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QUARK/3

A QUARTERLY OF SPECULATIVE FICTION BY

r. a. lafferty, joanna russ, james sallis,
kate wilhelm, and others

samuel r. delany and marilyn hacker, editors



QUARK/3 bailey delany dorman eklund
harrison hill kidd lafferty la vigne
penny russ sallis saxton simpson stanley
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QUARK/3

is the third issue of a new quarterly of speculative literature and graphics, selected and edited by Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker. The editors have tried to display the finest work of both new and established authors, whatever its imaginative substance, structure, or texture.

QUARK / 3

edited

by

Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker

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2.0121 . . . Just as we are quite unable to imagine spatial objects outside space or temporal objects outside time, so there is no object that we can imagine excluded from the possibility of combining with others.

If I can imagine objects combined in states of affairs, I cannot imagine them excluded from the possibility of such combination.

2.022 It is obvious that an imagined world, however different it may be from the real one, must have something—a form—in common with it.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

which is the best explanation why there is “speculative fiction.”

An aesthetic object (a work of art? a story?) has internal tensions (form?) and also produces tensions with its environment. The resultant matrix of forces is called “audience reaction.”

As writers, we can't control the real world. At best, we can observe it actively. We can control the internal tensions of the aesthetic objects of our making. Any of the “commercial writing tricks” to control reader reaction are a waste of time because they are attempts to control the real world, which is impossible, and distract from the time spent controlling internal tensions which—while they do not *control* audience reaction—are the workable points at which it is moored.

The attitude of the more commercial science fiction writers in its most articulate expression:

"I am not an artist. I am a craftsman. I am concerned with entertainment, not aesthetics. Science fiction is the only area of popular literature whose *basic* entertainment value is intellectual—technological or sociological—which makes it a socially valuable genre *per se*. You experimental writers, by your emphasis on aesthetics, have blurred the major valid claim SF has as a socially functional literature."

But the problems of entertainment are aesthetic problems. If the definition of "entertainment" is allowed to include the emotions, the intellect, and the pure pleasure we take in form, then *all* aesthetic problems are problems of entertainment. Aesthetic discipline is that which makes most accessible all the substance of a given work. The writer who declines to make use of the full range of aesthetic discipline in deference to entertainment is cheating the reader of the entertainment he claims to be concerned with.

The argument for the social value of art over propaganda is too tedious and too familiar to reproduce here.

A great deal of very good "classic" SF was done in the U.S. during the disasters of the (first) McCarthy period, when it was practically impossible to make a socially pertinent statement in any area other than science fiction.

People were invariably astounded that so much freedom did exist within the genre. But the official reaction was that SF was lunatic and not to be taken seriously.

Underneath that rather cavalier insult is a considerable truth: Within the aesthetic structure laid out by "the adventure story" it is impossible to produce a politically dangerous fiction, no matter how revolutionary the proposed world is, no matter what evils the hero is faced with, nor how congruent they are to the present ones.

The efficacy of "political" fiction, from the point of view of the body politic, is measured precisely in terms of real action it can cause . . . and presumably becomes dangerous when somebody notices this action. The adventure, with its building tensions suddenly relieved, its

preoccupation with the physical rather than the psychological, its linearity, simply doesn't leave enough residue of discomfort in the mind to precipitate action. This is what dooms a social criticism set in this form to political inconsequence.

The two fiction works in the U.S. that have been *near* revolutionary, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Babbitt*, are, despite whatever barbarousnesses they contain, social chronicle novels, not adventures.

One's only objections to science fiction "of value as social criticism" is precisely that it *failed* to be dangerous, because of an aesthetic choice by the authors deferring to "popular entertainment."

A willingness to take risks means health and vitality in any artistic field. An unwillingness to take risks means stagnation, death. To view meaningfully the social, psychological, and technological crises present by the particular illumination generated by the forms and textures of speculative fiction, we must encourage as much experimentation as possible, so that this illumination will reach beyond the boundary timid parents have tried to prescribe for their vigorous children.

—Samuel R. Delany &
Marilyn Hacker,
editors



ENCASED IN ANCIENT RIND

1

The eye is robbed of impetus
By fogs that stand and shout:
And swiftness all goes out from us
And all the stars go out.

Lost Skies—O'Hanlon

"Wear a mask or die," the alarmists had been saying louder and louder; and now they were saying "Wear a mask and die anyhow." And why do we so often hold the alarmists in contempt? It isn't always a false alarm they sound, and this one wasn't. The pollution of air and water and land had nearly brought the world to a death halt, and crisis was at hand as the stifling poison neared critical mass.

"Aw dog dirt, not another air-pollution piece," you say. Oh come off of it. You know us better than that. This is not such an account as you might suppose. It will not be stereotype, though it may be stereopticon.

"The lights are burning very brightly," said Harry Baldachin. "This club-room is sealed off as tightly as science can seal it, the air-conditioning labors faithfully, the filters are the latest perfection, this is the clearest day in a week (likely a clearer day than any that will ever follow), yet we have great difficulty in seeing each others' faces across the table. And we are in Mountain Top Club out in the high windy country beyond the cities. It is quite bad in the towns, they say. Suffocation victims are still lying unburied in heaps."

"There's a curious thing about that though," Clement Flood said. "The people are making much progress on

the unburied heaps. People aren't dying as fast as they were even a month ago. Why aren't they?"

"Don't be so truculent about it, Clement," Harry said. "The people will die soon enough. All the weaker ones have already died, I believe, and the strong ones linger awhile; but I don't see how any of us can have lungs left. There'll be another wave of deaths, and then another and another. And all of us will go with it."

"I won't," said Sally Strumpet. "I will live forever. It doesn't bother me very much at all: just makes my nose and eyes itch a little bit. What worries me, though, is that I don't test fertile yet. Do you suppose that the pollution has anything to do with me not being fertile?"

"What are you chattering about, little girl?" Charles Broadman asked. "Well, it is something to think about. Gathering disasters usually increase fertility, as did the pollution disaster at first. It has always been as though some cosmic wisdom was saying 'Fast and heavy fruit now for the fruitless days ahead.' But now it seems as if the cosmic wisdom is saying 'Forget it, this is too over-much.'

"But fertility now is not so much inhibited as delayed," Broadman continued almost as if he knew what he was talking about.

Sally Strumpet was a bright-eyed (presently red-eyed) seventeen-year-old actress, and that was her stage name only. Her real name was Joan Struthio, and she was met for club dinner with Harry Baldachin, Clement Flood, and Charles Broadman, all outstanding in the mentality set, because she had a publicity man who arranged such things. Sally herself belonged to the mentality set by natural right, but not many suspected this fact: only Charles Broadman of those present, only one in a hundred of those who were entranced by Sally's rather lively simpering, hardly any of the mucous-lunged people.

"This may be the last of our weekly dinners that I am able to attend," Harry Baldachin coughed. "I'd have taken to my bed long ago except that I can't breathe at all lying down any more. I'm a dying man now, as are all of us."

"I'm not, either the one nor the other," Sally said.

"Neither is Harry," Charles Broadman smiled snakishly, "not the first, surely, and popular doubt has been

cast on the second. You're not dying, Harry. You'll live till you're sick of it."

"I'm sick of it now. By my voice you know that I'm dying."

"By your voice I know that there's a thickening of the pharynx," Charles said. "By your swollen hands I know that there is already a thickening of the metacarpals and phalanges, not to mention the carpals themselves. Your eyes seem unnaturally deep-set now as though they had decided to withdraw into some interior cave. But I believe that it is the thickening of your brow ridges that makes them seem so, and the new bulbosity of your nose. You've been gaining weight, have you not?"

"I have, yes, Broadman. Every pound of poison that I take in adds a pound to my weight. I'm dying, and we're all dying."

"Why Harry, you're coming along amazingly well. I thought I would be the first of us to show the new signs, and instead it is yourself. No, you will be a very very long time dying."

"The whole face of the earth is dying," Harry Baldachin maintained.

"Not dying. Thickening and changing," said Charles Broadman.

"There's a mortal poison on everything," Clement Flood moaned. "When last was a lake fish seen not floating belly upward? The cattle are poisoned and all the plants, all dying."

"Not dying. Growing larger and weirder," said Broadman.

"I am like a dish that is broken," said the Psalmist. "My strength has failed through affliction, and my bones are consumed. I am forgotten like the unremembered dead."

"Your dish is made thicker and grosser, but it is not broken," Broadman insisted. "Your bones are not consumed but altered. And you are forgotten only if you forget."

"Poor Psalmist," said Sally. This was startling, for the Psalmist had always been a private joke of Charles Broadman, but now Sally was aware of him also. "Why, your strength hasn't failed at all," she said. "You come on pretty strong to me. But my own nose is always itching,

that's the only bad part of it. I feel as though I were growing a new nose. When can I come to another club supper with you gentlemen?"

"There will be no more," Harry Baldachin hacked through his thickened pharynx. "We'll all likely be dead by next week. This is the last of our meetings."

"Yes, we had better call our dinners off," Clement Flood choked. "We surely can't hold them every week now."

"Not every week," said Charles Broadman, "but we will still hold them. This all happened before, you know."

"I want to come however often they are," Sally insisted.

"How often will we hold them, dreamer, and we all near dead?" Harry asked. "You say that this has happened before, Broadman? Well then, didn't we all die with it before?"

"No. We lived an immeasurably long time with it before," Charles Broadman stated. "What, can you not read the signs in the soot yet, Harry?"

"Just how often would you suggest that we meet then, Charles?" Clement Flood asked with weary sarcasm.

"Oh, how about once every hundred years, gentlemen and Sally. Would that be too often?"

"Fool," Harry Baldachin wheezed and peered out from under his thickening orbital ridges.

"Idiot," Clement Flood growled from his thickening throat.

"Why, I think a hundred years from today would be perfect," Sally cried. "That will be a wednesday, will it not?"

"That was fast," Broadman admired. "Yes, it will be a wednesday, Sally. Do be here, Sally, and we will talk some more of these matters. Interesting things will have happened in the meanwhile. And you two gentlemen will be here?"

"No, don't refuse," Sally cut in. "You are so unimaginative about all this. Mr. Baldachin, say that you will dine with us here one hundred years from today if you are alive and well."

"By the emphyseman God that afflicts us, and me dying and gone, yes, I will be here one hundred years from today if I am alive and well," Harry Baldachin said angrily. "But I will not be alive this time next week."

"And you say it also, Mr. Flood," Sally insisted.

"Oh, stop putting fools' words in people's mouths, little girl. Let me die in my own phlegm."

"Say it, Mr. Flood," Sally insisted again. "Say that you will dine with us all here one hundred years from this evening if you are alive and well."

"Oh all right," Clement Flood mumbled as he bled from his rheumy eyes. "Under those improbable conditions I will be here."

But only Sally and Charles Broadman had the quick wisdom to understand that the thing was possible.

Fog, smog, and grog, and the people perished. And the more stubborn ones took a longer time about perishing than the others. But a lethal mantle wrapped the whole globe now. It was poison utterly compounded, and no life could stand against it. There was no possibility of improvement, there was no hope of anything. It could only get worse. Something drastic had to happen.

And of course it got worse. And of course something drastic happened. The carbon pollution on earth reached trigger mass. But it didn't work out quite as some had supposed that it might.

2

We shamble through our longish terms
Of Levallosian mind
Till we be ponderous Pachyderms
Encased in ancient rind.

Ibid.

Oh, for one thing, no rain, or almost no rain fell on the earth for that next hundred years. It was not missed. Moisture was the one thing that was in abounding plenty.

'But a mist rose from the earth and watered all the surface of the ground.'

Rainless rain-forests grew and grew. Ten million cubic miles of sea-water rose to the new forming canopy and hung there in a covering world-cloud no more than twenty miles up. Naturally the sun and moon and stars were

seen no more on the earth for that hundred years; and the light that did come down through the canopy seemed unnatural. But plants turned into giant plants and spread over the whole earth, gobbling the carbon-dioxide with an almost audible gnashing.

So there was more land now, and wetter land. There was a near equipoise of temperature everywhere under the canopy. The winds were all gathered up again into that old leather bag and they blew no more on the earth. Beneath the canopy it was warm and humid and stifling from pole to pole and to the utmost reaches of the earth.

It was a great change and everything felt it. Foot-long saurians slid out of their rocks that were warm and moist again: and gobbled and grew, and gobbled and grew, and gobbled and grew. Old buried fossil suns had been intruded into the earth air for a long time, and now the effect of their carbon and heat was made manifest. Six-foot-diameter turtles, having been ready to die, now postponed that event: and in another hundred years, in two hundred, they would be ten-foot-diameter turtles, thirteen-foot-diameter turtles.

The canopy, the new lowering copper-colored sky, shut out the direct sun and the remembered blue sky, and it shut out other things that had formerly trickled down: hard radiation, excessive ultra-violet rays and all the actinic rays, and triatomic oxygen. These things had been the carriers of the short and happy life, or the quick and early death; and these things were no longer carried down.

There was a thickening of bone and plate on all boned creatures everywhere, as growth continued for added years. There were new inhibitors and new stimulants; new bodies for old—no, no—older bodies for old. Certain teeth in certain beasts had always grown for all the beast life. Now the beast life was longer, and the saber-teeth appeared again.

It was murky under the new canopy, though. It took a long time to get used to it—and a long time was provided. It was a world filled with fogs, and foggy phrases.

‘A very ancient and fish-like smell.’

‘Just to keep her from the foggy foggy dew.’

‘There were giants on the earth in those days.’

‘When Enos was ninety years old, he became the father

of Cainan. Enos lived eight hundred and fifteen years after the birth of Cainan, and had other sons and daughters.'

'Behold now Behemoth, which I have made with thee.'

'And beauty and length of days.'

'There Leviathan . . . stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims.'

'I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.'

"A land where the light is as darkness," said Job.

"Poor Job," said Sally Strumpet.

"This is my sorrow, that the right hand of the Most High is changed," said the Psalmist.

"Poor Psalmist," said Sally Strumpet.

The world that was under the canopy of the lowering sky was very like a world that was under water. Everything was incomparably aged and giantized and slow. Bears grew great. Lizards lengthened. Human people broadened and grew in their bones, and lengthened in their years.

"I suppose that we are luckier than those who come before or after," Harry Baldachin said. "We had our youths, we had much of our proper lives, and then we had this."

This was a hundred years to a day (a wednesday, was it not?) since that last club dinner, and the four of them, Harry Baldachin, Clement Flood, Charles Broadman, and Sally Strumpet were met once more in the Mountain Top Club. Two of them, it will be remembered, hadn't expected to be there.

"What I miss most in these last nine or ten decades is colors," Clement Flood mused. "Really, we haven't colors, not colors as we had when I was young. Too much of the sun is intercepted now. Such aviators as still go up (the blue-sky hobbyists and such) say that there are still true colors above the canopy, that very ordinary objects may be taken up there and examined, and that they will be in full color as in ancient times. I believe that the loss of full color was understood by earlier psychologists and myth-makers. In my youth, in my pre-canopy youth, I made some studies of very ancient photography. It was in black and white and gray only, just as most dreams were then in black and white and gray only. It is strange

that these two things nearly anticipated the present world: we are so poor in color that we nearly fall back to the old predictions. No person under a hundred years old, unless he has flown above the canopy, has ever seen real color. But I will remember it."

