latin word meaning "equalizer").

If the earth were cut through at the equator, the section would pass through the center of the earth. That makes the equator a "great circle." Every sphere has an infinite number of great circles, but the equator is the only parallel of latitude that is one of them.

It early became customary to measure off the parallels of latitude in degrees. There are 360 degrees, by convention, into which the full circumference of a sphere can be divided. If one travels from the equator to the north pole, one covers a quarter of the earth's circumference and therefore passes over 90 degrees. Consequently, the parallels range from 0° at the equator to 90° at the north pole, (the small ° representing "degrees").

If one continues to move around the earth past the north pole so as to travel toward the equator again, one must pass the parallels of latitude (each of which encircles the earth east-west) in reverse order, traveling from 90° back to 0° at the equator (but at a point directly opposite that of the equatorial beginning). Past the equator, one moves across a second set of parallels circling the southern half of the globe, up to 90° at the south pole and then back to 0°, finally at the starting point on the equator.

To differentiate the 0° to 90° stretch from equator to north pole and the similar stretch from equator to south pole, one speaks of "north

latitude" and "south latitude." Thus, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is on the 40° north latitude parallel, while Valdivia, Chile, is on the 40° south latitude parallel.

Parallels of latitude, though excellent as references about which to build a map, cannot, by themselves, be used to locate points on the earth's surface. To say that Quito, Ecuador, is on the equator merely tells you that it is somewhere along a circle 25,000 miles in circumference.

For accurate location, one needs a gridwork of lines; a set of north-south lines as well as east-west ones. These north-south lines, running up and down the conventionally oriented map (long-ways) would naturally be called "longitude."

Whenever it is midday upon some spot of the earth, it is midday at all spots on the same north-south line, as one can easily show if the earth is considered to be a rotating sphere. The north-south line is therefore a "meridian" (a corruption of a Latin word for "midday") and we speak of "meridians of longitude."

Each meridian extends due north and south, reaching the north pole at one extreme and the south pole at the other. All the meridians therefore converge at both poles and are spaced most widely apart at the equator, for all the world like the boundary lines of the segments of a tangerine. If one imagines the earth sliced in two along any meridian, the slice always cuts through the earth's center, so that *all* meridians are great circles, and each stretches around the world for a distance of approximately 25,000 miles.

By 200 B.C., maps being prepared by Greeks were marked off with both longitude and latitude. However, making the gridwork *accurate* was another thing. Latitude was all right. That merely required the determination of the average height of the midday sun or, better yet, the average height of the north star. Such determinations could not be made as accurately in ancient Greek times as in modern times, but they could be made accurately enough to produce reasonable results.

Longitude was another matter. For that one needed *time of day*. One had to be able to compare the time at which the sun (or better still, a star) was directly above the local meridian, as compared with the time it was directly above another meridian. If a star passed over the meridian of Athens in Greece at a certain time, and over the meridian of Messina in Sicily, 32 minutes later, then Messina was 8 degrees of longitude west of Athens. To determine such matters, accurate timepieces were

necessary; timepieces that could be relied on to maintain synchronization to within fractions of a minute over long periods while separated by long distance; and to remain in synchronization with the earth's rotation, too.

In ancient times, such timepieces simply did not exist and therefore even the best of the ancient geographers managed to get their meridians tangled up. Eratosthenes of Cyrene, who flourished at Alexandria in 200 B.C., thought that the meridian that passed through Alexandria, also passed through Byzantium (the modern city of Istanbul, Turkey). That meridian actually passes about 70 miles east of Istanbul. Such discrepancies tended to increase in areas further removed from home-base.

Of course, once the circumference of the earth is known (and Eratosthenes himself calculated it; see THE SHAPE OF THINGS, F & SF, September 1962), it is possible to calculate the east-west distance between degrees of longitude. For instance, at the equator, one degree of longitude is equal to about 69.5 miles, while at a latitude of 40° (either north or south of the equator), it is only about 53.2 miles and so on. However, accurate measurements of distance over mountainous territory, or, worse yet, over stretches of open ocean are quite difficult.

In early modern times, when European nations first began to make long ocean voyages, this became a horrible problem. Sea-captains never knew certainly where they were, and making port was a matter of praying as well as sailing. In 1598, Spain which, at the time, was the major sea-going nation, offered a reward for anyone who would devise a timepiece that could be used on board ship, but the reward went begging.

In 1656, the Dutch astronomer, Christian Huygens, invented the pendulum clock; the first accurate time-piece. It could be used only on land, however. The pitching, rolling and yawing of a ship put the pendulum off its feed at once.

Great Britain succeeded Spain as the major maritime nation after 1600, and in 1675, Charles II founded the observatory in Greenwich (then a London suburb, now part of the city) for the express purpose of carrying through the necessary astronomical observations that would make the accurate determination of longitude possible.

But a good timepiece was still needed and in 1714, the British government offered a large fortune (in those days) of 20,000 pounds for anyone who could devise a good clock that would work on shipboard.

The problem was tackled by John Harrison, a Yorkshire mechanic, self-trained and gifted with mechanical genius. Beginning in 1728, he built a series of five clocks, each better than the one before. Each was so mounted that it could take the sway of a ship without being affected.

Each was more accurate at sea than other clocks of the time were on land. One of them was off by less than a minute after five months at sea. Harrison's first clocks were perhaps too large and heavy to be completely practical, but the fifth was no bigger than a large watch.

The British Parliament put on an extraordinary display of meanness in this connection for they wore Harrison out in their continual delays in paying him the money he had earned and in demanding more and ever more models and tests. (Possibly, this was because Harrison was a provincial mechanic and not a gentleman scientist of the Royal Society.) However, King George III himself took a personal interest in the case and backed Harrison, who finally received his money in 1765, by which time he was over 70 years old.

It is only in the last two hundred years, then, that the latitude-longitude gridwork on the earth became really accurate.

Even after precise longitude determinations became possible, a problem remained. There is no natural reference-base for longitude; nothing like the equator in case of latitude. Different nations therefore used different systems, usually basing "zero longitude" on the meridian passing through the local capital. The use of different systems was confusing and the risk was run of rescue operations at sea being hampered, to say nothing of war maneuvers among allies being stymied.

To settle matters, the important maritime nations of the world gathered in Washington, D.C. in 1884 and held the "Washington Meridian Conference." The logical decision was reached to let the Greenwich observatory serve as base since Great Britain was at the very height of its maritime power. The meridian passing through Greenwich is, therefore, the "Prime Meridian" and has a longitude of 0°.

The degrees of longitude are then marked off to the west and east as "west longitude" and "east longitude." The two meet again at the opposite side of the world from the Prime Meridian. There we have the 180° Meridian which runs down the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Every degree of latitude (or longitude) is broken up into 60 minutes (′), every minute into 60 seconds (″), while the seconds can be broken up into tenths, hundreds and so on. Every point on the earth can be located uniquely by means of latitude and longitude. For instance, New York City (referring to some municipally agreed upon central point) is at 40° 45′ 06″ north latitude and 73° 59′ 39″ west longitude; while Los Angeles is at 34° 03′ 15″ north latitude and 118° 14′ 28″ west longitude.

The north pole and south pole have no longitude, for all the meridians converge there. However, the north pole is defined by latitude

alone, for 90° north latitude represents one single point—the north pole. Similarly, 90° south latitude represents the single point of the south pole.

It is possible to locate longitude in terms of time rather than in terms of degrees. The complete day of 24 hours is spread around the 360° of longitude. This means that if two places differ by 15° in longitude, they also differ by 1 hour in local time. If it is exactly noon on the Prime Meridian, it is 1 P.M. at 15° east longitude and 11 A.M. at 15° west longitude.

If we decide to call Prime Meridian 0:00:00 we can assign west longitude positive time readings and east longitude negative time readings. All points on 15° west longitude become +1:00:00 and all points on 15° east longitude become −1:00:00.

Since New York City is at 73° 59′ 39″ west longitude it is 4 hours 55 minutes 59 seconds earlier than London and can therefore be located at +4:55:59. Similarly, Los Angeles, still farther west is at +8:04:48.

In short, every point on earth, except for the poles, can be located by a latitude and a time. The north and south poles have latitude only and have no local times, since they have no meridian. This does not mean, of course, that there is no time at the poles; only that the system for measuring local times, which works elsewhere on earth, breaks down at the poles. Other systems can be used there; one pole might be assigned Greenwich time, for instance, while the other is assigned the time of the 180° meridian.

In the ordinary mapping of the globe, both latitude and longitude are given in ordinary degrees. However, the time system for longitude is used to establish local time zones over the face of the earth, and the 180° meridian becomes the "International Date Line" (slightly bent for geographical convenience). All sorts of interesting paradoxes become possible, but—that is for another article another day.

And what about mapping the sky? This concerned astronomers even before the problem of the mapping of the earth, really, for whereas only small portions of the earth are visible to any one man at any one time, the entire expanse of half a sphere is visible overhead.

The "celestial sphere" is most easily mapped as an extension of the earth sphere. If the axis of the earth is imagined extended through space until it cuts the celestial sphere, the intersection would come at the "north celestial pole" and the "south celestial pole." ("Celestial" by the way is from a Latin word for "sky.")

The celestial sphere seems to rotate east to west about the earth's axis as a reflection of the actual rotation of the earth west to east about that axis. Therefore, the north celestial pole and the south celestial pole are fixed points that do not partake in the celestial rotation, just as the north pole and the south pole do not partake in the earthly rotation.

The near neighborhood of the north celestial pole is marked by a bright star, Polaris, also called the "pole star" and the "north star", which is only a degree or so from it and makes a small circle about it each day. The circle is so small that the star seems fixed in position day after day, year after year, and can be used as a reference point to determine north, and therefore all other directions. Its importance to travel in the days before the compass was incalculable.

The imaginary reference lines on the earth can all be transferred by projection to the sky; so that the sky, like the earth, can be covered with a gridwork of ghost-lines. There would be the "celestial equator" making up a great circle equidistant from the celestial poles; and "celestial latitude" and "celestial longitude" also.

The celestial latitude is called "declination" and is measured in degrees. The northern half of the celestial sphere ("north celestial latitude") has its declination given as a positive value; the southern half ("south celestial latitude") as a negative value. Thus, Polaris has a declination of roughly $+89°$; Pollux one of about $+30°$; Sirius one of about $-15°$; and Acrux (the brightest star of the Southern Cross) a declination of about $-60°$.

The celestial longitude is called "right ascension" and the sky has a prime meridian of its own that is less arbitrary than the one on earth, one which could therefore be set and agreed upon quite early in the game.

The plane of the earth's orbit about the sun cuts the celestial sphere in a great circle called the "ecliptic." (The reason for the name and some of the interesting matters concerning the ecliptic I will leave—reluctantly—for another article.) The sun seems to move exactly along the line of the ecliptic, in other words.

Because the earth's axis is tipped to the plane of earth's orbit by $23.5°$, the two great circles of the ecliptic and the celestial equator are angled to one another by that same $23.5°$.

The ecliptic crosses the celestial equator at two points. When the sun is at either point, the day and night are equal in length (twelve hours each) all over the earth. Those points are therefore the "equinoxes," from Latin words meaning "equal nights."

At one of these points, the sun is moving from negative to positive

declination and that is the "vernal equinox" because it occurs on March 20 and marks the beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere, where most of mankind lives. At the other point, the sun is moving from positive to negative declination and that is the autumnal equinox, falling on September 23, the beginning of the northern autumn.

The point of the vernal equinox falls on a celestial meridian which is assigned a value of 0° right ascension. The celestial longitude is then measured eastward only (either in degrees or in hours) all the way round, until it returns to itself as 360° right ascension.

By locating a star through declination and right ascension one does precisely the same thing as locating a point on earth through latitude and longitude.

An odd difference is this, though. The earth's Prime Meridian is fixed through time, so that a point on the earth's surface does not change its longitude from day to day. However, the earth's axis makes a slow revolution once in 25,800 years and because of this the celestial equator slowly shifts, and the points at which it crosses the ecliptic moves slowly westward.

The vernal equinox moves westward, then, circling the sky every 25,800 years, so that each year, the moment in time of the vernal equinox comes just a trifle sooner than it would otherwise come. The moment precedes the theoretical time and the phenomenon is therefore called "the precession of the equinoxes."

As the vernal equinox moves westward, every point on the celestial sphere has its right ascension (measured from that vernal equinox) increase. It moves up about 1/7 of a second of arc each day, if my calculations are correct.

This system of locating points in the sky is called the "Equatorial System" because it is based on the location of the celestial equator and the celestial poles.

A second system may be established based on the observer himself. Instead of a "celestial north pole" based on a rotating earth, we can establish a point directly overhead; each person on earth having his own overhead point, although for people over a restricted area, say that of New York City, the different overhead points are practically identical.

The overhead point is the "zenith" which is a medieval misspelling of part of an Arabic phrase meaning "overhead." The point directly opposite in that part of the celestial sphere which lies under the earth is the "nadir", a medieval misspelling of an Arabic word meaning "opposite."

The great circle that runs around the celestial sphere, equidistant from the zenith and nadir is the "horizon" from a Greek word meaning "boundary," because to us it seems the boundary between sky and earth (if the earth were perfectly level, as it is at sea.) This system of locating points in the sky is therefore called the "Horizon System."

The north-south great circle traveling from horizon to horizon through the zenith is the meridian. The east-west great circle traveling from horizon to horizon through the zenith, and making a right angle with the meridian, is the "prime vertical."

A point in the sky can then be said to be so many degrees (positive) above the horizon or so many degrees (negative) below the horizon, this being the "altitude". Once that is determined, the exact point in the sky can be located by measuring on that altitude the number of degrees westward from the southern half of the meridian. At least astronomers do that. Navigators and surveyors measure the number of degrees eastward from the north end of the meridian. (In both cases, the direction of measure is clockwise.)

The number of degrees west of the southern edge of the meridian (or east of the northern edge, depending on the system used) is the *azimuth* (AHA-A-A-A-A-A). The word is a less corrupt form of the Arabic expression from which "zenith" also comes.

If you set north as having an azimuth of 0°, then east has an azimuth of 90°, south an azimuth of 180°, and west an azimuth of 270°. Instead of boxing the compass with outlandish names you can plot direction by degrees.

And as for myself?

Why, I have an azimuth of isaac. Naturally.

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touchstone (tuch ston), *n.* 1. *Mineral.* A black, siliceous stone allied to flint;—used to test the purity of gold and silver by the streak left on the stone when rubbed by the metal. 2. Any test or criterion by which to try a thing's qualities.

Touchstones have a long, complex, and fascinating history—most of which is unknown to Your Editor—and, after some period of desuetude, have begun to reclaim a modicum of popular attention under the name of feeling-pieces. *John Anthony wrote a justly-praised story about one for us THE HYPNOGLYPH; now Terry Carr (BROWN ROBERT, July 1962; HOP-FRIEND, Nov. 1962) divulges the properties, both hidden and revealed, of yet another. The scene is Greenwich Village, whose ancient and beautiful character seems doomed to fall victim to the insensate greed of the speculator. Yet a few sections of this antic faubourg remain still unchanged since the days when poor Poe dwelt there, and in shops both dim and curious—such as Mr. Carr describes—things both curious and dim may still be found. And now let us follow his protagonist—but not, we suggest, too closely . . .*

TOUCHSTONE

by Terry Carr

FOR THIRTY-TWO YEARS, during which he watched with growing perplexity and horror the ways of the world and the dull gropings of men reaching for love and security, Randolph Helgar had told himself that there was a simple answer to all of it—somehow it was possible to get a handhold on life, to hold it close and cherish it without fear. And on a Saturday morning in early March when the clouds had disappeared and the sun came forth pale in the sky he found what he had been looking for.