"I remember wind and storm," said Harry Baldachin, "and these cannot now be found in their real old form even by going above the canopy. I remember frost and snow, and these are very rare everywhere on earth now. I remember rain, that most inefficient thing ever—but it's pleasant in memory."

"I remember lightning," said Charles Broadman, "and thunder. Ah, thunder."

"Well, it's more than made up for in amplitude," Clement smiled. "There is so much more of the earth that is land now, and all the land is gray and growing—I had almost used the old phrase 'green and growing,' but the color green can be seen now only by those who ascend above the canopy. But the world is warm and moist from pole to pole now, and filled with giant plants and giant animals and giant food. The canopy above, and the greenhouse diffusion effect below, it makes all the world akin. And the oceans are so much more fertile now—one can almost walk on the backs of the fish. There is such a lot more carbon in the carbon cycle than there used to be, such a lot more life on the earth. And more and more carbon is being put into the cycle every year."

"That's true," said Harry Baldachin. "That's about the only industrialism that is still being carried out, the only industrialism that is still needed: burning coal and petroleum to add carbon to the cycle, burning it by the tens of thousands of cubic miles. Certain catastrophes of the past had buried great amounts of this carbon, had taken it out of the cycle, and the world was so much poorer for it. It was as if the fruit of whole suns had been buried uselessly in the earth. Now, in the hundred years since the forming or the reforming of the canopy, and to a lesser extent during the two hundred years before its forming, these buried suns have been dug up and put to use again."

"The digging up of buried suns has caused all manner of mischief," Charles Broadman said.

"You are an old fogey, Charles," Clement Flood told

him. "A hundred years of amplitude have made no change at all in you."

The hundred years had really made substantial changes in all of them. They hadn't aged exactly, not in the old way of aging. They had gone on growing in a new, or a very old way. They had thickened in face and body. They had become more sturdy, more solid, more everlasting. Triatomic oxygen, that old killer, was dense in the world canopy, shutting out the other killers; but it was very rare at ground level, a perfect arrangement. There was no wind under the canopy, and things held their levels well. How long persons might live now could only be guessed. It might be up to a thousand years.

"And how is the—ah—younger generation?" Harry Baldachin asked. "How are you, Sally? We have not seen you for a good round century."

"I am wonderful, and I thought you'd never ask. People take so much longer to get to the point now, you know. The most wonderful news is that I now test fertile. When I was seventeen I worried that I didn't test out. The new times had already affected me, I believe. But now my term has come around, and about time I'd say. I'm a hundred and seventeen and there are cases of girls no more than a hundred who are ready. I will marry this very week and will have sons and daughters. I will marry one of the last of the aviators who goes above the canopy. I myself have gone above the canopy and seen true colors and felt the thin wind."

"It's not a very wise thing to do," said Harry. "They are going to put a stop to flights above the canopy, I understand. They serve no purpose; and they are unsettling."

"Oh, but I want to be unsettled," Sally cried.

"You should be old enough not to want any such thing, Sally," Clement Flood advised. "We are given length of days now, and with them wisdom should come to us."

"Well, *has* wisdom come?" Charles Broadman asked reasonably. "No, not really. Only slowness has come to us."

"Yes, wisdom, we have it now," Harry Baldachin insisted. "We enter the age of true wisdom. Long wisdom. Slow wisdom."

"You are wrong, and unwise," Charles Broadman said

out of his thickened and almost everlasting face. "There is not, there has never been any such name or thing as unqualified Wisdom. And there surely are not such things as Long Wisdom or Slow Wisdom."

"But there *is* a thing named Swift Wisdom," Sally stated with great eagerness.

"There was once, there is not now, we lost it," Charles Broadman said sadly.

"We almost come to disagreement," Baldachin protested, "and that is not seemly for persons of the ample age. Ah well, we have lingered five hours over the walnuts and the wine, and perhaps it were the part of wisdom that we leave each other now. Shall we make these dinners a regular affair?"

"I want to," Sally said.

"Yes, I'd rather like to continue the meetings at regular intervals," Clement Flood agreed.

"Fine, fine," Charles Broadman murmured. "We will meet here again one hundred years from this evening."

3

And some forget to leave or let
And some forget to die:
But may my right hand wither yet
If I forget the sky.

Ibid.

We are not so simple as to say that the Baluchitherium returned. The Baluchitherium was of an earlier age of the earth and flourished under an earlier canopy. Something that looked very like the Baluchitherium did appear, however. It was not even of the rhinoceros family. It was a horse grown giant and gangly. Horses, of course, being artificial animals like dogs, are quite plastic and adaptable. A certain upper-lippiness quickly appeared when this new giant animal had turned into a giant leaf eater and sedge eater ("true" grass had about disappeared: how could it compete with the richer and fuller plants that flourished under the canopy?); a certain spreading of the hooves, a dividedness more of appearance than of fact, was appar-

ent after this animal had become a swamp-romper. Well, it was a giant horse and a mighty succulent horse, but it looked like the Baluchitherium of old.

We are not so naïve as to accept that the Brontosaurus came back. No. But there was a small flat-footed lizard that quickly became a large flat-footed lizard and came to look more and more like the Brontosaurus. It came to look like this without changing anything except its size and its general attitude towards the world. Put a canopy over any creature and it will look different without much intrinsic change.

We surely are not gullible enough to believe that the crinoid plants returned to the ponds and the slack-water pools. Well, but certain conventional long-stemmed water plants had come to look and behave very like the crinoids.

All creatures and plants had made their peace with the canopy, or they had perished. The canopy, in its two hundredth year, was a going thing; and the blue-sky days had ended forever.

There was still vestigial organic nostalgia for the blue-sky days, however. Most land animals still possessed eyes that would have been able to see full colors if there were such colors to be seen; man himself still possessed such eyes. Most food-browsers still possessed enough crown to their teeth to have grazed grass if such an inefficient thing as grass had remained. Many human minds would still have been able to master the mathematics of stellar movements and positions, if ease and the disappearance of the stellar content had not robbed them of the inclination and opportunity for such thing.

(There was, up to about two hundred years ago, a rather cranky pseudo-science named astronomy.)

There were other vestiges that hung like words in the fog and rank dew of the world.

‘And the name of the star is called Wormwood.’

‘In the brightness of the saints, before the day-star.’

‘It was the star-eater who came, and then the sky-eater.’

“And the stars are not clear in his sight,” said Job.

“Poor Job,” said Sally.

The second hundred years had gone by, and the diners had met at Mountain Top Club again. And an extra diner was with them.

"Poor Sally," said Harry Baldachin. "You are still a giddy child, and you have already had sons and daughters. But you should not have brought your husband to this dinner without making arrangements. You could have proposed it this time, and had him here the next time. After all, it would only be a hundred years."

We are not so soft-headed as to say that the Neanderthal Men had returned. But the diners at Mountain Top Club, with that thickening of their faces and bones and bodies that only age will bring, had come to look very like Neanderthals—even Sally a little.

"But I wanted him here this time," Sally said. "Who knows what may happen in a hundred years?"

"How could anything happen in a hundred years?" Harry Baldachin asked.

"Besides, your husband is in ill repute," Clement Flood said with some irritation. "He's said to be an outlaw flier. I believe that a pick-up order for his arrest was put out some six years ago, so he may be picked up at any time. In the blue-sky days he would have been picked up within twenty-four hours, but we move more graciously and slowly under the canopy."

"It's true that there's a pick-up order out for me," said the husband. "It's true that I still fly above the canopy, which is now illegal. I doubt if I'll be able to do it much longer. I might be able to get my old craft up one more time, but I don't believe I would be able to get it down. I'll leave if you want me to."

"You will stay," Charles Broadman said. "You are a member of the banquet now, and you and I and Sally have them outnumbered."

The husband of Sally was a slim man. He did not seem to be properly thickened in joint and bone. It was difficult to see how he could live a thousand years with so slight a body. Even now he showed a certain nervousness and anxiety, and that did not bode a long life.

"Why should anyone want to go above the canopy?" Harry Baldachin asked crossly. "Or rather, why should anyone want to claim to do it, since it is now assumed that the canopy is endless and no one could go above it?"

"But we do go above it," Sally stated. "We go for the sun and the stars; for the thin wind there which is a type of the old wind; for the rain even—do you know that

there is sometimes rain passing between one part of the canopy and another?—for the rainbow—do you know that we have actually seen a rainbow?”

“I know that the rainbow is a sour myth,” Baldachin said.

“No, no, it’s real,” Sally swore. “Do you recall the lines of the old Vachel Lindsay: ‘When my hands and my hair and my feet you kissed/When you cried with your love’s new pain/What was my name in the dragon mist/In the rings of rainbowed rain?’ Is that not wonderful?”

Harry Baldachin pondered it a moment.

“I give it up, Sally,” he said then. “I can’t deduce it. Well, what’s the answer to the old riddle? What is the cryptic name that we are supposed to guess?”

“Forgive him,” Charles Broadman murmured to the husband and to Sally. “We have all of us been fog-bound for too long a time below the canopy.”

“It is now believed that the canopy has always been there,” Baldachin said stiffly.

“Almost always, Harry, but not always,” Charles Broadman answered him. “It was first put there very early, on the second day, as a matter of fact. You likely do not remember that the second day is the one that God did not call good. It was surely a transient and temporary back-drop that was put there to be pierced at the proper times by early death and by grace. One of the instants it was pierced was just before this present time. It had been breached here and there for short ages. Then came the clear instant, which has been called glaciation or flood or catastrophe, when it was shattered completely and the blue sky was seen supreme. It was quite a short instant, some say it was no more than ten thousand years, some say it was double that. It happened, and now it is gone. But are we expected to forget that bright instant?”

“The law expects you to forget that instant, Broadman, since it never happened, and it is forbidden to say that it happened,” Baldachin stated stubbornly. “And you, man, the outlaw flyer, it is rumored that you have your craft hidden somewhere on this very mountain. Ah, I must leave you all for a moment.”

They sat for some five hours over the walnuts and the wine. It is the custom to sit for a long time after eating

the heavy steaks of any of the neo-saurians. Baldachin returned and left several times, as did Flood. They seemed to have something going between them. They might even have been in a hurry about it if hurry were possible to them. But mostly the five persons spent the after-dinner hours in near-congenial talk.

"The short and happy life, that is the forgotten thing," the husband of Sally was saying. "The blue-sky interval—do you know what that was? It was the bright death-sword coming down in a beam of light. Do you know that in the blue-sky days hardly one man in ten lived to be even a hundred years old? But do you know that in the blue-sky days it wasn't sealed off? The sword-stroke was a cutting of the bonds. It was a release and an invitation to higher travel. Are you not tired of living in this prison for even two hundred years or three hundred?"

"You are mad," Harry Baldachin said.

Well of course the young man was mad. Broadman looked into the young man's eyes (this man was probably no older than Sally, he likely was no more than two hundred and twenty) and was startled by the secret he discovered there. The color could not be seen under the canopy, of course; the eyes were gray to the canopy world. But if he were above the canopy, Broadman knew, in the blue-sky region where the full colors could be seen, the young man's eyes would have been sky-blue.

"For the short and happy life again, and for the infinite release," Sally's husband was saying. "For those under the canopy there is no release. The short and happy life and scorching heat and paralyzing cold. Hunger and disease and fever and poverty, all the wonderful things! How have we lost them? These are not idle dreams. We have them by the promise—the Bow in the Clouds and the Promise that we be no more destroyed. But you destroy yourselves under the canopy."

"Mad, mad. Oh, but they are idle dreams, young man, and now they are over." Harry Baldachin smiled an old saurian smile. And the room was full of ponderous guards.

"Take the two young ones," Clement Flood said to the thickened guards.

But the laughter of Sally Strumpet shivered their ears and got under their thick skins.

"Take us?" she hooted. "How would they ever take us?"

"Girl, there are twenty of them, they will take you easily," Baldachin said slowly. But the husband of Sally was also laughing.

"Will twenty creeping turtles be able to catch two soaring birds on the high wing?" he laughed. "Would two hundred of them be able to? But your rumor is right, Baldachin, I do have my craft hidden somewhere on this very mountain. Ah, I believe I will be able to get the old thing up one more time."

"But we'll never be able to get it down again," Sally whooped. "Coming, Charles?"

"Yes," Charles Broadman cried eagerly. And he meant it, he meant it.

Those guards were powerful and ponderous, but they were just too slow. Twenty creeping turtles were no way able to catch those two soaring birds in their high flight. Crashing through windows with a swift tinkle of glass, then through the uncolored dark of the canopy world, to the rickety craft named Swift Wisdom that would go up one more time but would never be able to come down again, the last two flyers escaped through the pachydermous canopy.

"Mad," said Harry Baldachin.

"Insane," said Clement Flood.

"No," Charles Broadman said sadly. "No." And he sank back into his chair once more. He had wanted to go with them and he couldn't. The spirit was willing but the flesh was thickened and ponderous.

Two tears ran down his heavy cheeks but they ran very slowly, hardly an inch a minute. How should things move faster on the world under the canopy?

—R. A. Lafferty

HOME AGAIN, HOME AGAIN

Light streaming over pale blank hills. Red sun clinging like a leech to a vast pink horizon. Bugs. Pouring over the hills like an angry mist. Thousands upon thousands of bugs, and only two stood against them: me and a buddy named Tony. The rest of the company had withdrawn during an eternal night of forty-four hours. Our assignment: wait for the bugs to show, then flash headquarters. And run.

The Vet waited at the terminal, clicking his heels together, twitching and curling an upper lip. The Vet: over seven feet tall, featureless, heavy dark beard, arms like an ape. The Vet put out an eye and watched for fellow soldiers, but saw none, only civvies, row upon row of bleak, gray civvies. Did it make him sick to see them swarming across the floor of the great building, pushing and shoving like an impatient horde of army ants? Did it?

The Vet knew he could wait for hours if necessary, because death was a part of him and hate was not. He had to see his family again, but wouldn't know them when he did. He'd fought beneath the suns of a thousand systems, and he'd helped win a war that had to be won. He felt good inside, the Vet, warm like a glowing flame, and he saw his family.

There were three in the horde. One was named Pop, and he was a fat man, swimming in his own flesh beneath a bulging nose. Another was called Mom, and she too was fat, but her nose was plain, and her features were calm. The third was Sis, and she was cute and gently shaped and made the Vet feel good inside.

"You are . . . ?" said Mom.

The Vet told her he was the one, explaining the great battle of XD7F, where his face had been wiped clean, like a soiled window, and another had been grafted to replace it. Common Field Mold Number Eighty-Nine, he told them. One of many, but the only one available on that rotting world of decaying men (XD7F). They saved

my life, said the Vet, and they gave me a new face. It can't smile, and it can't cry, but it's mine, and I like it.