The snow had been gone from the streets of Greenwich Village for over a week, leaving behind only the crispness on the sidewalks. Everyone still walked with a tentative step, like sailors on

shore leave. Randolph Helgar was out of his apartment by ten, heading west. His straight, sandy hair was ruffled by an easterly wind, giving him the superficial appearance of hurrying, but his quick grey eyes and the faint smile that so often came to his mouth dispelled that. Randolph was busier looking around than walking.

The best thing about the Village, as far as he was concerned, was that you could never chart all of it. As soon as you thought you knew every street, every sandal shop, every hot dog or pizza stand, one day you'd look up and there'd be something new there, where you'd never looked before. A peculiar blindness comes over people who walk through the streets of the Village; they see only where they're going.

The day before, on the bus coming home from work at the travel agency on West 4th, he had looked out the window and seen a bookstore whose dirty windows calmly testified to the length of time it had been there. So of course this morning he was looking for that bookstore. He had written down the address, but there was no need now for him to take the slip of paper from his wallet to look at it; the act of writing it had fixed it in his memory.

The store was just opening when he got there. A large, heavy-shouldered man with thick black hair and prominent veins in the backs of his hands was setting out the bargain table in the front of the store. Randolph glanced at the table, filled with the sun-faded spines of anonymous pocketbooks, and nodded at the man. He went inside.

The books were piled high around the walls; here and there were handlettered signs saying MUSIC, HISTORY, PSYCHOLOGY, but they must have been put there years ago, because the books in those sections bore no relation to the signs. Near the front was an old cupboard, mottled with the light which came through the dirty window; a sign on one of its shelves said *$10*. Next to it was a small round table which revolved on its base, but there was no price on this.

The owner had come back into the store now, and he stood just inside the door looking at Randolph. After a moment he said, "You want anything special?"

Randolph shook his head, dislodging the shock of hair which fell over his eyes. He ran his fingers through it, combing it back, and turned to one of the piles of books.

"I think maybe you'd be interested in this section," said the owner, walking heavily over the bending floorboards to stand beside Randolph. He raised a large hand and ran it along one shelf.

A sign said MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT.

Randolph glanced at it. "No," he said.

"None of those books are for sale," the man said. "That section is strictly lending-library."

Randolph raised his eyes to meet those of the older man. The man gazed back calmly, waiting.

"Not for sale?" Randolph said.

"No, they're part of my own collection," the man said. "But I lend them out at 10¢ a day, if anybody wants to read them, or . . ."

"Who takes them out?"

The heavy man shrugged, with the faint touch of a smile about his thick lips. "People. People come in, they see the books and think they might like to read them. They always bring them back."

Randolph glanced at the books on the shelves. The spines were crisp and hard, the lettering on them like new. "Do you think they read them?" he asked.

"Of course. So many of them come back and buy other things."

"Other books?"

The man shrugged again, and turned away. He walked slowly to the back of the store. "I sell other things. It's impossible to make a living selling books in this day and age."

Randolph followed him into the darkness in back. "What other things do you sell?"

"Perhaps you should read some of the books first," the man said, watching him beneath his eyebrows.

"Do you sell . . . love potions? Dried bat's blood? Snake's entrails?"

"No," said the man. "I'm afraid you'd have to search the tobauconist's shops for such things as that. I sell only imperishables."

"Magic charms?" Randolph said.

"Yes," the man said slowly. "Some are real, some are not."

"And I suppose the real ones are more expensive."

"They are all roughly the same price. It's up to you to decide which ones are real."

The man had stooped to reach into a drawer of his desk, and now he brought out a box from which he lifted the lid. He set the open box on the top of his desk and reached up to turn on a naked lightbulb which hung from the shadowed ceiling.

The box contained an assortment of amulets, stones, dried insects encased in glass, carved pieces of wood, and other things. They were all tumbled into the box haphazardly. Randolph stirred the contents with two fingers.

"I don't believe in magic," he said.

The heavy man smiled faintly "I don't suppose I do either. But some of these things are quite in-

teresting. Some are of authentic South American workmanship, and others are from Europe and the East. They're worth money, all right."

"What's this?" Randolph asked, picking up a black stone which just fit into the palm of his hand. The configurations of the stone twisted around and in upon themselves, like a lump of baker's dough.

"That's a touchstone. Run your fingers over it."

"It's perfectly smooth," Randolph said.

"It's supposed to have magical powers to make people feel contented. Hold it in your hand."

Randolph closed his fingers around the stone. Perhaps it was the power of suggestion, but the stone did feel very good. So smooth, like skin . . .

"The man who gave it to me said it was an ancient Indian piece. It embodies Yin and Yang, the opposites that complement and give harmony to the world. You can see a little of the symbol in the way the stone looks." He smiled slowly. "It's also supposed to encase a human soul, like an egg."

"More likely a fossil," Randolph said. He wondered what kind of stone it was.

"It will cost five dollars," the man said.

Randolph hefted the stone in his hand. It settled back into his palm comfortably, like a cat going to sleep. "All right," he said.

He took a bill from his wallet, and noticed the paper on which he'd written the store's address the day before. "If I come back here a week from now," he said, "will this store still be here? Or will it have disappeared, like magic shops are supposed to do?"

The man didn't smile. "This isn't that kind of store. I'd go out of business if I kept moving my location."

"Well then," Randolph said, looking at the black stone in his hand. "When I was young I used to pick up stones at the beach and carry them around for weeks, just because I loved them. I suppose this stone has some of that sort of magic, anyway."

"If you decide you don't want it, bring it back," said the man.

When he got back to the apartment Margo was just getting up. Bobby, seven years old, was apparently up and out already. Randolph put yesterday's pot of coffee on the burner to heat and sat at the kitchen table to wait for it. He took the touchstone out of his pocket and ran his fingers over it.

Strange . . . It was just a black rock, worn smooth probably by water and then maybe by the rubbing of fingers over centuries. Despite what the man at the store had said about an Indian symbol, it had no particular shape.

Yet it did have a peculiar calming effect on him. Maybe, he thought, it's just that people have to have something to do with their hands while they think. It's the hands, the opposable thumb, that has made men what they are, or so the anthropologists say. The hands give men the ability to work with things around them, to make, to do. And we all have a feeling that we've got to be using our hands all the time or somehow we're not living up to our birthright.

That's why so many people smoke. That's why they fidget and rub their chins and drum their fingers on tables. But the touchstone relaxes the hands.

A simple form of magic.

Margo came into the kitchen, combing her long hair back over her shoulders. She hadn't put on any makeup, and her full mouth seemed as pale as clouds. She set out coffee cups and poured, then sat down across the table.

"Did you get the paint?"

"Paint?"

"You were going to paint the kitchen today. The old paint is cracking and falling off."

Randolph looked up at the walls, rubbing the stone in his fingers. They didn't look bad, he decided. They could go for another six months without being redone. After all, it was no calamity if the plaster showed through above the stove.

"I don't think I'll do it today," he said.

Margo didn't say anything. She picked up a book from the chair beside her and found her place in it.

Randolph fingered the touchstone and thought about the beach when he had been a boy.

There was a party that night at Gene Blake's apartment on the floor below, but for once Randolph didn't feel like going down. Blake was four years younger than him, and suddenly today the difference seemed insuperable; Blake told off-center jokes about integration in the South, talked about writers Randolph knew only by the reviews in the Sunday *Times*, and was given to drinking Scotch and milk. No, not tonight, he told Margo.

After dinner Randolph settled in front of the television set and, as the washing of dishes sounded from the kitchen and Bobby read a comic book in the corner, watched a rerun of the top comedy show of three seasons past. When the second commercial came on he dug the touchstone from his pocket and rubbed it idly with his thumb. All it takes, he told himself, is to ignore the commercials.

"Have you ever seen a frog?" Bobby asked him. He looked up and saw the boy standing next to his chair, breathing quickly as

boys do when they have something to say.

"Sure," he said.

"Did you ever see a black one? A dead one?"

Randolph thought a minute. He didn't suppose he had. "No," he said.

"Wait a minute!" Bobby said, and bounded out of the room. Randolph turned back to the television screen, and saw that the wife had a horse in the living-room and was trying to coax it to go upstairs before the husband came home. The horse seemed bored.

"Here!" said Bobby, and dropped the dead frog in his lap.

Randolph looked at it for two seconds before he realized what it was. One leg and part of the frog's side had been crushed, probably by a car's wheel, and the wide mouth was open. It was grey, not black.

Randolph shook it off him onto the floor. "You'd better throw it away," he said. "It's going to smell bad."

"But I paid sixty marbles for him!" Bobby said. "And I only had twenty-five, and you got to get me some more."

Randolph sighed, and shifted the touchstone from one hand to the other. "All right," he said. "Monday. Keep him in your room."

He turned back to the screen, where everyone had got behind the horse and was trying to push him up the stairs.

"Don't you like him?" Bobby asked.

Randolph looked blankly at him.

"My frog," Bobby said.

Randolph thought about it for a moment. "I think you'd better throw him away," he said. "He's going to stink."

Bobby's face fell. "Can I ask Mom?"

Randolph didn't answer, and he supposed Bobby went away. There was another commercial on now, and he was toying idly with the thought of a commercial for touchstones. "For two thousand years mankind has searched for the answer to underarm odor, halitosis, regularity. Now at last . . ."

"Bobby!" said his wife in the kitchen. Randolph looked up, surprised. "Take that out in the hall and put it in the garbage *right now!* Not another word!"

In a moment Bobby came trudging through the room, his chin on his chest. But tiny eyes looked at Randolph with a trace of hope.

"She's gonna make me throw him away."

Randolph shrugged. "It would smell up the place," he said.

"Well, I thought *you'd* like it anyway," Bobby said. "You always keep telling me how *you* were a boy, and *she* wasn't." He

stopped for a moment, waiting for Randolph to answer, and when he didn't the boy abruptly ran out with the grey, crushed frog in his hand.

Margo came into the living-room, drying her hands on a towel. "Ran, why didn't you put your foot down in the first place?"

"What?"

"You know things like that make me sick. I won't be able to eat for two days.'

"I was watching the program," he said.

"You've seen that one twice before. What's the matter with you?"

"Take some aspirin if you're upset," he said. He squeezed the stone in the palm of his hand until she shook her head and went away.

A few minutes later a news program came on with a report on some people who had picketed a military base, protesting bombs and fallout. A university professor's face came on the screen and gravely he pointed to a chart. "The Atomic Energy Commission admits—"

Randolph sighed and shut the set off.

He went to bed early that night. When he woke up the next day he went and got a book and brought it back to bed with him. He picked up the touchstone from the chair next to the bed and turned it over in his hand a few times. It was really a very plain kind of stone. Black, smooth, softly curving . . . What was it about the rock that could make everything seem so unimportant, so commonplace?

Well, of course a rock is one of the most common things in the world, he thought. You find them everywhere—even in the streets of the city, where everything is man-made, you'll find rocks. They're part of the ground underneath the payment, part of the world we live on. They're part of home.

He held the touchstone in one hand while he read.

Margo had been up for several hours when he finished the book. When he set it down she came in and stood in the doorway, watching him silently.

After a few minutes she asked, "Do you love me?"

He looked up, faintly surprised. "Yes, of course."

"I wasn't sure."

"Why not? Is anything wrong?"

She came over and sat on the bed next to him in her terry-cloth robe. "It's just that you've hardly spoken to me since yesterday. I thought maybe you were angry about something."

Randolph smiled. "No. Why should I be angry?"

"I don't know. It just seemed that . . ." She shrugged.

He reached out and touched

her face with his free hand. "Don't worry about it."

She lay down beside him, resting her head on his arm. "And you do love me? Everything's all right?"

He turned the stone over in his right hand. "Of course everything's all right," he said softly.

She pressed against him. "I want to kiss you."

"All right." He turned to her and brushed his lips across her forehead and nose. Then she held him tightly while she kissed his mouth.

When she had finished he lay back against the pillow and looked up at the ceiling. "Is it sunny out today?" he asked. "It's been dark in here all day."

"I want to kiss you some more," she said. "If that's all right with you."

Randolph was noticing the warmth of the touchstone in his hand. Rocks aren't warm, he thought; it's only my hand that gives it warmth. Strange.

"Of course it's all right," he said, and turned to let her kiss him again.

Bobby stayed in his room most of the day; Randolph supposed he was doing something. Margo, after that one time, didn't try to talk to him. Randolph stayed in bed fingering the touchstone and thinking, though whenever he tried to remember what he'd been thinking about he drew a blank.

Around five-thirty his friend Blake appeared at the door. Randolph heard him say something to Margo, and then he came into the bedroom.

"Hey, are you all right? You weren't at the party last night."

Randolph shrugged. "Sure. I just felt like lounging around this weekend."

Blake's weathered face cleared. "Well, that's good. Listen, I've got a problem."

"A problem," Randolph said. He settled down in the bed, looking idly at the stone in his hand.

Blake paused. "You sure everything's all right? Nothing wrong with Margo? She didn't look too good when I came in."

"We're both fine."

"Well, okay. Look, Ran, you know you're the only close friend I've got, don't you? I mean, there's a lot of people in the world, but you're the only one I can really count on when the chips are down. Some people I joke with, but with you I can talk. You listen. You know?"

Randolph nodded. He supposed Blake was right.

"Well . . . I guess you heard the commotion last night. A couple guys drank too much, and there was a fight."

"I went to bed early."

"I'm surprised you slept through it. It developed into quite a brawl there for awhile; the cops

came later on. They broke three windows and somebody pushed over the refrigrator. Smashed everything all to hell. One of the doors is off the hinges."

"No, I didn't hear it."

"Wow. Well, look, Ran . . . the super is on my neck. He's going to sue me, he's going to kick me out. You know that guy. I've got to get ahold of some money fast, to fix things up."

Randolph didn't say anything. He had found a place on the stone where his right thumb fit perfectly, as though the stone had been molded around it. He switched the stone to his left hand, but it didn't quite fit that thumb.

Blake was nervous. "Look, I know it's short notice. I wouldn't ask you, but I'm stuck. Can you lend me about a hundred?"

"A hundred dollars?"

"I might be able to get by with eighty, but I figured a bribe to the super . . ."

"All right. It doesn't make any difference."

Blake paused again, looking at him. "You can do it?"

"Sure."

"Which Eighty or a hundred?"

"A hundred if you want."

"You're sure it won't . . . bother you, make you short? I mean, I could look around somewhere else . . ."

"I'll write you a check," Randolph said. He got up slowly and took his checkbook from the dresser. "How do you spell your first name?"

"G-E-N-E." Blake stood nervously, indecisive. "You're sure it's no trouble? I don't want to pressure you."

"No." Randolph signed the check, tore it out and handed it to him.

"You're a friend," Blake said. "A real one."

Randolph shrugged. "What the hell."

Blake stood for a few seconds more, apparently wanting to say something. But then he thanked him again and hurried out. Margo came and stood in the doorway and looked at him silently for a moment, then went away.

"Are you going to get me the marbles tomorrow?" Bobby said that evening over supper.

"Marbles?"

"I told you. I still have to pay that guy for the frog you made me throw away."

"Oh. How many?'

"Thirty-five of them. I owed him sixty, and I only had twenty-five."

Bobby was silent, picking at his corn. He speared three kernels carefully with his fork and slid them off the fork with his teeth.

"I'll bet you forget."

Margo looked up from where she had been silently eating. "Bobby!"

"I'm finished with my dinner," Bobby said quickly, standing up. He threw a quick glance at Randolph. "I'll bet he does forget," he said, and ran out.

After five minutes of silence between them Margo stood up and started clearing away the dishes. Randolph was rubbing the touchstone against the bridge of his nose.