"Never would have recognized you," said Pop. "You're like a different fellow, but twenty years is a long time."

The Vet moved within the family and followed them down a long, twisting corridor, where streaming civilians seemed to quiver beneath the weight of great gravity. The Vet fondled his medal, staring at Sis, letting his glance flicker across Mom and Pop. He saw the grand helicopter, newly purchased, and they flew in it over great fields of mud, dust, and corn. The Vet told them what a swell place they had, and what a mighty fine helicopter it was, and what a great feeling he had, getting back home again.

They landed. It was a huge white house, three floors, a dozen rooms, but it looked like the one next to it and also like the one next to that. It made the Vet sick to see it, and he sat down at the dinner table and pressed his lips against an empty plate. He slapped the table with a knife and a fork and screamed for food, which made Sis grin and Pop glower and Mom say:

"It's coming right up."

They ate the meal in a studious silence, while Pop told the Vet of available jobs.

Mom said, "The hay fever season is almost here, and I bet you could get yourself a job at Harry's Drug Store. When people start sneezing, Harry starts hiring."

The Vet curled an artificial lip. He shoved a fork into Sis's bicep and laughed as she cried.

Pop said, "I'd like to put you to work on the farm, but it's like this fertilizer stuff I was reading about in *All Knowledge*. There isn't room for people to work any more, the machines are crowding them out, but you listen to your Mom. There's good money to be made in the drug business. People are always going to need stuff to keep them healthy."

The Vet started to tell them of the great battle of XD7F. He started to tell them about the angry mists, and the bugs, and Tony. But Pop raised a hand, and Mom dropped her fork, and Sis said, "Judy Bentley wants me to call her, so I better go."

The Vet was proud of his battle, and he was proud of his war, and he was proud of his new face. He wanted

to know why they didn't like his story, why they didn't want to hear it.

Pop said, "We don't talk about wars any more, even the ones we got going now, and if you want to stay alive in this country, you better learn to keep quiet."

"Enough death and killing in the universe, dear," said Mom, "that we don't need another word about it. You'll understand, once you readjust to home."

And Sis said, "I think I better call Judy."

The Vet giggled at them, and later, he moved across dark fields, half-a-moon poking through a light cloud, and he was on his way to see an old girlfriend named Sarah. As he walked lightly, he toyed with mental pictures that were twenty years out of date. The visions featured calm black hair, which cruised past slim shoulders, and tiny pink lips, and even tinier green eyes, and a tinkly laugh that made the birds sing. Twenty years.

And after the Vet had gone, the investigators slipped from hiding, moving swiftly across barren fields, and with them, their great android dogs, heavy plastic fur clinging to strong, lean flesh that was not real. The investigators stared at the bodies, and the dogs moved around them, whining and moaning. The chief investigator, a small man, less than five feet, who wore a huge overcoat that covered him like a tent, called headquarters and said:

"It happened like we expected. We'll toss the pieces in a trunk and have them sent back. What now? Bring him in?"

He received his orders, then released the dogs. They darted forward, and the investigators followed.

As their programming demanded, the dogs sang as they worked. Softly, as they moved, the dogs sang: *Jiggity-jiggity-jig. Jiggity-jiggity-jig.*

As they sang, did they pause to inhale the gentle country air? They only sang. *Jiggity-jiggity-jig.*

Tony's face flared like a flame sliced from the beam of a faulty flashlight. I turned my heater on high, sweeping left and sweeping right, first up, then down. The smell of burning bugmeat filled the air. A small war party circled behind us and then, with no advance warning, appeared. Tony fell, clutching his belly and calling on me. It was bad, and I was scared. Then I was scared; not later.

Sarah did not seem to recognize the Vet, and when

she saw him, she shivered. A stranger, she seemed to think, and there are no strangers here.

But the Vet did not recognize Sarah either, for twenty years had changed her as if she were topsoil, easily eroded by time and circumstance. The Vet was disappointed, angry, irritated, when he found out that Sarah was Sarah. He asked if she were married, and she told him, no, she had waited.

He asked if he might speak to her, and she cranked her hips and pointed at the living room, wiping her mustache, and the Vet followed, finding comfort in a hollow armchair which rested near a warm fire.

Sarah was cooking dinner, frying hot dogs over the fire, and the Vet watched her. When he'd left, Sarah had lived with her father, a gentle man, given to shoving his hands in the soil and washing them later with a strong soap. The Vet had loved Sarah's father, he was a man of his times, but now she said he was dead.

"Cancer," she explained, "of the liver, of course. It struck very suddenly. One day, Daddy was out in the fields, his hands in the soil; the next day, he was dead."

The Vet had seen much of death, and he knew it quite well. He'd seen many men die, their hands in the earth, and some of the men he had loved. He stroked his cheek, as smooth and cool as a block of ice, and asked Sarah to tell him of the twenty years.

"I have a confession to make," she said. "I haven't been totally faithful to you. Five years after you left—five years that were very sad and very lonely—I ran off to Chicago with a man who played music. He was very good at it, and he'd read books by men like Proust and Pynchon and Mann. I thought he was wonderful, but he left me, and I had to walk all the way home."

But the Vet cared little for Sarah's twenty years, and now he cared little for Sarah herself. He told her about the rest camps that were provided for soldiers on unoccupied planets, worlds much like the Garden of Eden, where life had never formed. He gave her every detail he knew, speaking of his early experiences, of his middle experiences, of his mature delights. Sarah licked her plump lips, laughing, beaming, seeming to wish that she could have served.

“But what are you talking about?” she said, when he was done. “What is a soldier?”

Sarah put a hot dog on the end of her stick and slipped the stick into the fire. This made the Vet recall XD7F, so he lifted Sarah into his arms and threw her into the fire. When she burned, which was soon, she smelled like a bug and, sick, the Vet fled to the kitchen.

He fixed himself a snack in a room which reminded him of a sterile ward. There was an odor of stale medicine in the air. He found a long knife with a wooden handle, and he shoved it in his belt.

Returning to the living room, Sarah still burned, her fat lips crinkling in a flaming grin, her exposed teeth glistening as whitely as the kitchen walls. The Vet lifted her carefully from the fire and set her down on the sofa. He removed a chunk of flesh from her left wrist and ate it, swallowing tenderly.

He asked her what she'd meant when she'd said she hadn't known what he was talking about, when she'd asked what a soldier was.

She said: “I just don't know. Soldier. It's a meaningless term.”

The Vet told her that a soldier was a life-giving force, similar to a god or a devil. Sarah laughed at him, and bits of charred flesh slid from her glowing cheeks. Sickened, he turned to go, but she called him back.

“Your uniform,” she said, “and your medals. I wouldn't wear them to town.”

The Vet wanted to know who'd told her he was going to town.

She said, “Just don't do it. Please. I—I still love you, don't want to see you hurt.”

The Vet told Sarah he loved her too, had always loved her, didn't care about musicians who read Proust, and his heart jumped and quivered each time he saw her soft loveliness.

Sarah giggled at him, then moaned.

And after the Vet had left, the investigators slipped from hiding, moving swiftly across barren fields. Their great android dogs lapped at the ground, gathering subsistence from the earth, and the investigators chatted softly among themselves, all except the chief investigator

who, hands in his overcoat pockets, glowered and sniffed and spat.

When they entered the farmhouse, the investigators were sick, except for the dogs, who merely waited, and the chief investigator, who phoned headquarters. His collar was pulled tightly across his face, and all that showed were his eyes. They were frosty and dark, green and yet brown, and rivers of age trickled from each corner.

"Got the girl," said the chief investigator. "I'll have the pieces mailed to you, what's left, the boy was hungry. What now? Bring him in?"

The chief investigator received his orders, then released the dogs. They moved briskly toward town, and the investigators followed, watching shadows, holding stomachs, all except the chief investigator who sang a light tune. He sang: *Jiggity-jiggity-jig*. Pausing to inhale deeply of the rich country air, he sang, *Jiggity-jiggity-jig*.

The bug who'd killed Tony glared through eyes that saw nothing as it properly should have been. I killed him. Another with hands that sliced through lead as though it were lunch meat. I killed him. A club and a gun. A gun and a knife. Fighting as if all mankind stood naked at my side. The world went black, and I swam through a mirror thick with the blood of a thousand lovers. Thought I was dead.

The streets of the town were as awkwardly empty as the uncultivated fields of the country. Green neon dripped with the heat of summer, and lazy newspapers flopped past broken sidewalks.

The Vet crept, his boot heels clicking like the wings of a cricket, his breath rasping in the cool night air. The Vet walked, his destination well in mind, his head filled with shimmering memories that refused to depart.

JENKINS' SERVICE STATION, hollered bright orange neon, with crisp red flames rising from a dozen gas pumps. An anachronism in an era of electro-cabs and steam-driven helicopters, but the Vet stepped inside: the one place in town where a man could find a friend.

A dozen pairs of eyes, some hidden by thick glass, squinted, then glared. The Vet walked past a black pot-belly stove and drew a wooden chair from within a wall. He introduced himself casually, remembering his new

face and making it grin. The glares simmered, cooled, faded, changed to smiles, and the Vet felt at home.

He knew only a few of the dozen men. He knew Oswald Jenkins, who owned and operated the gas station, taking small profit from a few ancient motor cars and a handful of diesel-powered tractors, and he knew Harold Beakins, a fat schoolteacher who specialized in Latin, and he knew Ezra Calkins, a dirt farmer whose wife had murdered her five children twenty-five years before. The Vet forced his lips to smile, and he forced his teeth to glisten.

Oswald Jenkins said, "I heard you finally got back."

And Harold Beakins said, "The universe is sure a big place."

But Ezra Calkins said nothing, and the other nine frowned.

The Vet allowed the conversation to resume, as if he'd never come, and he petted an old dog which sat curled beneath his feet. The conversation, both wry and bitter, dealt with the price of corn and the taste of cool water. The dog was an old dog, and it smelled badly. The Vet could feel warm flesh tingling beneath soft fur. It was a Collie dog and seemed contented.

The Vet drew the knife from his belt, and reaching down, gently slit the dog's throat. He watched blood splash to the floor, then jumped to his feet. He told a dozen pairs of eyes that he had something to say, but Oswald Jenkins said, "The war's been over twenty-five years, and we don't want to hear about it." The men nodded their agreement.

The Vet laughed at their ignorance and told them about XD7F. He told them about the battle he and Tony had won.

And they told him about their corn.

He told them about the giant receiving hospital, as big as a dozen red barns, where he'd received his new face.

And they told him it hadn't rained in a month.

He told them about the great rest camps, and about his medal. Most particularly, he told them about his medal.

And they told him you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

A little girl walked into the room, and the noise softened. She was no more than ten, with light brown hair drawn back into tight pigtailed. She had freckles on her face and arms, the kind that would disappear once she

was older. She looked at the Vet and said, "I like your story."

He told her more.

He was told to shut up, filthy talk, not fit for children, and kicking the dog aside, he found a torch and went outside and ignited the gas pumps. The holy fire could be seen for miles around, and giant flames leaped upward toward a moon that was not quite full.

The Vet sucked smoke into his lungs, then scampered back to the office. When he emerged, the little girl accompanied him, and she said her name was Sharon, and he told her about Tony's fateful end. Together they fled the stark flames of night.

And after the Vet had left, the investigators slipped from hiding, moving swiftly across barren streets. They looked neither to the left nor the right, and their giant android dogs sniffed at the ground. The chief investigator walked behind his men, and when they waded into the fire, he did not follow. The first man emerged, his sleeve was on fire, and he flashed a curt nod before dousing the flames. The chief investigator lifted his radio, and speaking softly, said:

"Got the twelve in the gas station. What now? Bring him in?"

He loosened his collar, revealing a neck that was wet like steam on a radiator. His chin was flanked by a pointed beard, partly black, partly white, salt and pepper.

He received his orders, then called back the dogs. They headed across town, past flopping newspapers, cracked sidewalks, dripping neon. The chief investigator led the pursuit, and this time his men ran like dogs.

Waking on a hill with the light of a red sun slanting into half-open eyes, and I cried. Around me: Death stood; forms of Tony and a thousand bugs. My work? All my work. The medal is made of the finest of silver, and it talks to me, sitting on my chest, it tells me what to do. Posthumously.

"Posthumously?" said Sharon.

The Vet told her that it meant life after death. The sun clutched at the horizon, and only the bare tip of it frowned at the Earth. They sat beneath an old willow tree, and a stream ran past them, and the little girl looked much older now. The stream bubbled as it ran past them, and circles

formed where tall fish danced. Crickets roamed silently, and a single bumblebee whirred.

Sharon said, "It's hard for a woman to understand war."

They'd been sitting there since midnight, five or six hours, and the girl's eyelids drooped with the weight of fatigue, and of the tears she had shed for Tony. She held the Vet's palm, so smooth and so sleek, and then she kissed him.

"Don't cry," she said. "It can't be your fault. Don't you know it can't be your fault?"

The Vet knew he was home at last, and he pillowed his head against the little girl's breasts. She seemed much older now, thirty at least, and he wanted very much to weep and to sob.

The Vet told her somebody had to do it, and she told him he was right. The tree quivered with a heavy breeze, and both of them drew inward.

Then they rested together, and the Vet used his hands to uproot the tree, and he used his fingers to stop the soaring stream, but he did not touch the girl, and with the finality of dawn, she slept.

The investigators had not hidden, and they moved in briskly, surrounding the Vet. The chief investigator, grim as an owl, held out his hands and said, "You must come with me."

The Vet asked him why, he'd done nothing wrong, and the investigator said perhaps it was a test to see whether a Vet could live in a peace-loving society. You killed all the androids, and you failed the test. So we see we were wrong, you just can't adjust, and now you must return to the front.

The Vet raised his eyebrows, and the investigator shrugged and said perhaps the Vet was only a madman, wars had been over for a hundred years, and they'd only hoped a look at his old life would bring him around. So we see we were wrong, you just can't adjust, and now you must return to the ward.

The Vet laughed at that, and reaching to grab the investigator, his hands stopped, twitching, and he said he knew he was in the wrong place.

The chief investigator nodded and turned away, while

the Vet looked at Sharon and threw her a kiss, then destroyed an ant nest and laughed at the war.

The investigator spoke to his radio: "We're bringing him in."

The android dogs panted from their long search.

The other investigators chatted quietly about domestic affairs.

Sharon awoke and said, "Good-bye."

By that time, it was half-past-nine, and they'd all arrived, well over a dozen of them. The Vet's father was there, the one they called Pop, and so was Mom, and so was Sis. There was Sarah, standing in a hole, and the men from the gas station.

With difficulty, the Vet tore himself away from Sharon and walked toward the crowd. They fell back a yard, like an army in retreat.

The Vet said, "I knew they were androids, despite all the blood, because their hearts were stiff, like electrical plugs."

The crowd nodded.

The Vet said, "I could've passed the test, don't you see that? But I didn't, for I am what I am, and you're all safer now."