"I'd like to sleep with you tonight," she said.

"Of course," he said, a bit surprised.

She stopped beside him and touched his arm. "I don't mean just sleep. I want you to love me."

He nodded. "All right."

But when the time came she turned away and lay silently in the dark. He went to sleep with one arm lying carelessly across her hips.

When the telephone rang he came out of sleep slowly. It was ringing for the fifth time when he answered it.

It was Howard, at the agency. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm all right," Randolph said.

"It's past ten. We thought maybe you were sick and couldn't call."

"Past ten?" For a moment he didn't know what that meant. Then Margo appeared in the doorway from the kitchen, holding the alarm clock in her hand, and he remembered it was Monday.

"I'll be there in an hour or so," he said quickly. "It's all right; Margo wasn't feeling too good, but she's all right now."

Margo, her face expressionless, put the clock down on the chair next to the bed and looked at him for a moment before leaving the room.

"Nothing serious, I hope," said Howard.

"No, it's all right. I'll see you in awhile." He hung up.

He sat on the edge of the bed and tried to remember what had happened. The past two days were a blur. He had lost something, hadn't he? Something he'd been holding.

"I tried to wake you three times," Margo said quietly. She had come back into the room and was standing with her hands folded under her breasts. Her voice was level, controlled. "But you wouldn't pay any attention."

Randolph was slowly remembering. He'd had the touchstone in his hand last night, but it must have slipped out while he was asleep. He began to search among the covers.

"Did you see the stone?" he asked her.

"What?"

"The stone. I've dropped it."

There was a short silence. "I don't know. Is it so important right now?"

"I paid five dollars for it," he said, still rummaging through the bed.

"For a rock?"

He stopped suddenly. Yes, five dollars for a rock, he thought. It didn't sound right.

"Ran, what's the matter with you lately? Gene Blake was up here this morning. He gave back your check and said to apologize to you. He was really upset. He said he didn't think you really wanted to loan him the money."

But it wasn't just a rock, Randolph thought. It was a black, smooth touchstone.

"Is something worrying you?" she asked him.

The back of his neck was suddenly cold. Worrying me? he thought. No, nothing's been worrying me. That's just the trouble.

He looked up. "It may be cold out today. Can you find my gloves?"

She looked at him for a moment and then went to the hall closet. Randolph got up and started dressing. In a few minutes she returned with the gloves. He put them on. "It's a little cold in here right now," he said.

When she had gone back into the kitchen he started looking through the bed again, this time coldly and carefully. He found the touchstone under his pillow, and without looking at it he slipped it into a paper bag. He put the bag into his coat pocket.

When he got to the agency he made his excuses as glibly as possible, but he was sure they all knew that he had simply overslept. Well, it wasn't that important . . . once.

He stopped off at the store on his way home that night. It was just as he remembered it, and the same man was inside. He raised his thick eyebrows when he saw Randolph.

"You came back quickly."

"I want to return the touchstone," Randolph said.

"I'm not surprised. So many people return my magic pieces. Sometimes I think I am only lending them too, like the books."

"Will you buy it back?"

"Not at the full price. I have to stay in business."

"What price?" Randolph asked.

"A dollar only," the man said. "Or you could keep it, if that's not enough."

Randolph thought for a moment. He certainly didn't intend to keep the stone, but a dollar wasn't much. He could throw the stone away . . .

But then someone would probably pick it up.

"Do you have a hammer here?" he asked. "I think it would be better to break the stone."

"Of course I have a hammer," the man said. He reached into one of the lower drawers of his desk and brought one out, old and brown with rust.

He held it out. "The hammer rents for a dollar," he said.

Randolph glanced sharply at the man, and then decided that that wasn't really surprising. He had to stay in business, yes. "All right." He took the hammer. "I wonder if the veins of the rock are as smooth as the outside."

"Perhaps we'll see the fossilized soul," said the man. "I never know about the things I sell."

Randolph knelt and dropped the touchstone from its bag onto the floor. It rolled in a wobbling circle and then lay still.

"I knew quite a bit about rocks when I was young," he said. "I used to pick them up at the beach."

He brought the hammer down on the touchstone and it shattered into three pieces which skittered across the floor and bounced to a stop. The largest one was next to Randolph's foot.

He picked it up and the owner of the store turned on the overhead lightbulb. Together they examined the rock's fragment.

There was a fossil, but Randolph couldn't tell what it was. It was small and not very distinct, but looking at it he felt a chill strike out at him. It was as ugly and unformed as a human foetus, but it was something older, a kind of life that had died in the world's mud before anything like a man had been born.

Stephen Becker is possibly our only contributor to have studied at Yenching University near Peiping—in the days, of course, before Chairman Mao set up his yurt in the Imperial City. He is the translator of André Schwarz-Bart's THE LAST OF THE JUST. Mr. Becker hails from our own home town of Yonkers, New York (and although we are a Man of the World, we won't stand for anybody knocking its water-works) and now lives in Westchester's Bedford Village with his wife and children. If he will write more "entries"—and we think he will—we will publish them for your (and our) instruction and amusement.

THE NEW ENCYCLOPAEDIST

Entries for the Great Book of History, First Edition, 2100 A.D.

by Stephen Becker

Gill, Robert (1930-2022). Leader of the "Irreconcilables" and one of the founders of our present civilization. The Irreconcilables refused, on the grounds of good taste and "freedom of association," to join their fellow citizens in the vast, complex network of underground shelters constructed by "Civil Defense" authorities (→Opera Buffa) between 1965 and 1970 at the cost of all the prosperity, liberties, and amenities that free men everywhere were struggling for. "Gill's Bull" predicted accurately that underground society would necessarily be authoritarian. During the Great Alert of 1973 some 30,000 Irreconcilables remained above ground. When, because all potential enemies were also underground, nothing happened during the obligatory sixty-day period, and populations sheepishly regained the surface, Gill delivered his famous Report: "The West Side Highway was clear; there were no school-children in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and there was no television. We all caught up on our correspondence." As a consequence, during the Second Great Alert in 1977 the

populations refused to go underground; the Irreconcilables therefore did, and enjoyed sixty days of luxurious solitude, gourmandise, and meditation, making free use of the libraries, cinemas, galleries, monorails, and restaurants planned for a sub-civilization of 200,000,000 people. Emerging after two months, they found a world barren of life except for their counterparts in other nations, though many buildings, vehicles, power plants, etc., were perfectly usable. From these groups sprang our present highly literate, healthy, and peaceable world population of 12,000,000, including only three psychiatrists and no soldiers. (→Quantum Jump; also Darwin, Charles and "Survival of the Fittest.")

"Cantabile," the author tells us, means, "In the manner of a song." It is a very curious song which he sings here in this first appearance anywhere—vivid, though in an essentially minor key; different. We do not know very much about the author, though the words used above to describe his song might apply in a certain measure to himself. When not absorbed in writing he is, we know, absorbed in music; and his past avocations have included the observation of plant life in the marshes of the eastern seaboard. Mr. DeCles is now working on other stories which we hope to print here, stories each in its own way as different, as distinctive, as is this one of the Woman, the Garden in the City, and the Beast Who Wept.

CANTABILE

by Jon DeCles

A CONJECTURE: IT CAME FROM the past. Or: it came from the future. A supposition: It was a bolt shot by a talent great even in chains, shot at a venture because it dared not be shot at a target. As to the nature of the chains, or even the talent—? At all times and in every place, genius lives upon the sufferance of idiots.

In shape it was undescribable, and may for that reason perhaps have escaped notice. Eye may refuse to report to brain sights for which no concepts exist. Almost immediately after its appearance it ceased to be. Its contents were scattered, too small to vex the eye with challenge, and drifted slowly earthward. The surface they settled upon was the stony, inhospitable one of the City; and in seconds most of them were dead for dearth of hosting. One only survived. By a chance perhaps mathematically calculable, but nonetheless remote, this one found its way through an opening—smaller than the diameter of a pin—in the foundation of a quartz glass dome which crowned the skyscraper demesne of a Baron of the City, and drifted into a pond chemically and otherwise balanced to sustain life among its contents: plants, algae, and tiny fish. At noon, in the random nurture of this *de facto* womb, The Beast Who Wept was born. Alone of a mother, or a father, or siblings.