They nodded again.

The chief investigator tickled the Vet's elbow and said, "You better come with me now, son."

And the Vet thought: *Madhouse or front; I'll be happier there.*

With a final look at the crowd, family and friends, he stopped, seeing their guilt, previously so well concealed, as it clung to their eyes, like a medal on a hero's breast. Then he turned away.

As he walked past barren fields and once-rich lands, he sang to himself. It was a fighting song he'd learned long ago. A fighting song; a sad song. It went: *Home again, home again, jiggy-jig. Home again, home again, jiggy-jig.*

A fighting son; a sad song. *Jiggy-jiggy-jig.*

—Gordon Eklund



DOG IN A FISHERMAN'S NET

After the storm, Panos spread the nets on the concrete, while his younger brother moved the iced crated fish from deck to dock. Spyro cuffed him to let him know he was finished. Panos grunted, the warm long sound a bear makes when satisfied. "Ya!" he called as Spyro started back to the boat. "Take her behind the spit. And rope the nets to the rail this time. I'll mend these dry ones."

"Ne," Spyro yelled above the clashing hulls and vaulted to the deck. Loosed, the line spun from the piling as the boat rocked backwards. Panos worked his toes on the crumbling jetty edge.

Beneath the ghost lights that sheeted half the sky, two more boats bucked through the froth that lazed on the water. A wave slapped stone and flung drops higher than his head. Gold fell from cloudings east, and Panos squinted.

When he walked to the center of the net, his knees jabbed from his pants. There were drops like tears on his face, jewels in his hair and sweater.

With bowed legs resting on their heels, he sat now and pulled up a ruined section into his lap, hooking the meshes out with his toes to keep it straight. The knife with which he cut the broken threads clean had been whet an hour that morning while he'd waited to go out. With orange thread on a bone shuttle, he retied the running diamonds.

When the fishing boats slammed in he only looped the knots more quickly, not looking up. Shouting; dogs circling toward the dock; water—the shuttle danced in the webbing. Behind him a truck from the obsidian mines growled. The three o'clock freighter would be late because of the storm. He heard a handful of stones chuckle over the sideboards. Near, a running dog . . .

At the tug under the seat of his pants, he looked back over his shoulder. Legs flipped up, a pink mouth choked off a howl, and corks jumped on net wings.

The dog barked, tried to shake off the strings, fell,

kicked. Panos, roaring, whirled to his knees and grabbed. His own feet snagged and he stumbled. Sinkers rasped concrete. The dog bounded, was dragged back. Panos caught one leg and lost balance. When he jerked his hand back from the teeth, his fingers carried harsh threads across his own face. As he tried to roll from the yelping animal, his hand went out, stopped in string, then worse, went through. Threads chattered.

Men from the boats and the truck ran up. The one with the stick—behind orange strings, Panos saw him hesitate—struck at the dog's head. Netting strained under a cracked boot with toes showing. Netting tore.

He tried to push the men away. They were making it worse. Again the stick, but this time it went on to strike the bony point of his shoulder. Fur twisted on his chest, and a hind foot pawed his cheek.

Someone else was pushing the men aside, and Panos saw Costa, all hair and grooved muscle, drop to his knees and raise a piece of concrete. The road-mender's arm was tarred to the elbow. The rock fell, Panos jerked; and something jabbed his neck . . .

The knife! The blade, snagged in the net, had pierced him, hard. Costa had struck the dog again, and the barking stopped. Someone kicked at the limp, sticky thing, but when Panos pulled away, somehow the point slipped in another surprising inch. Panos opened his mouth to scream and his mouth flooded with something salty, salty as the sea.

Costa, wielding the clotted rock, pushed back the men. They were shouting. "Hey, Paniyotis!"

From another, "Ya! Move back there!"

And, "Open the net! Slowly, slowly! Ne! The bitch has torn it enough."

The last words were stones in a pool of silence.

Two crossed themselves. Two more the same. Costa backed against the waiter who had come out from *Alexei's*, jumped, and in confusion flung the rock to the water. Behind them another boat clattered, and from the head of the dock Spyro shouted, "Ya, somebody take this box!"

No one turned.

and lowered the boxes himself, jerking his scarred fingers out in time. At the multiple crash, the top box nearly fell, but he caught it. "What are you staring at there?"

The men blinked at him. Costa whispered, "Your brother . . ."

Three men clenched their jaws so that their cheeks hollowed suddenly.

"What about him?" Spyro pushed the box in place. Then he frowned. "The storm blew the mackerel into our net. Has your catch been poor?"

"Spyro, your brother . . ." Costa stretched his hand out. Crimson slicked the tar.

"A dog," the waiter from *Alexei's* began. "A dog got in the net. We only tried to . . ."

"He was tearing the strings, Spyro."

"You know the sound of tearing nets is like the Lady's laughter at moon-down . . ."

Spyro screamed. Later, he would have said, "I did not see what was tied in the torn cords. I felt it. I felt death in it. It yanked my hands up, snatched my face down and shook me by the tongue. Death stuck two fingers in my eyes. I saw nothing. I felt." They picked him up, first trying to protect themselves, then trying to keep Spyro himself from hurt. Had he reached the body, he would have hugged his own life back into it.

They took him into the cafe, holding him around the shoulders, holding his arms, his waist, as many as possible touching him with live hands to protect him from the dead thing, Paniyotis.

Costa told Katina, the girl who served in the cafe, in two grunted sentences what had happened. She smashed her fingertips against her mouth to stop a sound, kneading her lips, and stepped back against the white-washed wall.

"So easy to die," said an old man, swinging his beads into his fist and silencing them for the first time that day. "So hard to grieve."

Katina started to run out, but someone grabbed her arm. "Give us coffee. And if you must run, bring a big bowl of soup back from *Alexei's*. But first give the poor boy brandy."

With no father or brothers to set dowry, obliged to work, and therefore with no marriage possibilities, her

feelings were given little care. She bit her lower lip, went to the liquor shelf and took down the Metaxa. One man called for ouzo, but another punched his arm. "Sheep! You have brandy with the grieving man, or you take only coffee."

All those crowding Spyro's table urged him to drink from their glasses as well as his own. He took only one sip from Costa's.

"Panos has had bad luck this whole year. First the falling house wall, then his poor sister who must be married at once . . ."

Costa hissed for silence. "Don't weigh yesterday's problems, Grandfather. Today's are heavy enough."

"And tomorrow's may be heavier," returned the old man, and began to drop his beads again.

Spyro stood up.

When he looked around, the four men who had crossed themselves at the dock raised their hands, palms up, to shield his glance.

"Gotsi! Gotsi!" insisted Costa—*Sit down! Sit down!*—"Katina, bring him another brandy!"

But the girl had gone.

Spyro walked to the door and saw them look at each other to see who would stop him. Before their decision, he was outside.

Two steps, three steps across the stone apron: nobody called. Unsure why, he walked back to the dock. In the confusion he recalled someone going to see that the body was taken care of but the net still lay over the stain.

A black-shawled woman whispered something to the men unloading.

When they saw him look, their hands jumped before their eyes. Then men stooped quickly to their boxes. Spyro turned.

Katina stood at the dock's head. Her oiled braid looped across the shoulder of her green sweater. The glance of a grieving man brings grief, he thought, and waited for her to raise her hand or look away. He saw fear in her face, but she did not try to cover it. There was something else, to which he could not fit a name. Words growled up from his belly, but stumbled once in his mouth so that he could only blurt, hoarsely, "It was my brother!"

A memory began to beat behind his eyes, hammering

out Katina's face. It came by piece and patch. Then, with urgent vividness, it flooded:

Panos had borrowed a shotgun. They had saved a month for cartridges. He had wrapped rags around his feet, Panos had borrowed rubber boots, and they had gone hunting in the central mountains of the island, taking turns with the gun. That afternoon they brought home six rabbits to Piope.

She jumped when they came in, and the box of sea-shells she had been looking through scattered on the floor. Laughing and crying, she said she had been terrified all day that one brother would accidentally shoot the other.

"Do you worry every time we go out on the boats each morning one of us will drown?" Panos grinned.

She looked at the shells over the packed dirt, then took the rabbits with an amused glance (hints of something very deep and very frightening as well as frightened always shone in her black, tear-bright eyes), then came back from the stone sink, brushing her light hair from her forehead. There was a scar high on her right temple from the time, as a little girl, some boys threw rocks at her when she tried to play with them.

Both Spyro's and his brother's hair was black.

Piope's hair—it looked like sun in a copper cauldron filled with oil—had upset their mother terribly. She had used calimari ink to darken it and made Piope wear a kerchief every time she went outside to keep the sun from lightening it more. Now Piope's emotions fell like half-lights about the house. Things from outside brought her easily to tears or laughter, so most of the time she stayed indoors, at housework, or playing with the shells her brothers brought her.

The broiled rabbit was tender and full-flavored, crisp with its slight fat, and juicy. Spyro was so after Panos to go again he could hardly keep his feet under him on the sloppy deck. Finally Panos took him up as far as the limestone bluffs where, beside a bush of paddle cactus leaves, they found a waist-high cypress sapling with half-exposed roots clawing the white earth. With twigs pegged to the ground, and fishing line, Panos built a snare.

They left the sapling bent double in the October wind. In the morning the sapling was straight, and the dangling

hare, hind foot snapped and bloody, was half dead from exhaustion.

After that they had a rabbit nearly every other day. Then Spyro found a second sapling and they sometimes had two at once. That was when the house wall fell.

They were coming back from the bluff, two bloody-footed hares at Spyro's waist, when confusion met them at the edge of the town. In the mountains they hadn't even felt the tremor, but along the shore it had been more severe, and the radio said that windows had been broken in Athens. But only two houses had suffered in the island's harbor town. One was a half-completed structure being built by old Austinos.

The other was theirs. The side wall was rubble. The bamboo roof sagged like cloth, raveled at the edges with dried sea-weed and cracked mud. Piope, her face sore from spent hysteria, blinked in the painful sun, as she paused in her hunt among the stone for broken shells. When somebody tried to talk to her, she cried again, shaking her scarfed head, and ran behind the gnarled almond tree if they persisted.

When Spyro reached the yard through his chattering neighbors, fear filled his mouth like rocks. The shattered familiar, the safety of his birthplace broken, tried to force up questions, but rock sealed his throat. *Panos, what must we do?* But he was as incapable of speech as Piope.

Unasked, Panos answered.

He pulled the rabbits from Spyro's belt, went into the house, and came out with the rafia-covered wine jar that had escaped, under the sink. "Costa," he said, "don't get too drunk this evening." He handed the jar to the tarry workman. "You will have to help us tomorrow."

A bony seven-year-old, in a pair of men's army pants ripped off above the knees and bound with rusty bailing cable over his hollow belly, stared across his knuckles. "Take these to your aunt." Panos held out the rabbits. "Perhaps they won't fill you for long, but they'll fatten the worms in your gut some." The boy's scaly eyelids widened. Then he snatched the rabbits and fled.

Spyro got his voice back. "Our house falls in, and you give away everything that remains to us?"

"A few little presents," Panos said, squeezing the back

of Spyro's neck. "Are you hungry for wine and broiled rabbit?"

Spyro squinted into the house. "This makes me sicker than any storm. I couldn't hold food."

"Well then?" Panos picked out a shell from under fallen mortar and thumbed the crumbs away. "We only have a little on this island, and still She snatches at it. Though the good Father prays to Kyrios Jesus for us, it may still be as the herders say."

"You think because Kyrios Jesus was buried in a stone tomb instead of soil, his body cannot make the land prosper?"

Panos shrugged. "Even with all the cactus and bramble, there are still oranges, olives, and tomatoes enough. I only mean that when the Lady shows Her caprice to one of us, that man must busy his mind thinking of others, or his own misery will paralyze him. What are you crying about, Piope?" He handed his sister the shell and pulled her to him while she stood holding it. "The widow Mardoupas has gone to pick up olives for oil this morning. It would take more than an earthquake to stop her fingers. That wise woman's stories made you laugh when you were a little girl. Go help her now, and perhaps you will come home in the evening laughing, even to this." He nodded back down the road. "Come," he said to Spyro.

The donkey trail they walked was walled with granite and red marble. Burros, carrying brush and vegetables between the harbor town of Adamas and the old city, the Plaka, kept the runnel blotched with old or steaming lumps over the yellow carpet. The land, brown two months ago in summer, rose now in green terraces on both sides. They turned for a while up the asphalt road till it left the shadow of the bluffs for the sun and the hot macadam stung through their callouses and forced them to the chalk ditch at the road's edge, where they were dusted white to the knees.

They crossed a grape arbor where the jointed vines lay like crabs on the cracked ground; then up another walled path that wound higher till the wind at the crest slapped the backs of their necks and brushed their hair forward.

Halfway down they met some twenty goats, driven by a herder with a skinny face and most of his nails rotten from injuries scrabbling after his charges. He spoke with the

half incomprehensible, sing-song speech of the old mountains. His gray eyes glittered behind pale hair that beat down his forehead in the wind. He knew a lot of stories, some filthy, most funny, as well as all the old tales. Spyro had spent much time wondering, as had most fishermen, at the brown-haired, light-eyed inlanders with their priestless churches where goats were killed; who came into Adamas or the Plaka to drink only at October's equinox, when the men boasted openly in the cafes of sexual intercourse with other men, women, or their beasts. They kept their boys for work and sent their girls to the Plaka gymnasium, and left the handling of money to the women as well, saying that reading, writing, and numbers were a sort of magic, and magic was Her province.

Reaching under his chamois vest to scratch, the herder grimaced. "My sister can write the name of every man in the family, as well as put down a story you tell her one day so that she can give you back the same words in a month's time; and she is not yet fifteen."

Spyro had been to the Plaka gymnasium for a year and had seen a few of the brown-haired mountain girls. "What was your sister's name?"

Curiosity impelled the question, but the herder jabbed him with a wrinkled fist, and though he joked, his tone held alarm. "If She would not tell Her name to any man, why should I tell the name of a woman of my family to you?"

The goats clicked out across the red and orange clays that streaked the hillside. The highest peak of the island heaved from beneath the Plaka, topped with an abandoned monastery, like a jawbone in the clear, late light. Left, terraces lowered to the sea.

When Panos turned onto the stone channel that dropped toward the ruins beside the Old City, the herder laughed. "You go now to where She sleeps. Be quiet, or She may wake."

Panos only grinned at the little fellow once, but Spyro kept glancing back to where the goatherd bobbed with his flock as he guided it back to town.

At last Spyro sat with his brother on the tower foundation, the old Roman amphitheater above and to the left, the water below. The bay arcing away should be a haven for fish, deep and undisturbed by freighters. But no Chris-

tian fisherman brought his boat here. Sometimes herders came to drop handlines from the rocks, but those fishermen who chanced the bay—and at the Orthodox Father's urging, each year a few would try—always returned with tales of snagged nets, or groundings where no rocks should be. Far along the coast, at the craggy brim of the island, smoke trickled from the mines.

Panos hugged in his knees, pulling chalky feet across the stone.

"Why?" ventured Spyro at last. "Why did we come here?"

His brother gestured with his chin. "Why do you think?"

As the sun at the horizon slit sky from water, pale gold bled on the waves. The evening was bruised with copper sores.

"It is beautiful."

"Yes."

"But still, why did we come?"

"We have had a misfortune. First we have given a little to our neighbors. Now we must give a little to—to the gods."

"To Kyrios Jesus, you mean?"

Though Paniyotis' eyes were black, they shone a moment like a herder's. "If it please you."

"Then why do you come to where She sleeps to pray to Kyrios Jesus . . ."

"I said nothing about prayer. Besides, how can She sleep here when the English archaeologists came and dug Her up and took Her away a hundred years ago. She may have slept here once, but now She is in a museum in Paris, in France. Your grandfather worked on the crew that found Her. What did they teach you in that year at the gymnasium, anyway?"

"They told us about that," Spyro nodded. "But the herders say She was not in the earth at all, but in the sea."

"You say one thing. I say another. Come." He rubbed the back of Spyro's neck. "You must give something too. But it must be of yourself, and quietly."

Afterwards they walked home by moonlight. Though the November days were warm enough, the nights were cold. When they followed the road into the shadow of the lime bluffs, Spyro could hardly see, and had to blink after his brother, a shadow before him on the night road.

And blinking brought back Katina's face, still before him on the busy dock, wide-eyed, but steadily watching. "It was my brother," he repeated.

She whispered something he hardly heard, and seemed near running away.

"What?"

"I said," she repeated, " 'It was my dog.' "

"Yours . . . ?" The mucilage that held sound to meaning had come unstuck. Spyro struggled to fix it.

"He came to the cafe once when the boys had thrown cans at him and cut his side, here. I put iodine on the cut so it wouldn't run. Then I fed him and let him sleep in my room. Now they have killed my dog . . ." She dropped her eyes. ". . . and your brother." The last was softer; he watched the small jumping muscle in her cheek.

"But he was in the nets," Spyro said, for the first time trying to explain to himself what had been done. "He was tearing them, and there was no time to untangle him slowly. Each time he turned, he wrecked a day's damage. They had to kill him because he would have ruined the strings beyond retying if they tried to take him out slowly. The sound of tearing nets is like the Lady's laughter. It was an accident he was caught, and there was no . . ."

Horror had built in her face. "You mean the dog," she said suddenly, comprehending.

"The dog, yes. Of course I mean the dog!"

"But Paniyotis . . ."

At the name, rhythmic explosions began in his chest. The greatest part of grief is fear. "My brother . . ."

"It was an accident," repeated Katina, her voice hoarse. "Oh, yes. They saw the nets going, and they ran to help, to save those terrible nets!"

He could understand her sorrow over the pet, but the hard, flat anger that struggled under the words was disproportionate. "What sort of men are they that they could not even see the trapped man for the dog. Oh, yes, it was an accident they killed him . . ."

"You mean my brother!" Now surprise was his.

"Your brother, yes. Of course I mean your brother!" Her voice, emptied of outrage, became subtle and forlorn. "I do not like this island. Here they do not know which is more important, a fisherman or his nets. Someday," her eyes moved from thing to thing across the dock, "I am

going to leave Milos. I will go to Syros, where they have many boats everyday, from Piraeus to Mykonos, and Rhodos. I can go to Idra, or St. Orini, or visit my aunt in Athens anytime I want, instead of waiting for the one boat here from Piraeus every Sunday. I do not like it here."

He smiled, having heard her say this before, usually in exasperation at some man in the cafe. Her eyes returned to him, but Spyro walked back to his stack of fish boxes. A dozen women had been picking among the fish from the other boats. The smaller fish were piled on newspapers or verdigrised brass trays; the medium ones were in wide enameled baskets, and the larger were laid across iced boxes in alternate directions.

Spyro started to take the top box down, then paused to look at four girls, near Katina's age, but of good family, strolling with joined arms toward the dock.

Two old men with string shopping bags nodded and smiled to them, inquired after their fathers, turning to watch them go on. Austinos, the older man, had let it be known that as soon as his six months of mourning were over and the black armband came off, he would take a third wife. Panos had once proposed, against all advice and reason, to Ana, the prettiest and strongest of the four. The existence of unmarried Piope, whose house and dowry had not been settled, aside from his fluctuating income, made it a ludicrous proposition. Her father had instructed Ana to refuse him. Six months would probably see Austinos with her or her sister.

Spyro slid the box across the deck, and pulled back the lid. Beside the mackerel, there were seven eels, four black ones and three gold-flecked marinas with long mouths. When all the boxes were open, he planted his feet wide apart and called out, "I have fish here, and today free! Here is a gift to anyone who wants it! Here is fish that the sea gave me for nothing but the sweat on my arms. The price to you is the work it takes to carry it home! Fish! Fish! Free fish here!"

One girl with Ana laughed and began to pull the others toward Spyro's boxes. They were beaten by a little girl who pointed to the largest mackerel and demanded, "That one!" She grabbed it by the tail with her left hand, thought again, and grabbed a second with her right, and ran.

Austinos, exhorting people to respect his sixty-seven years (they ignored him), pushed a marina in his string bag. A woman jostled him, and the gold and black length slithered from an opening and was crushed by bare feet and booted. Spyro himself pushed away. Women were running toward the crowd. Children streaked off with fish over their shoulders. And one woman waddled away with six in her apron.

Something more powerful than sorrow, but propelled by it, erupted from him. The full sound clanged in his throat for seconds before he recognized his own laughter.

Katina watched wondrously from the other side of the dock. Slapping his thighs, Spyro turned from the jetty.

A circle of stone about him. Grass, mud, gravel, and cactus with rotten fronds shriveled among the spears. Still, a circle of stone. This must be something of yourself, Spyro thought, and quietly.

But all he had were memories of Panos. They clawed, would not loosen, even though he was exhausted with them: Panos yawning at dawn, cursing at noon, laughing in the evening at the cafe. The laughter, still on Spyro's face, only netted the beasts. But oh, they turned and tore and twisted.

Below lay the harbor of the Old City, abandoned now for less accessible Adamas from which the brothers had fished. Spyro climbed from the foundation and crossed the terrace. Above were the catacombs from the time the island had been under Rome. She had wanted the mines, of course. At the gymnasium he learned that Rome was the capital of Italy. Italian sailors worked on the freighters that carried the obsidian and the clay. The mates and captains let their little fingernails grow long, the same as the bank clerks and the waiter of *Alexei's* in Adamas, or the Greek sailors from the National Navy who sometimes took their leaves on the island. Spyro knew a war had ended about the time of his birth, in which Greeks fought Italians. His uncle had gone all the way to Albania to fight, and still told stories to anyone who would listen. In class, Spyro had asked if that were the war which had ended the Roman control of the mines and the Old City. Some people laughed. That laughter, which was frequent, was one reason Spyro had left the gymnasium. "Twenty years,

two thousand years!" His teacher had exploded. "Does it take such great intellect to distinguish between the two?" With many of the students, both herders and fishermen, this was his most frequent chastisement. When Spyro announced at home he was not going back, Paniyotis had been quietly angry, and Piope had whispered, "I wish I could go to the gymnasium at Plaka."

"What? Like some herder's girl?" Panos snapped, and Piope, pulling her kerchief up over her strange, lovely hair, moved into the corner. But his brother's and sister's disappointment shadowed the house for days;—Spyro spent most of his free time in the cafe over small cups of coffee, playing at tavli or cards with the older fishermen when no money was involved. After all, he was a boy, and must be allowed to do what he wanted.

Spyro dropped to the last rock by the water. The small Aegean tide rilled his feet, and to the right a stone inlet roared with froth. No matter which branch of the possible future he looked at, the fruit was ripe loneliness, to feed the beasts:

Panos flinging an octopodia again and again on the jetty, to tenderize it, till froth covered the stone: Panos after too much ouzo, stealing—well, borrowing, since he returned it the next day—the out-of-tune satura hanging on the wall at *Alexei's*, sneaking beneath the window of Ana's father the night his proposal had been refused, to set up a tinny racket on the unharmonied strings till the noise ended with her father's curses, and the curses with his own laughter: or later, the same morning, when it turned chilly and Spyro climbed to the roof to take a blanket to his brother who had insisted on sleeping up there the rest of the night, Panos, hunched in the corner, crying.

Then, again, there was Panos, his hand hard and sweating on Spyro's shoulder, when they danced together in line with the other men at the St. Barbara's day festa. St. Barbara was patron of the miners. The weather had threatened since morning. Below the mine shacks the sea ground the rocks. Piope, even with the house rebuilt, was still unhappy, so they had taken her to the party and, when the dancing began, left her with widow Mardoupas and the other women, and joined the line of men who stamped and ducked with arms around each other's shoulders. Costa

pounded his drum with his black fist and those that could stuffed hundred drachma notes in the little hole at the top. Someone from the Plaka had tuned the satori and hammered out the insistent melodies, while a fiddler, who had come from Sifnos for the day on a fishing boat, razored the winds with his howling box. There were miners, herders, and fishermen, as well as soldiers from the National Army Airport at the far side of the island who were only allowed in town five at a time, and whose presence most people usually ignored.

The herders were welcomed this time because they brought three roasted goats. The trouble started when one of the soldiers, who was from the Macedonia, took a herder aside and tried to tease him into teaching him one of the goat dances. They danced together, the soldier clumsily, the herder nimbly, miming obscenities at one another. Spyro and Panos watched with the other men, and Spyro laughed till his throat was sore. Then Austinos came over and objected, and some other people who had laughed at first now grew offended and called for an end. The musicians stopped, the soldier apologized and sat down, but the herder kept on. Then his friends came and danced too. The herder women began to sing for the men and stamp their sandals. When anyone tried to stop a man, he would make dirty signs and pull away laughing. Then one old woman, at least thirty, in a skirt made from a silk house coat thrown out by some woman in town, with necklaces of shells, teeth, and polished wood, started to do the forbidden dance that the women do alone in the mountains. Some of the fishermen cried out. Someone called the herders gypsies and said they should go away and leave decent people alone. Three boys were suddenly beside her, their light eyes frightened, but their hands knotted. Two older men stepped beside her as well, one with arms like rocks in a sausage skin. The other could have been the goatherd they'd met before on the road. "How come you have men about you, Lady?" It was Costa who called. Though his tone was contemptuous, he still called her *Lady* rather than *woman*. "Who are these standing by you now?"

"These are my sons." She gestured to the boys. "And these are their fathers." People gasped, but she creased her

lips back from yellow teeth. "Though I need not one of them to protect me from any man here."

Just then the Orthodox Father, who had been taking a glass of sweet samos in another shack, came up to see what the confusion was, still holding a half-eaten, winy apple. "Come now, come now," he said, striding through the crowd by the door where the dancing had been going since noon. The sun was down and there was only gray light left in the west. "This is a holiday," the Father said. "A Saint's day. This is no time to quarrel." The Father wore his long hair in a little bun at the back, as the herder men did, and most of them respected him. But the woman . . .

The old woman in the bright dress gave a growl of disgust.

Panos, who was holding Spyro's arm, suddenly squeezed. They had laughed at the dance before, but it was suddenly as if the lewdness had been ripped away revealing—evil or good, Spyro did not know, but it was vast as the secrets behind his sister's unsettling stare.

"Be friends," continued the Father, "this is Saint Barbara's day."

"You dirty Her with a name that can be said by men!" the woman answered with drawling contempt that turned to rasping laughter. "You try to make Her a saint, a chattel to your weak little god who can die and be reborn only once. It is Her day, the day of the Earth, that potters and farmers and miners have held holy since before your weakling came to die in his turn as gods before him have died, as gods will die after him, while She rules forever."

"My daughter . . ."

The woman stamped her foot, spat, and everyone, including the Father, jumped. Just then the whole sky split, and trundled into the sea. The priest went down on his knees with his hands over his face. Some people screamed, and Spyro's heart pounded so slowly and hard his chest ached, and he felt weak. Rain flushed from the clouds as the last light disappeared. When Spyro wiped water from his face, he saw all the herder women were dancing. Fear and fascination ranged through the miners and fishermen who had run from the other shacks to see. Men hustled their wives, sisters, or daughters away so they would not see, or perhaps learn from the forbidden steps and

rhythms, then rushed back across the mud to watch for themselves. People jostled, pushed, and somewhere a fight began. Panos had to shake Spyro's arm three times before he gained his brother's open-mouthed attention. "Piopel! Where's Piopel!"

Spyro closed his mouth and shook his head. "I don't . . ."

"For the sake of Kyrios Jesus, find Piopel, before . . ." Thunder deadened his last words, and Panos lurched away.

Spyro started in the other direction. In a lightning blaze, he recognized his sister. Her scarf had blown off and her hair streamed. He grabbed her hand, but the gray eyes that turned to him were a stranger's.

The shell of her ear, the high-boned cheek, the corner of her wet mouth gleamed in yellow light from the shack window. As the rain roared between them, he tried to pull away, but the herder woman grabbed his other hand and leaned close, hissing, or was it singing, in that odd accent between music and laughter, "Come with me, Greek. Lie down on your back in the wet earth, and I will ride you where rider never rode horse . . ."

Spyro ran. Water struck his face, got in his throat, and he began to cough. He tried to get inside a shack, but it was too crowded, and people were yelling about something. For a long time he crouched under the dripping eaves in the back, then sounds coming through the rain frightened him, and finally he reached the head of the path back to Adamas.

Lightning bleached the rock behind a familiar figure twenty feet ahead, bulling through the rain. "Panos!" Spyro began to run. When he grabbed his brother's shoulders, Panos turned and caught him. Spyro pushed his face against the wet sweater. Then he pulled away.

His brother's back was caked with dirt, too thick for even this torrent to wash away. Spyro ran his hand up through his brother's hair. The front was slick and clean, but the back was filled with mud. Panos started forward angrily. Spyro followed, wiping water from his eyes with his dirtied hand. "Panos, what—"

Piope reached home the next morning while rain still fell. She was dirty, exhausted, and immediately caught a fever that lasted nearly a week. Three months later, Paniyotis had to pay Marias, the carpenter who had lost his arm in a freighter winch last year, and so could never be more than an assistant, five thousand drachmas to take Piope for his wife, and Spyro had to work a month on his sister's new house under Marias' crabby and impatient instructions.

The time just before the wedding was strained, and Piope cried most of it. Once she broke all her shells and ran into the mountains where something unpleasant must have happened; when she came back three days later, she had strange scratches on her face that couldn't have been from brambles, for they were in ordered, parallel strokes. She refused to tell what had happened. But during the whole time, where many a father or brother would have turned her out, Panos never said a word of reproach.

Water lapped from the old bay of Milos, pulling a single file of sand across the rock by Spyro's foot and into the sea. Spyro looked out where She slept. Fear and sorrow tightened his throat. And the fear had to loosen if the sorrow were to leave him.