The Beast Who Wept was small when he was born. In fact, at the moment of his creation, he was only one quarter inch tall. For a short time before that he had been a random grouping of protoplasmic cells, propelled from one side of the fish pond to the other by sun-currents. The hot of the summer sun, lingering late into Autumn, brought him forth. He was one quarter inch tall, but this soon changed. With the voracious capacity that life had built in him, he soon found and devoured what food the garden offered. In a week's time he had reached the size of a small dog.

A goodly portion of the time allotted the Beast in that week was spent in observation. By City standards the Garden was not small. To all four points of the compass it reached, going for fifty feet in each direction. There it was cut off by the rigid confines of masonry walls. Across the top of the Garden stretched the sectional expanse of a quartz glass dome, thrust up into the sky to sample the rarity of the cold upper air. Here, high atop the Baronial skyscraper, the Garden was isolated, and like a child, sucked and stored warmth from the glowing breast of the Solar furnace. There were murals on the walls of the Garden, quasi-mosaic pictures in warm earth colors, too soft and blending for the Beast's undeveloped perceptions. But then, the Beast had only the things of the Garden to compare them with, the flowers and fish, the dwarf fruit trees, and the gaily colored birds that fluttered everywhere; and those were not what the murals depicted.

One day, sitting in the lily pool and chewing on lotus seeds, the Beast made a discovery. Reaching out, he seized a goldfish. It squirmed and wriggled, and made horrible sounds when he bit into it. Sitting calmly as he was, he was able to make the observation that living things do not like to be eaten while they are still alive. His memory reminded him of the piercing screams of the birds he had eaten, and how difficult it was to pull away the choking downiness of the feathers.

Considering, he decided not to eat any more things that were alive. As the days passed he found it was a good decision. The animals ceased to fear him, and they afforded him much amusement.

The Beast still required protein, but this he solved by awaiting the deaths of his fellow creatures, and in this way, that which was his natural need was provided. The rest of his diet was on the trees, and in the blossoms of the flowers.

When he was four feet tall he learned to walk on his hind legs, and he discovered the door. Not of his own agency was this discovery, but part of a change in his environment. The door opened and the Woman came through.

By now the Beast could see the murals, and he recognized her instantly as one of the things depicted in mosaic, all brown in the throbbing warm of the un-filtered sunlight. She did not see him at first. He still sat in the cool water of the pond, still chewed his lotus seeds. The woman tossed off the gold robe she wore and stretched out on the hot, clean sand, putting black cloth shields over her eyes.

The Beast stood slowly and stepped with care from the blue painted bottom of the pool to the flagstone walk. He walked quietly to where she lay, and stood looking at her with an agonizing scrutiny, feeling as if he should act. Yet he stood without moving and gazed over her body, with a longing for something that he was not old enough to understand.

After a while the Woman sensed his presence, and took the shields from her eyes. When she saw him she sat up and clutched for her robe. She even gave a little scream to the still air.

"How did you get here?" she said. "What are you doing here?"

The Beast looked at her differently for a moment. Her voice was not shrill and sweet, like the birds, nor soft and gutteral, like the goldfish. She did not chirp the way the insects did.

"Well, answer me!" she demanded.

The Beast made a sound in his throat; he pawed at himself. Her voice had been sharp that time, and it hurt him inside. He turned his back to her. He wept, as he had at the screech of a dying bird, but again he did not know why.

"What's the matter? Can't you talk?" she asked.

The Beast turned back to her and looked into her deep blue eyes. They were moist, like his, but not from pain. The Beast had never seen pity.

"You poor thing," the Woman said. She stood, blushed, wrapped her robe about herself, and came toward him. She made motions, indicating the door.

"You can't go out like that," she said. "Where are your clothes?" She made more motions, trying to indicate her curiosity as to the location of his garments, using her robe as an example.

The Beast stood blank, not understanding.

"Oh, all right. I'll look for them."

As she searched, the Woman talked. Idle chatter mostly, to relieve her nervousness at his presence. A flash, a dark thundernoise, and a rocket passed across the sky, attracted to space like iron to a magnate. The Woman laughed.

"You know, we *are* like mushrooms," she said, looking under a gardenia bush. "Those rockets, those space ships. I venture that you, that most of the workers, have no concept of what they are. Humans, Mortals, we live at the

base of the tree, trodden by the passing bulls, the events of life. Up there, in the branches of the Oak, the space ships carve out an empire, with no thought for us. No thought for people.

"Only the makers of Laws think of people. They make the laws that keep the empire builders from dropping the fire of the Sun on us, from subjugating us or killing us. They make the laws that limit a man to the use of personal combat, or the hiring of mercenaries. They give us a social sanity that limits a man's grasp to his reach."

She went over every foot of the garden. She looked under shrubs and bushes, even in the pool. When she finished, she was puzzled.

"I can't imagine how you got in here without clothes. For that matter, I can't really imagine how you got in here at all. Its a good thing that no one else found you, or you'd be in trouble. You wait here, and I'll go downstairs and see if I can get some of my younger brother's things for you. Then we'll see if I can get you out of the building. Without anyone seeing you."

She looked at him again, turning her head from left to right, and finally letting it come to rest, tilted at an angle, on her golden shoulder.

"I might not be able to get you out tonight, so I will bring you some food after dinner. I used to eat up here quite often, so no one will think it strange."

The Beast stood looking for a long while at the place where she had lain in the sand. Then, not having understood what she said about food, he went about the Garden gathering his own.

The Beast did not understand Night. He was born of the gentle rays and hard radiations of the Sun, and when the Sun disappeared behind the concrete confines of the Garden, he curled up in a bed of ornamental hemlocks and went to sleep. Times had been when noises from below jarred him out of his euphoria, and in those times he had seen the stars and the moon. The stars were cold, and the moon made him feel sick, and pale with an emotion he had no reason to know was Grief.

He was asleep when the Woman came again. She waved her hand in front of a glowing metal panel, and the Garden burst, like a fresh blown iris, into an enigma of artificial lighting. The light was not so strong as sunrise, but illumined the room as brightly. As the lights gave no heat, the Woman found the Beast sleeping, curled tightly. At her touch he was awake, looking up at her.

She was pale gold now. The moon washed her with milk. Her hair was moon-blued, not black, yet she was of a kin with the black soil beneath him. Under the still

of the moon and the stars, he worshiped her.

"Come," she said. "Put these on. I think my brother is larger than you are, but they will fit."

The Beast stood bewildered. He tried to follow her motions, but to no avail.

"Don't you know how to put them on?"

He was silent. The Woman sensed then that there was something in him she had not encountered before. For a moment the Woman was afraid of him.

"Oh. You don't understand me, do you? Not at all?"

The Woman helped him to put the clothes on, though at his touch, she was embarrassed. His eyes followed her, and from her he breathed in the scent of peppermint, a scent he knew from the bed of aromatics near the bird's fountain.

"You're a nice little boy," she said as she dressed him. "I feel strange near you. Almost as if I were your mother, but not motherly." She laughed. "The way I felt about my dolls when I was your age, or the way I feel about the birds here in the garden. I had a little dog with black spots when I was very young. My father wasn't a Baron then. We lived in a Baron's tower, but my father was only learning his craft. I was allowed to play with the other children, and I knew lots of boys like you. Only, of course, they could talk."

She looked at him with that pity again.

"Well, you look presentable at least, and you shall have a new suit of clothes when you go home. I imagine *that* must be among the workers. Well, never mind, you won't have to go back tonight. I couldn't smuggle you beneath the hundredth floor if my life depended on it. I brought you some food."