Suddenly he pulled his sweater over his head and jerked his wrists from the sleeves. He flung his pants back on top of it. Then he crouched, drew in his breath, and leapt.

Water struck cold into the crevices of his body. The winter Aegean warmed to him quickly though. Summer lingered under the sea well into December. Pressure built on his eyes and ears, and he refused to come up, even when over a minute had passed and his chest hurt. He arced before blurred and blued rock. Then something above dove to the water, plummeting in silver toward him.

At the same moment, directly before him, he saw the stone thing. Twice broken, it jutted from the rock slope, arms twined with carved snakes and shingled weed. Weed bearded Her gaping face, clotted Her eyes. Spots on Her chipped shoulders glittered gray black. He was very near, perhaps ten feet. As he turned, She waved a long net toward him. As it settled about him, he thought, *She isn't*

asleep! She isn't asleep at all! He clawed still deeper in the cool tow.

The form above him—a live woman, he realized suddenly—reached him at last, seized his hand through the strings. And strings tore.

As they rolled upward, Spyro looked back to see other webs sailing gently from the stone arms. All the lost nets, snagged yearly from fishing boats that dared Her waters, swirled around the huge, pointed, black breasts.

The woman beside him tugged his arm, and air began to seep from Spyro's nose, the bubbles tickling his eyelids. He kicked hard, and dragged her half way up before he lost her. When he broke surface, he was blind with pulsing blood, and he thought for a moment he was going to vomit.

He heard her splash beside him, and took long strokes forward till hands scraped painfully on rock. Water streamed his face and it was hard to hold his head up. She—probably one of the strong herder women—had been under perhaps half as long as he had. He heard her wet hands slap the rock, a splash, then a slap again as she pushed herself back from the lip. He shook hair and water from his eyes, and looked up.

Katina, naked and wide-eyed, crouched on the rock, her black braid trailing between her breasts, the ends making little circles against her skin. Her breasts were goose-fleshed around the brown, shriveled nipples. As she gulped her breaths, her stomach, behind the wet braid, took a single crease, smoothed, creased.

"Why . . . ?" Below the water he felt warmth coiling through the place where fear had been. Katina, as though she were reaching for something she did not know were hot or cold, took his wrist. "You better come out."

He nodded, his mouth open—and swallowed brine as a wave washed him. Coughing again, he pushed up on sore hands, then rolled against her. His wet shoulder struck cool against her thigh, then warmth broke through. "Why . . ." he asked again, "why are you here?"

He thought she was going to brush his cheek. But she said, "I come here too, sometimes—when I'm sad. I swim here, because it's alone, and nobody else does, and—I followed you."

"Why did you follow me—I mean, down there?"

“When you jumped, I thought you didn’t want to come up.”

“I didn’t want . . . ?” Though sorrow was still real, when he had faced Her beneath the water, the fear had gone. And without it, the laughter came up, this time free and freeing. He lay on his back, rocking his head and laughing, his thick hair sloshing against her calf. Then he took her shoulder and pushed himself to his elbow. Water coursed the runnel of his spine. “Not me! No! When I go down, I come up!”

She looked at his horny yellow hand on her shoulder. “Men have felt that way before about brothers. Why else should you come here to where She . . .” She inclined her head toward the water.

Spyro dropped his hand to her knee; it fell palm up, the fingers defining a cup. “Tell me, Katina,” he whispered, “if She sleeps here, what was it the archaeologists carried away from the slopes that is now in the Paris museum?”

Katina shrugged. “Just another statue, the same sort as the Turks carried away from here by the dozen. It must have been one the Turks simply overlooked.”

“The herders tell the story, ne?”

She shrugged. “But the archaeologists should have listened to the herders’ tale more closely. The herders say She stood on the top of the tower guarding the old city that was sacred to Her, until the tower fell in an earthquake. We exported obsidian to Egypt even before Minos slung his net over the seas. But that statue they found was of white marble, from Paros, while we have only poor red marble here; and the herders say she was chipped from black glass.” She twisted her head to look again.

“You come to swim here?” He rose to his knees as she turned back. “And you are not afraid of Her?” He stood up. She looked up at him, then suddenly pushed herself back against the rock, pulling in her shoulders. Her lips gemmed with sea water, parted. “But you are afraid of me?”

She shook her head quickly, but her eyes began to dart around and about his body. What light came past his left hip banded the right side of her face and body with gold. Nakedness, a corollary of circumstance a mo-

ment past, was suddenly something powerful about himself, glorious about her. He stooped, bending above her till one knee rubbed against her wet arm, and her staring face darkened with the shadow of his. He took her neck in both hands, as she bent back her head, the muscles stretching under his palms, and touched her ear with lips and teeth at once.

A goat's bleating above became laughter. Twigs and gravel burned his back, and Spyro leaped away, nearly slipping.

The goatherds, two boys and a girl, were scrambling up the foundation, looking back, poking each other, and giggling. Glory and power became tingling heat.

Katina was nervously slipping up her skirt when he looked back. Spyro stood a moment, then, confused, reached for his sweater and butted through the wool for the neck. The knit scratched the skin under his arms.

At the foundations, Katina hesitated before accepting his hand. He had hesitated before extending it. When she took it, he pulled her up over the rock, and she looked at him very straight all the time. "I don't like this place, this little Island," she began again. "It is somehow like we are all caught in—like Panayotis. Then one dives below and discovers even She is bound in the nets of men." She shook her head. "I do not like this place."

"I am going to leave Milos," Spyro said.

They were both surprised. He spoke the thought as he'd formed it, and its articulation was strange and amazing.

"You are?"

"Ne. I have nothing here. My sister is married. My brother—is dead."

"Where are you going?"

"Piraeus, I think. Yes, to the mainland at Piraeus. I will work on the freighters there."

"You—really will go?"

He nodded. "Ne."

"And it will not be hard for you, just to leave?"

"Old, water-logged nets tear easily."

"I am afraid to go," Katina said.

"I am too," Spyro admitted. "But I'm going." They reached the donkey trail.

The evening star led the crescent moon from the sea. The sky was purple behind the lime bluffs. They had only

been walking a minute when Katina said, "I'm going too."

Spyro smiled at her, then looked at his feet.

"I am going to Syros," she went on. "Though I may come to see you in Piraeus. Boats leave from Syros every day, not just once a week. From Syros I can go anywhere. Anywhere!" Suddenly she ran a few steps forward and laughed.

From the high bluff laughter returned, as though another woman laughed above them.

Spyro took her arm and they walked together.

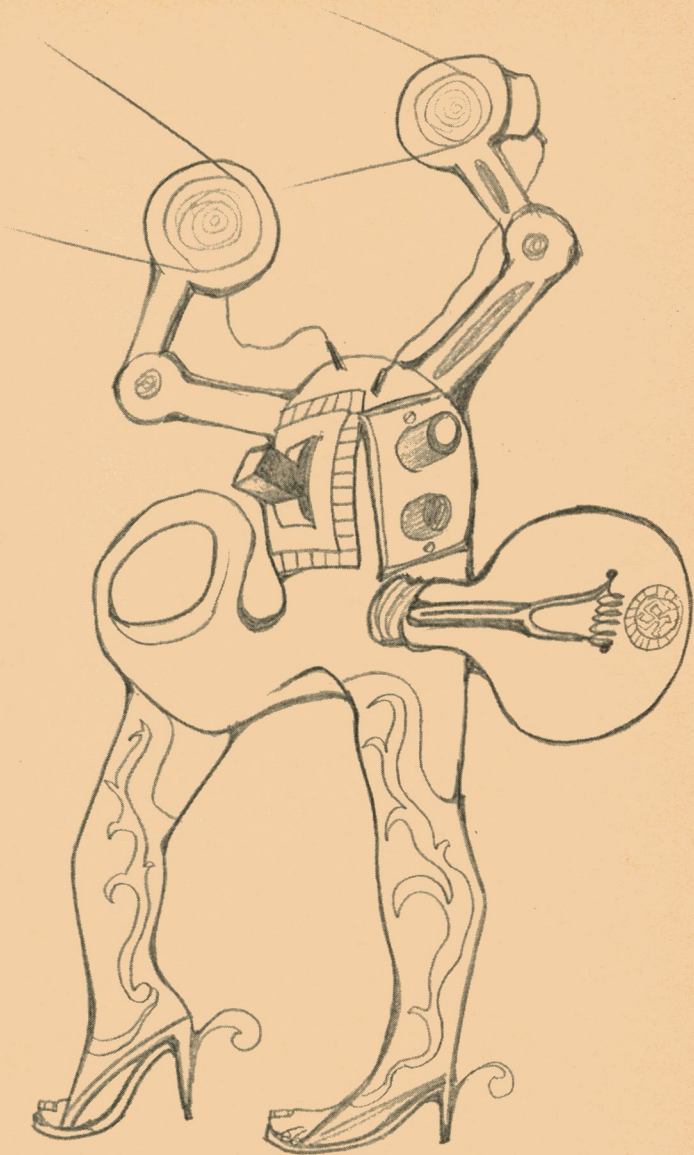
"I am going," she repeated.

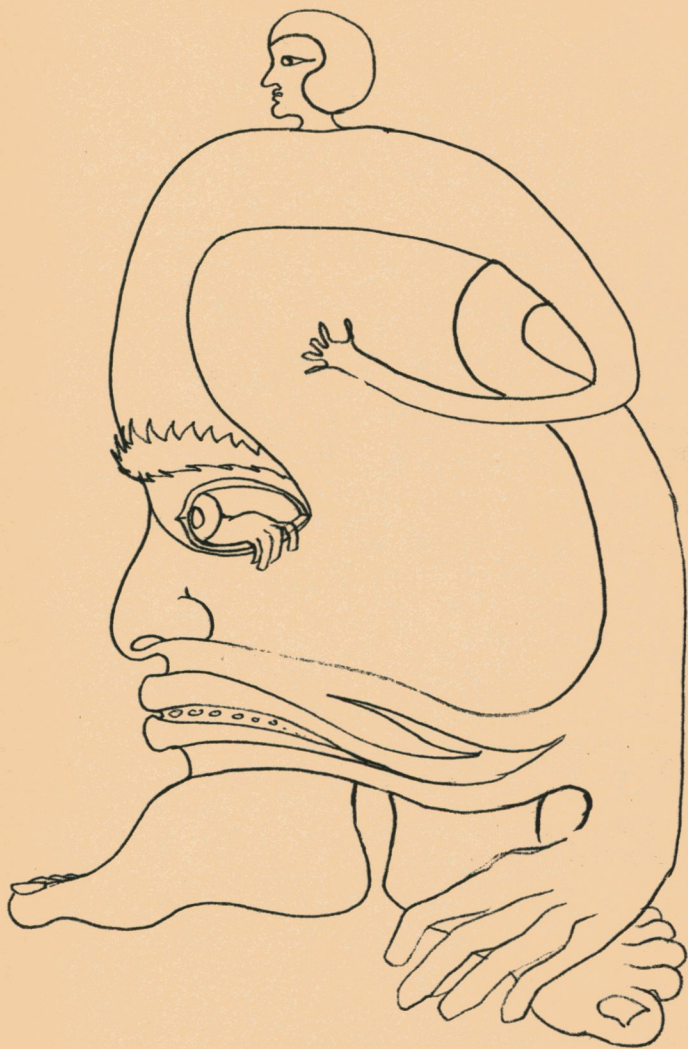
"I think you are," Spyro said. Then, a few minutes later, when they reached the asphalt road, Spyro said, "I am more important than the nets I cast."

"Yes." She frowned toward the shadows from the bluff. "I think you are."

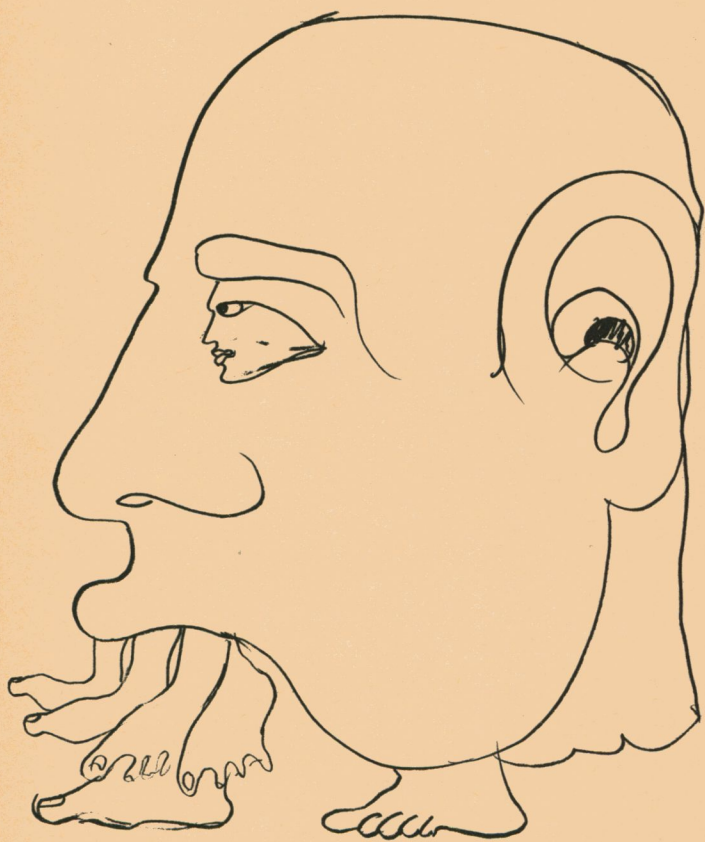
—*Samuel R. Delany*

**SIX
DRAWINGS
BY
ROBERT
LA VIGNE**

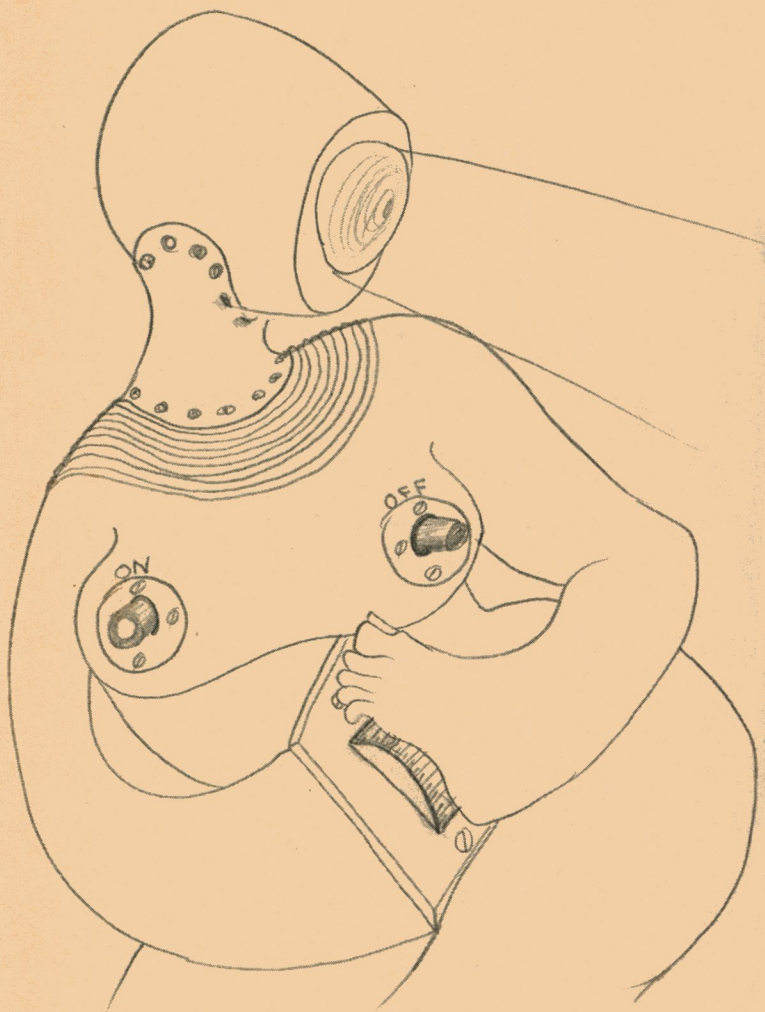












THE ZANZIBAR CAT

Hommage à Hope Merrilees

1

Duke Humphrey, bearded and humped, had died six hundred years before but not really, so that the people of Appletap-on-Flat were understandably frightened when he began to reappear in the outlying districts with (it was said) a demon cat from Zanzibar sitting on his hump and telling him what to do. Shepherds had seen him laughing and loitering at dusk; little boys watching cows at night had heard strange sounds of war; armed men were perceived to issue from the shadowy depths of wells; and more than one young girl had run terrified into a cottage at twilight with tales of which no one could make either beginning or end, for the Duke (they had always said, as a joke) was armed in more ways than one. For a while the Mayor of Appletap-cum-Cumber, which is the principal city of the whole plain, merely humphed and the Vice-Mayor declared, "They have eaten of that fairy fruit which makes the treason lissomer," but as no one in the whole Flat had seen fairy berries—which look like candles or Christmas-tree lights or chandeliers, but never, never like honest vegetables—for ten generations at least, the explanation tended to ring a little false. Besides, as the old remembered and the young were beginning rather reluctantly to appreciate, the Duke's depredations followed an all-too-familiar pattern—so the maids and matrons of Appletap-cum-Cumber, their husbands, their fathers, members of the learned professions, gaffers and gammers and even little children (in short, the whole population of the town), repaired to attics, storerooms, and old libraries, to ponder the lessons taught on vellums worn with age, on tapestries falling to loose thread, on old miniatures, scenes painted on fans, and the buckles, medallions, and party favors of another age. Some said the Duke

had come to claim his own again, and was Evil, some that he was giving Appletap-on-Flat one last chance, some even that he did not exist and some (down by the wharves at the mouth of the Cumber and this was the oddest opinion of all) that the Duke had an interest in the importation of fairy berries, and that these ought to be seen back again in the Flat, and that by marching against the Duke, Appletap-on-Flat was arming itself against nothing less than all of life and all of death and would doom itself—unless the Duke prevented—to an existence that was Flat indeed.

For arm they did. After much prodding by the guild representatives and professional councils (especially the Law, which considered itself to be most insulted by the whole irregular affair), the Mayor of Appletap-cum-Cumber organized a militia, to proceed through the counties, gathering strength as it went. Ladies and non-participating citizens were to be strictly excluded, but the fact was that nobody could be kept out; and the whole of Appletap followed the army to the town gates. Half of Appletap followed it for the rest of the day, the other half cut out by supertime, and when the sun came up over the Meaning Mountains, no one was left but the Miller's daughter, a shy, brown-haired, plain-faced young miss who had become separated from her parents and was afraid to go back alone. No one bothered about her much. As the army marched—or rather, straggled—North, for the people of Appletap-on-Flat were not military in their habits, the Miller's daughter went with them. She sewed a button for a soldier, a plain farmer from the hills, who said "Thank 'ee, miss." She salted the porridge of another soldier. She helped gather sweet-smelling branches for the evening fire built by a third. In the twilight the Meaning Mountains began to look somewhat sinister—great serrations and saw-toothed gaps against what a little shepherd lad called "a bleeding sky." Nor did the foothills, called The Merry Marches, lighten anybody's spirits, name or no name. Nor did (everyone added) the common knowledge that beyond the Meaning Mountains lay Nobody-Knows-What, Don't-Say, and Avoid-If-You-Can (they would do anything to keep from calling it by its proper name). By the time the militia had passed the next day in ragged single file up The Dismal Downs—

long, tumbled ridges of stone and thorn—there was not a man among the grim farmers of Appletap-on-Flat, the solid burghers of Appletap-cum-Cumber, or the few queer foreign sailors from the low dives by the Cumber (allies of the Duke, some whispered) who believed that he would ever return from beyond the Mountains alive.

And nobody did, except the Miller's daughter.

2

"I only have escaped alive to tell you," said the Miller's daughter. Everyone listened attentively.

"By the evening of the second day" (she continued) the going had got pretty bad. Thorns tore at them and they stepped on stones that turned underfoot as if they had been living things—and maybe they were, for half the army was limping. If you think soldiers can't fall and go arse-over-teacup, you're wrong. The Miller's daughter had fallen down so many times it would be cruel to count them, and her gown was ripped in dozens of places. She was missing her parents, too, and sobbed a little, even though the soldiers had made a kind of mascot of her. Even a country girl can't walk as fast or as far as a man, and the soldiers weren't willing to leave somebody behind with her—not that I think she would have consented to stay, for the light was draining out of the sky and the sky itself turning a most peculiar greenish-black, and above the Downs where the stars should have been coming out there was nothing at all: not light nor haze nor stars nor moon. The ground, too, seemed to shift under their feet as they marched, not that anybody fell exactly, but the *feeling* of it changed; so that now it seemed to be tilted to one side and now to the other, and sometimes you didn't know if you were walking uphill or downhill. It was altogether most unsettling. And then it got darker still and there was (for everyone) an overwhelming certainty that a precipice lay only a dozen steps away, and then only six steps, and then three, and at last it was the hardest thing in the world for anyone to take a single step, for each man seemed to be on the edge of his own cliff, so (as one man) they stopped.

There was a light shining in the distance.

As they watched the light grew, a kind of friendly light, actually, the sort you might see through trees in the middle of a forest at night, and although there was no forest on the Downs and never had been (which was not a pleasant thought), still it was better to see a light through trees than no light at all.

"By damn, these be trees!" said one of the foreign sailors.

"They be not natural trees neither," complained a burgher who had just been hit in the face by one.

"The light is growing stronger," said the Miller's daughter.

If you have ever watched a magic-lantern display or the kind of shadow-pictures countryfolk make before the fire in winter in the outlying districts of the Cumber, you may have seen a hazy dot broaden to a blur, the blur to the flickering lines of a fire, and the fire suddenly waver and clear like a curtain to reveal a castle, or a painting of the Cumber, or a portrait of the maker's favorite niece. Thus the light in the woods grew from a dim glow, only glimpsed through the tree-trunks, to a far-off star, and as the struggling militia of the Cumber pushed through the trees, to a spreading glow of fire and finally—as if the forest had become transparent and the trees had suddenly turned to veils—resolved itself into the light of an hundred torches playing on a fretwork of stone, an hundred torches set in the niches of a lofty castle close embowered by trees; and in front of the castle stood an hundred mailed knights, their faces obscured and their arms folded on their chests. No one in all of Appletap had ever seen even three armed knights in one place at one time before.

Or twelve five-star generals or fifteen Messerschmitts or thirty Herrenvolken, said a voice. No one recognized it but it belonged to the Miller's daughter. The men of Appletap pressed in through the outside gate of the castle as if they and the knights and the trees and indeed the whole scene itself had been bewitched asleep; and when the gate closed behind them they climbed the broad stairs, and from there they crowded under the castle archway, and from there into a long gallery and from there up stairs and down, round about, through rooms, past old tapestries, into courtyards and out, under faded banners, through draughty passageways, until the enchantment dis-

solved and they woke up to find themselves in the longest, broadest, oldest hall of all.

There was the Duke. He needed no servants. Behind him stood his men-at-arms, but whether there were one hundred or fifty or five or thirty million or none at all nobody could tell; for when you looked away, then you saw them, and when you looked right at them, they weren't there.

The Duke was a very evil man. He had a fair, silken beard and a beautiful face. He sat on the ducal throne in the leaping light from the fire at the end of the huge hall; the foreign seamen swore there were leopards in the shadows behind him, doubtful creatures half-formed, partly men and partly beasts, like shadows from the fire. To some the Duke looked handsome in the face but deformed in the body, to some straight in the back but crooked in the mind. There were, however, two things about him that none could deny: one, that he wore the suit of apple-green brocade in which he had always been pictured so that everybody knew it was he, and two, that on his shoulder, in a little striped pool, lay the Zanzibar cat.

Who has come to make war against me? said the Duke very softly, and the Zanzibar cat, dainty and taloned, rose on his shoulder, stretched itself, yawned pinkly, and settled again. It had no tail.

Then it grinned like a man.

This is the fifty-nine-thousandth cat in Zanzibar, said the Duke. *I have counted them.*

No one from Appletap stirred.

O Appletappians! said the Duke (and the humorousness of it seemed to please him) *Do you know against whom it is you come to wage war? I have counted the cats in Zanzibar, I have numbered the waterspouts over the Red Sea, I am all-life-and-all-death, I am the shadow inside the shadow, the shadow that makes the light, the light that makes the shadow, I am tender and cruel, I am he whom they call the Altogether Persuasive One, I am as hard as a thrust in the groin and as diffused as water, and you cannot keep me out of your little world by your fences and your names and your books and your short memories and your Rules for the Behavior of Young Misses.*

Now, said the Duke, *I am going to strip away the walls of this castle; and you must know that you are on the edge of Fairyland, which is the name you keep avoiding, by the way, on the very edge, to be exact, and when the walls of this castle disappear, the wind which always blows from that place will strike you, and as you will no longer be protected by these walls of mine, that Fairy blast will kill you. It's a cheap way to be rid of one's enemies and very much to my taste.*

"Not bloody likely," said someone in the crowd. The Zanzibar cat herpilated like a bottle-brush. He arched himself on the Duke's hump and spat a ghastly *gah!* like any ordinary cat. There was a stir in the crowd as the Miller's daughter pushed through. She did not look, to those who looked at her, like the same girl she had been, sweet as a lamb and so shy she could not hold up her head. She looked possessed. She looked, in fact, (as they blinked and rubbed their eyes) not at all like a young girl of twenty but like a woman twice that age, and a spinster too, and a hard one too, as hard as nails, or maybe a many-times-married woman because the effect is—curiously enough—much the same. All this came out in her face gradually as she walked the length of that courtly hall, and as rooms seem to listen to what's being said in them and to conform themselves to it, so the hall shrank as the Milleress walked down it until it seemed to the army of Appletap-on-Flat that they stood in a smoky tavern on the edge of the Merry Marches where a desperate and infamous gambler sat in front of a half-spent fire and that that gambler was the Duke. Some even fancied that the Milleress looked rather like a landlady, a comparison that evoked painful memories in many. The Duke's cat, still threatening, had nevertheless hidden behind the Duke's neck. He plucked it into his lap and stroked its fur. It settled, though cautiously.

It is very much to my taste, he repeated, and accords well with my fancy. I will do it now.

"You will not," said the Milleress. The room shrank a little more.

Do you really think, said the Duke very, very gently, that you can exist without me? He smiled like a humane man. The pet on his lap looked up with a puckered brow, with a little human face of protracted woe. It said quite

clearly, "O master, the silence of those infinite spaces is terrifying to me." The men of Appletap gasped to hear a cat speak (for it had never happened before that *they* remembered) but the Milleress did not flinch and she said nothing, only she stood with her arms folded, quite silent and unmoved, and in this silence there was the attitude of a person who expects to be paid. The Duke tilted his head, as if he were listening. Then the cat said in its little voice:

"The bad picture
Leads me on.
What to do?"

The Duke shook it. It was evident that he did not like what he had heard. The cat gave a mew in a voice like a little girl's. It stood up in his lap and cried rapidly, "You see, all this nonsense is very exotic, until your grasp of life begins to deepen and glow beyond the common, I mean here and now is your America, I mean every time I cut an onion, that is like cutting my throat, isn't it, and there was a man who heard about the fifty-two enzymic reactions occurring constantly in the human body and who grew so perturbed in mind at the thought of them and so terrified because one of them might fail, that he hanged himself, and that is what I mean by hell. Do you see?"

Furiously the Duke flung the animal from him. It landed on the floor on its back and lay there weeping in distress. The Duke made as if to stumble up from his throne, but the Milleress stepped forward (whereupon the room shrank again) and the animal writhed to its feet and streaked back to its master's shoulder. The woman recited stolidly:

"Nor life nor death were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock, and barrel
Out of his bitter soul."

Very pretty, said the Duke, rising, and considering that the people of the Flat had always seen him painted as one who has a faint, mocking smile, the expression on his face was really extraordinary, *very pretty and very apt and quite enough, though I rather wonder where you got it, as I had always understood that the crown of an*

Appletap girl's education was making swans in butter-pats under the direction of some benevolent old hag. But understand, my girl, (and here his eyes gleamed dangerously from under his half-lowered eyelids) there are the fairy berries, which leave you with longings nothing in this world can satisfy; there are the dwarves, there are the anthropophagi and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders; there are worlds which twist the very structure of the human mind so horribly as to make Fairy-land look like a child's picnic, though the airs from Fairy-land can kill you, and I, who am lord of it all, can poison with a touch, can heal with a touch, can leave you grieving your life long, can show you hells and intimacies you never dreamed of, and I—who am shortly going to kill you—ask you again: Do you think that you, or any other human being, can bind me with your petty rules or loose me with your fences of custom and habitual blindness and comfort? I am lord of it all. Can you—or any other human being—keep me out?

“Keep you out?” said the Milleress flatly. “I think the question is, can I keep you in.” And again the walls shrank. The room was no bigger than a burgher's parlor. It was an Appletappian's front room. It was impossible that the entire militia of the Flat should be able to fit inside it, but somehow they all did. The Duke's head had sunk on his chest, for the Devil is never so dangerous as when he appears to be asleep. As in a small parlor or a small cave that is lit by firelight, so that everything appears through a haze or screen of flame, thus the whole room seemed to be full of fire. The Duke, now hunched on the bare ground beneath his own deformed back, sat with his face hidden by flames; the Milleress stood burning in her flesh; the Duke's pet curled up behind a wavering screen of fire. There was nobody else in the room; there was nothing but flame.

Then I don't exist? said the Duke, or someone.

You exist, said she.

Why?