She led him across the Garden and handed him a basket of food. He looked dumbly at her, so she opened a flask of beer, spread a cloth on the ground and put pieces of cooked fowl, bread and melon upon it. He still did not eat until she put a piece in his hand. Then he knew it was food.

The Woman sat on the flagstones and watched him eat with his fingers. After a few moments she had the urge to reach out and pet him, or scratch his head, he reminded her so much of her lost puppy.

"You know, if I had this room all to myself, I should keep you here in secret, as a pet. My father forbids me another dog. He says that someone would use it as a weapon against me. I don't have any friends. No one that I can talk with, and naturally, I can't go out of the building. I'm only eighteen, and the Lottery hasn't chosen me a husband, so I've never been in the company of a young man. Oh, *how* I look forward to that day! Someone tall and strong like

a warrior, and bronzed as if from working in the fields. He'll be so wonderful and mannerly. He'll take me in his arms, and like a dance, we'll live!"

The Woman's eyes glittered and she saw past the Beast, beyond him, and into the future. The Beast looked into her eyes, past the veils of happy tears, and his own eyes glittered in response.

When he had finished the food the Beast made another decision. He reached out his hand, shiny with cooking oil, and touched the sleeve of her dress. It was a white dress, with puffy sleeves that billowed when she walked. The place where his hand met the softness of her garment was stained hopelessly, but the Woman smiled. On impulse she bent and kissed his forehead, tenderly, as is right to kiss a child.

"You are sweet," she said, and left with the basket and the white tablecloth. On her way she turned out the lights. The Beast scampered back into his hemlock grove, and was soon asleep.

The families of the Barons were well fed. If the Baron requested a meal that was less than nutritious in itself, the food was carefully processed with the necessary vitamins, minerals, and proteins. Thus the Beast had eaten his first complete and balanced meal. He was, for the first time in his short life, properly fed to stimulate his extraordinary rate of growth. During the night, the Beast matured.

The Sun rose over the concrete walls and began its daily progression from one quartz panel to another, like some obscure piece in a ruleless game of chess. The Beast luxuriated in its warmth. He stretched his golden limbs, and with their first contraction, the muscles firmed and rounded. With his first breath of evergreen and morning oxygen, his lungs gained capacity and his chest expanded. When he stood, it was with a limitless ease, and he perceived that he now possessed a complement of body hair. And, there were other things, things within him, that were different.

The clothes that the Woman had given him were torn, burst by his expansions in the night, and they fell from him. He was divested of their shabbiness by his very nature. The Beast was now an adolescent, or rather, in the last stages of his adolescence.

All morning the Sun moved in its prescribed path, and with the passing of the day the Beast stationed himself before the door. When the quartz glass was stained with sunset colours, the door opened. The Woman was all in yellow, wispy nylon, like jonquils, sunflowers, the high clear notes of a trumpet. She looked at the Beast.

Nothing perceptible passed between them. The Beast stood still. He did not weep now. The Wom-

an stood still. She did not seek in her mind for an explanation, neither did she consider that one was necessary.

"You are the same," she said. "You are the same little boy, and I can tell it. But you are different, not the same, for you are now a Man."

The Beast looked at her and his eyes were not damp nor unfocused. He was strong now, and different.

When the Sun was down and the stars glowed faintly in a powder-blue sky, the Juno lilies bloomed. They lifted their great white blossoms slightly above the water and strained toward the place where the moon would be. The Beast reached down and tugged at one until its rubbery stem snapped. Droplets of pool water came cascading up at them. The Woman held it to her breast and inhaled its perfume.

She sighed, and from her dark, damp lungs came a returned fragrance of hot summer nights and willow trees. The Beast kissed her, the way she had taught him to kiss her.

She hummed a low, rhythmic air, leaning back on the grass, then began to sing.

"My Prince grew from a Frog," she sang, and the crickets stopped their chirping to listen.

"My Prince grew from a Frog,
Who lived in a Silver Well,
And the Story that I tell,
Is how I kissed him as he sat
On a Log. The Frog who was
a Prince
Retrieved my Golden Ball."

She left him before the morning came. Her black hair glistened from the stroke of many caresses. The Beast ate the food she had left for him and went to sleep. The hemlocks were a prickly bower for him, and the lotuses were no longer sacred.

The next week passed. The Beast had a beard of light brown and there were traces of lines around the edges of his eyes. His shoulder-length hair was coarser; his skin was not so soft, his lips were darker and harder than before.

The Woman was not so different, but she had changed.

"I wish this could last forever, My Prince," she said one day when the Sun was especially hot. "But you will not last forever, nor will I. I have seen, in you, a wonder and a miracle: But miracles must pass, as must all things, good or bad, and I fear that the good must often pass sooner than the evil. You have grown quickly—from a child to a man within a month. I think that soon, My Prince, you will die. When you have died, I shall be left alone."

It was the Woman's turn to weep, and the Beast could not comfort her in these tears because he did not understand her speech,

and had he, he would not have been capable of dealing with the concepts of which she spoke. In the days of the Woman, the Beast knew only ecstasy.

"You have come here," she said, composing herself and blinking back the tears, "from some place beyond my world, and you have become a world for me. I am glad you came. You have given me something to measure the worth of my life, a standard. . . . I think, perhaps, it is good that you will grow old and die very quickly. If my father discovered you here he would have you put to death. I do not mind so much that you should die. I cannot ask favours of Death. But I would not be cheated by murder."

The Beast was like a man who is middle aged. He was heavier, though, by a mercy of his creation, he did not develop a paunch, nor any of the less pleasant accidents of matter that tend to make a man lose some of his physical pride during that time of life. Had the Beast developed any of these imperfections, he would not have concerned himself with them. His life was too short to allow the learning of social conscience.

They were not so passionate now, the Beast and the Woman. They had settled, in two short weeks, to the kind of relationship that many, even after years of marriage, never achieve. They were together constantly, and when they were together, neither was alone.

"These have been days that were of worth," she said. "I value these days as I will none that come after. When a man is chosen for me, I shall be a wife to him, but the Lottery will have failed. Any who is my husband will be sadly put to hold my affections hence."

When she was in a somber mood she told him: "My father is in difficulty with the other Barons. His bill has been rejected in the congress, and he faces expulsion. If that happens, I will be sent away to spend my life as a worker. Father will stay and fight, as is the custom, and everyone in the Tower will eventually be beaten into the ground. If Father goes to war, you will be discovered. This garden is atop the gun turrets, and the floor is underlaid with weapons. Oh, if he is expelled—!"

The time came shortly when the Beast was old. He could not smell the hemlocks in the night, or the pink pearl lilies. His long, straight hair was white, as was his beard. His eyes were deep now, and rheumy. He was bent, and he slept much more than had been his wont.

The Woman had not come to him for three days. The sky outside was cold and grey. From time to time tiny, sharp flakes of snow would jet against the quartz glass and make a rasping noise. The

Beast made a decision based on observation, and waved his hand in front of the glowing metal panel. The lights came on, but, blending with the murky daylight, did not cheer him. The red roses on a small trellis, roses that had throbbed with life, roses that had surged up with brilliance to meet the living Sun, were now faded and washed with despondence, purple like the lips of a painted whore.

When the Woman came, it was quickly. She hurried through the door into the dark, humid Garden. It was the first time the Beast had seen outdoor garments, and he was curious about them. The Woman wore a black cloak and hood, and carried a satchel.

The Woman ran and pressed herself to the Beast. She wet his cheeks with tears.

"Goodbye!" she sobbed. "Goodbye, My Prince. This is the last time I shall see you. My Father is expelled, and he is sending me away through the tunnels. There is no way I can save you. My Father and his retainers will all be dead before the morning, and you with them. Will you not now speak to me one word, one goodbye? Say to me once, only once!"

The Beast held her gently to him. Outside, a drone like the sound of bees. Snow stung the quartz glass and melted.

The Beast sensed what she wanted. He made sounds in his throat, rough, harsh sounds, croaking noises . . . but not words. It was beyond his ability, and his lifetime had been too short for the learning.

Like a star, appearing between furtive clouds, an aeroplane came into existence beyond the windows. It was an antique thing, so out of place in this world, with propellers, and a little glassed-in cockpit with a gun. The pilot pulled the trigger and a tight line of bullets shot across the glass. Then the plane was gone and the windows were shattered.

In his arms the Woman hung limp. She had jumped away from him at the approach of the aeroplane, then fallen back into his embrace.

The Beast worked his gnarled fingers to undo the shiny black buttons of her coat. With great and tender care he opened her blouse. He tore away the constricting under clothes and bared her chest. Between her breasts he found a hole. It was bruised, and blood trickled out, and it betrayed no pulse. The Woman was Dead.

He wondered what action he should take. When the animals of the Garden died, he ate them. He wondered if he should do this now. Absently, he leaned his old head down, old in a few weeks, and licked the blood from her flesh. The sweet salt taste in his mouth, he closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, he wept. The

Beast wept. He stood, bent with exhaustion, and wept.

Her body was clean and white. Through the broken windows a fierce wind swept down and stirred her glossy black hair. A little curl fell to her forehead.

High, at the top of the sky, at the summit of the Baron's tower, the Garden was gutted. The wind grew wilder and swept into the shell of life, breaking out the remaining glass. The wind tore the petals from the roses and pulled them in a whirlpool, out into the open air, scattering them through the sky. The birds were freed. Chartreuse and blue and white parakeets fluttered up, among the saffron and scarlet petals, to fly away and die in the coming Winter. A peacock blazed into distant oblivion, ever falling.

The snow was driven into the warm little pools and came to rest on the leaves of the lotuses, turning the pond into a bed of seeming giant mushrooms. The orchids blackened at cold's touch. The palms, and the bougainvillas, divested of their blossoms, shook at the storm's frenzied eddying.

Alone in the heavens, the Beast Who Wept withered. The Sun was veiled in snow, the flowers all were dying, and only the hemlocks did not seem to mind.

Coming next month . . .

. . . the story of Colin Hall and Ed West, whose Animals-To-Order business gets a most unusual order from Mrs. Harrison Bullitt (who Knew What She Wanted—and got it). Don't miss THE TRIUMPH OF PEGASUS by **F. A. JAVOR.**

And soon . . .

. . . **PHILIP K. DICK's** new short novel (scheduled for our July issue). Also along soon will be a novelet by **ROGER ZELAZNY,** whose A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES (Nov. 1963) was so well received.

LETTERS

People who have kept up with the Mercury launchings, and junior high school science students, will spot immediately the numerous technical errors in Robert F. Young's *The Eternal Lovers* [Dec. '63]. I will make no attempt here to list the errors since they occur in almost every paragraph. The plot is impossible; the dialog is inconceivable, especially when the spaceships are airborne and the 19th century poetry quotations start flying back and forth.—JAMES V. HARWOOD, USAS AMERICAN MARINER, Patrick AFB, Florida

Ah, you spacemen are all alike.—Ed.

I haven't even read the Nov. issue yet! I just gaze at that cover! I grabbed it the minute I saw it, and—it wasn't till I got home that I discovered the cover continues on the back! Has anybody any idea how good Bok really is? I sometimes think that even those of us who go mad over his work, even those of us who can stare for years into the depths of those liquid eyes, move in vision along those sky-soft curves of lines, I sometimes think even we are only looking at the surface, at the superficial trappings, and missing so much that it would detonate our minds if we for once saw everything he puts in painted canvas. . . . I guess my sense of wonder is returning. Don't listen to those finks from Chicago. *We* like all those esoteric comments. —DON FREDERICK, New York

Your magazine no longer pleases me. I don't know whether I'm getting old and completely out of the swing of things or not, but I do know that the current trend to "non-books" — "non-paintings" — "non-stories" has made a non-subscriber out of me . . . even at the cost of not knowing what happened to Heinlein's Hero in Never-Never Land.—Mrs. THOMAS G. ROBLES, Chimbote, Peru

I have just read *What Strange Stars and Skies* [Dec. 1963] and hasten to send you the enclosed snazzy certificate. I suppose that, in the above-mentioned opus, you may have been kidding the pants off Lovecraft and his imitators, or possibly certain Victorian novelists, or both. Or perhaps you may have, out of a clear sky, decided to see if you could write a story consisting entirely of description, with no action at all. Whatever the reason, I'm glad you did it. F&SF has been perking up nicely lately. . . . If you haven't read Mark Twain's *Letters From The Earth*, lose no time in doing so, for I'm sure you'll love it. It's Mark at his very best, or most of it is.—BILL DANNER, Kennerdell, Pa.

The "snazzy certificate" is a handsome little affair which certifies that, "after careful deliberation," your editor has "been judged fully deserving of the NUTTY AS A FRUITCAKE Award freely given to deserving individuals by Stefantasy, *the illustrated magazine that is up*

to 81.67% milder, in the sincere hope that they may long continue in their various ways to relieve the unpleasant and mind-rotting monotony of this crazy, mixed-up world." Thank you, Bill. I try.—Ed.

May I congratulate you on such new and interesting stories as *Deluge,* by Zenna Henderson [Oct. '63], *Mama,* by Philip Winsor [Nov.] (a truly delightful story!), *A Rose For Ecclesiastes* [Nov.] by Roger Zelazny, and the wonderful idea by Damon Knight in *The Tree of Time* [Dec.-Jan.] of the machine to multiply a professor—I wish I had one right here at Thiel for my sectional classes. And—thank Heaven!—you slowly get away from the boring interstellar wars and from heros fighting alien beasties—of course, it is understood that he will always win! In one word: you seem to have "tuned-in" on the psychological trend of our times.—Prof. PAUL VON TOAL, Thiel College, Greenville, Pa.

I keep a sharp eye on your book reviews of late. You note things on the fringes that are of interest to me. How can you keep up on *all* this offbeat out-put on your own? Some are SO out of the way to begin with . . . that's why I appreciate your reporting on same . . . I'd never run across them otherwise.—BETTY KUJAWA, South Bend, Ind.

Our spies are everywhere.—Ed.

I feel in Zenna Henderson's stories of The People the way that human beings bend in their loneliness and fear towards one another. The yearnings of men and women and children—to protect, to warm, to be protected, to love and be loved. The People are saved by their ability, at the end, to penetrate to the depths of one another and take comfort. We real people—if we have more reality than they—have no such talent. But what they feel, and the essential spirit of love at the heart of it, we feel. And we try, in our best moments, to lean toward one another.—CONRAD SQUIRES, Brooklyn, N.Y.

PLEASE! NO MORE PEOPLE STORIES! Take the latest one, for instance—! *Deluge!* Gathering Day, Happy Day, The Presence, The Name, The Power, A Calling, Teens, Seeing, Gifts, Befores, The Peace, Home, The Quiet Place, Crossing Day, Groups, Being Called, A Glory . . . Oh, Brother! What is Zenna Henderson, anyway—a Capitalist (and this goes for you, too)? On the other hand . . . more Asimov, please. More De Camp. And especially more Calvin W. Demmon, no matter who he turns out to be, please. [*What if he turns out to be Zenna Henderson?*—Ed.] I disapprove of your entire policy, that of writing with love. It'd work better if you tried a typewriter.—ROBERT OLSEN, Orange, Calif.

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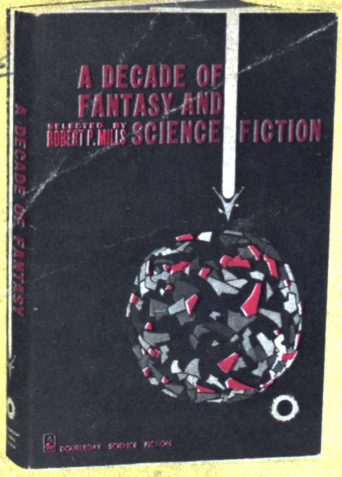

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