Because I made you up. And seizing him by the beautiful, fair hair, in all that burning, she drew his head up and back so that his face was next to her own. They were twins. Passively—or scornfully—Duke Humphrey stared at the men of Appletap and nobody could tell

whether the Miller's daughter had gotten to look like the Duke or whether the Duke had gotten to look like the Miller's daughter. She kissed him on the mouth: mirror meeting mirror.

O my dear, she said, I wanted so much for you to exist. But let us at least call things by their proper names.

And at those words the Duke disappeared. The burghers of Appletap-cum-Cumber, the farmers of Appletap-on-Flat, the foreign sailors who come from lands beyond the Cumber and who can therefore be presumed to know more about these things than other people, all these watched the Duke disappear and were very, very shocked. He disappeared the way a dream does: first the vividness went out of him so that although he had the same coloring, you knew he wasn't real; and then he went in patches like a construction falling apart, this one, for instance, which is going to do so in a very few minutes, and then he was only the impression of an impression, the memory of brocade, a ruff, a cat sitting on a hump, and after that the memory goes too and all you have is the vague feeling that you had hold of something a minute ago, and then you only remember that you remember that you remembered. It's no use going to count the cats in Zanzibar because, if the truth were known, just between you and me, there are no cats there.

"Do not," said the Miller's daughter, "go around looking for the kingdom of Heaven as if it were a lost sheep, saying wow, here! and wow, there! because the kingdom of Heaven is inside you."

"Who are you," said the people of Appletap-on-Flat, all kneeling down instanter, "who speak not as the scribes but with authority?"

She said:

"I'm the author.

—Joanna Russ

The Very Last Days of Boston

That requires an answer.
Something.

Mason Terrace, where we all came afterwards—après coup, he says. Where the leaves this fall are skeletons. Where everything seems to have happened before; in that past we can't admit. Where the wind sounds like gills ripping out of the flesh of fish, and it rains. Where this morning the charred bodies of all the women I've loved come floating down the stream outside our window. Where women's remains go thump-thunk in the heart banks as we pass. Etc.

And don't think I haven't seen you waiting in the next room to kill me.

With this turtle staring.

Its blunt head is pushed against one side of the glass cube that contains it, at the center of the room. Its nose flattened against the glass and it never moves. Each time I cross the direct line of its vision, it blinks; nothing more. The shell has been expertly cut away, something I never knew was possible, and hangs on the wall above a Mexican cane chair. At the party tomorrow night it will become an ashtray. You have painted a Madonna-like self-portrait inside it.

Your hair is long in the portrait.

1. A man was cut in half by a window. But not to worry: his wife contrived a system of straps and replaceable cello tape by which he is capable of functioning nor-

mally; only in such acts as seating himself and sex does he experience difficulty, and must he proceed with caution. But there's more. One night when he put his dentures in the glass alongside the bed they dissolved, and the next morning he found a goldfish in the glass, which is of course in reality a jar. He carries it with him from bar to bar now that his wife's left him, and drinks only with the jar and the fish on the counter beside his beer, cigarettes, good intent; beside the hand that is open and holds so much memory.

One of them finds divorce papers in a drawer of the desk. 6. The said Plaintiff avers that in violation of his marriage vows and of the laws of this Commonwealth, the said Defendant did: Offer such indignities to the person of the Plaintiff as to render the condition of the Plaintiff intolerable and life burdensome. The part after the colon has been typed in. The date of marriage has been left blank; neither of them knows. Folded into the legal document is a scrap of brown notepaper on which her mother has detailed, step by step (and they are numbered), just what she is to ask the lawyers, just what she is to do. He corrects several minor inaccuracies and signs the papers. He puts them back into the drawer. One of them answers the phone and says that No, Jane is not home to a confused male voice which will not leave a message. One of them finds a letter to her on the letterhead of his publisher. The answer to this letter is filed away in the same envelope, never mailed or perhaps later revised. What I want to know is why did you feel it necessary to lie to me and tell me you weren't sleeping with anyone else, when I never required such a statement from you. I tried to call you last night and again at 6:30 this morning—needless to say, you weren't there. Living with him for six years has given me a very low tolerance for lies. Perhaps if you were first, things would be different—but that's how it is. And it ends: I need you more than 2 days out of 14. One of them is the husband.

2. He's an electrician. He keeps sticking his hand into appliances and so on and getting shocked, and he dis-

covers that this stimulates him. (Background on flagging interest in wife, poor relationship, affairs.) So he hooks himself and the woman up to batteries and a series of induction coils: they receive a steadily increasing flow of electrical power—which ends in a high-amperage shock at the exact moment each comes. Over the months he rigs more and more voltage into the circuits; they need more each time, to come at all. Months pass. One night when they come, and it's great, the lights go off outside. The window dark. They unhook the wire, tear off the taped electrodes, walk to the window, look out. They have just blacked-out New York City.

“Another month just left
Its umbrella in the hall

And I can't get used to your apartment. (Just *in* it, you say.) I've taken a room across the street, where I'm obliged also to take weak tea each afternoon with the landlady and to have cheap gauze curtains on my windows (as though they were wounded). At night I watch you return to your apartment with other men. The shapes in your window, against the shades.”

3. Women.

Women in boots to their knees or slacks and sandals. Women in Neiman Marcus gowns, women who know how to say no, women with green eyes, with small feet, with stockings that have elastic at the top and no garters, women with narrow hands.

Women met in elevators, you hold the doors open for them, women who look like Edna Millay, like Virginia Woolf, women turning back to look while they wait at the corners for traffic, women in windows. Women with things inside them. Women bleeding, women eating, women standing in front of a Stella painting. Women with their hands on pianos, arms, something else.

Women watching you through the doors of a State Hospital.

Women waiting.

4. “Pandora tells Jordan about kudsu. Back home. Arkansas: a small town cupped up against the river by

hills, and a problem of erosion. From Japan (this is just before the war) officials import a green vine, but forget to bring along the vine's natural enemy, a pale red beetle. The vine now covers the hills—a cushion of green several feet deep, leafy pads like the ears of small stuffed elephants—and climbs the radio towers, kills all flowers, chokes the trees. People must go out every week and chop it back away from their lawns.”

“There are twenty people living in the apartment now. Pandora writes in the bathroom, as this is the only quiet place. She has a shelf above the sink where she keeps her books and notes; on the door facing the toilet is a sketch of her done by Jordan, the breasts amazingly detailed, showing the stretch marks and the single long hair that curls down around her left nipple. Sitting here with all the others moving about out in the other room, she fills exercise books with poems and letters, using every part of the page. These are all addressed to men she has known—farewells there was no time for. Occasionally there is a knock at the door and she must surrender, for a few moments, her room.”

“Jordan had always thought crocuses were insects, small, unseen things that clicked away far off in the bushes and trees. Once, just before the end, Jordan tried to leave the city. He went out into the country where one night the streetlights failed to come on at dark. He ran back to his cabin, turned on all the lights and wrote Pandora a letter, in which he questioned the ideas that had brought him there. He looked up at the hills then and suddenly remembered what Pandora had told him about kudzu. Terrified, he fled back to the city—back to Pandora—arriving before his letter. When it came he threw it into the fire and sat for hours with the flames in his face, shaking with fear. Pandora never saw the letter. The next day, it began.”

I wander through your flat, looking for pain, assurance.
There are times we've been happy. The way your skin
goes over your hips. A letter from you one day in rain.
And waiting for me at the airport. When we met by mis-

take in town. But that was before all this. Before it was possible to have nothing outside your window. And I've given the windows away. Some will be interested in trying to rebuild, even now. Let them.

5. They are moving the city again. For the third time this year the men arrive in their trucks and brown trousers, smiling. They drive their vehicles wildly, like Dodgem cars, against the buildings. Walls, windows, doors fall into the backs of the trucks and the trucks begin to move away, out of the city, to take them somewhere else. The remains are washed away by torrential rains, which follow.

Till someday I'll be found in a small dirty room in the North End (which they've put back together). Their heads will be lined up on my bookshelf—all those men, necks crusted to the bare wood—and when they open the door—it won't have a lock and their approach will be silent—I'll look up and say, Jane. That you've come back.

And the water will be coming into Boston Harbor, carrying French ships.

(Something about fish.)

Where it never rains.

Women waiting.

Hope: an outline

I haven't named any of you. I never shall. And they should know that, by now, but keep asking. With their mouths and bright tools outside the small circle of light, and this chair.

Can I help it if your answers come walking out of dark subways at night. Alone, in white coats.

“What do you want from me, no, what do you really want.”

(Just to get up every morning with the same body beside me.)

That was one exchange.

Another:

This morning I found a cup of coffee three weeks old in the kitchen.

I want to go back to the doctor and say why did you give me dark eyes.

I want to return my left foot because the socks you gave me don't fit.

That—then letters addressed to postmen, knees of women that won't stay together. Some things I have to tell you because I'm sick of being loved and you'd better listen. (They won't understand.)

That you tore me out by the roots etc. and I pressed my lips against one kind of wound, a female organ.

That the body will not go out of itself. Like the mind; but try. It will go only into hers.

That planes are arriving from London so fast the men on the field who wave them in have got their arms tangled together into knots.

That I threw your luggage out of the window.

Remember walking up out of the subway at night, holding his hand, afraid to ask his name, and does he have one. And so on. 36 cigarettes a day, more, 3 nights & the desk clerk's nervous. A man torn to shreds by wind on the streetcorner one afternoon. Some souvenirs.

The second day, and I still won't talk. No, there was no one else involved. I was alone.

They are drinking tea now, crossing off the questions already asked, rewording the others to fit. The first one's 13-year-old daughter is pregnant, the second is worrying about athlete's foot. Brushing ash off the white socks he despises.

“What do you want from me, no, what do you really want.”

No, there was no one with me. I was alone.

They are playing back the tape from our last session.

The first one is tall and sad; he dislikes doing this. He watches my face from outside the small circle of light—

and, then, there are brief silences. He knows that soon now the second will kill him.

They are playing the tape. They have forgotten me. And the first one is watching the second closely.

Go on.

Tell a story. It doesn't matter which, because you know a lot of them; and those you don't know, you make up. Don't give the characters names, because they might not like the ones you choose, and they could have had so many other adventures anyhow. Don't be too specific about places because wherever you look we've been there before. Give the characters proper motivation and be suitably mysterious about your own. Put your name at the top of each page and enclose sufficient return postage.

With the change of season your Snomobile converts easily and quickly to a lawn mower. Simply disengage *hasps* 1-5 and remove the Cab. (See Diagram 1.) This unlocks Blade W, which may then be lifted from its cradle (see Diagram 2) and replaced by Blade S. Tighten *bolts* 1-8. (See Diagram 3.) Your mower may be adapted to particular lawn conditions either by tightening *lugs* 1 and 2 (see Diagram 4), or manually, with the internal Lift Selector. (See Diagrams 5 through 7.) With the Lift Selector at full *Open* (see Diagram 8), your mower will easily handle inclines of up to 110°.

A concentration camp. It might be 1999, it might be Poland, it is December. There are two men alive. A German. A Frenchman. The Frenchman is a member of the Resistance. From time to time he walks to the small window and looks out at the snow still falling, says to himself very quietly *Non!*, then returns to sit on the bunk. The bunk is a slab of steel welded to the steel wall. The snow has been falling for as long as he can recall. Then he gets up, walks to the door and shouts out into the hall: *Non!* echoes in the hollow chambers of the building. It has the sound of a blank going off in a revolver. The German is bringing his dinner. Kosher salami tonight, Grenouille.

It's kosher salami every night. He looks at the food, two translucent slices like congealed, pale red grease on a single slice of bread, and says to himself quietly *non*. They refer to one another as Gérald and Grenouille. Possibly this is because they have forgotten their names. Gérald sets the tray on the bunk. It, too, is steel. The ragged sleeve of his uniform touches the solitary wool blanket.

—You will eat your meal, Grenouille.

—Non.

—You must eat your meal, Grenouille, or you will die.

—Non.

—But you have no choice.

—Non.

—Please eat your meal, Grenouille.

—Non.

Gérald picks up the tray and starts to leave. Grenouille will never eat; he is afraid Grenouille will die. He does not understand that Grenouille would die only if he *did* eat: that this is all that keeps him alive, this choice of saying Non.

—Gérald.

—Yes Grenouille.

—Where am I, just tell me where I am.

—Where you were before. We have not moved you, I have received no orders to move you. You are where you were before. You know that.

—Then . . . I've forgotten. I . . . don't remember.

There is a pause. Gérald stares sadly at the food.

—So long . . .

—Please eat, Grenouille.

He waits for an answer, then moves again towards the door.

—'I am a man, Jupiter.'

—What Grenouille.

—Nothing.

Today:

- ~~1. Take books back to library check out Neruda
—'Heights'—~~
2. Call dr re bloodtype
- ~~3. Letters—~~
- ~~4. Ms to BReview—~~
- ~~5. Have lamp repaired—~~
- ~~6. Shop food (mushrooms)—~~
- ~~7. Pick up tree at D's—~~
8. Call J
- ~~9. Go over to Hyannis P and bail water out of the
—gdmn boat—~~
- ~~10. Tape, cigarettes—~~
- ~~11. Movie?—~~

Tell her that yes you will stay away from other women and questionable situations. You will try, yes, to become a better person, but you can't be sure; how much of this is after all a lie. Imply that it may all be. You will do anything of course, but does she really want you to, to stay with her. She knows very well what you need from her. Will she give it and can she, without damage to herself. And naturally you can't live without her, nothing makes sense that way but you don't have enough however massive love for both. Amazing. Can she, and can you, decide what she wants, what she really wants. Then go to bed with her. If that doesn't work, go away.

I am working in my room. I've got up early and there's much to be done. Still, the sheets of paper are slowly making their way from the stack on the left of my desk to that on the right, near the lamp. From time to time the phone will ring. An editor will ask is that poem ready. The one . . . And no, I will say; there's this comma . . . Ah yes, commas. Troublesome things. There follows a brief discussion on the role of the comma in contemporary writing, and the advisability of my foregoing their use; the example of Apollinaire. Finally I hang up the phone and continue work. A few more sheets

move from the stack on the left, into the space before me, go away to join those on the right. This time it is the doorbell which rings.

A stout small man with a red face stands there smiling at me. In his hands he holds a bundle of papers which, upon my admitting to my name, he begins to disassemble. What I thought a bundle is actually one large, stiff document. It hangs from his outstretched arms now, swinging in the wind like a bedsheet set out on the line to dry. It is a summons, the printing in script. Your postal expenses, he says. Your rent, the typewriter, the tape recorder. . . . I pay him—I can't afford the loss of more time which this document promises—and together we search for the line upon which I am to inscribe my name, having already admitted to it. This accomplished, I return to the study. It is ten. The stout little man drives past outside my window in a metallic-blue MG. The phone sounds, unanswered. I hear the morning post drop through the slot onto the kitchen floor but do not go down to retrieve it. I resume my work. The sheets of paper are now sorted by color. There are four stacks: top copy, carbon, drafts, notes and commentary. White, yellow, blue, pink. The doorbell rings again.

I open the door to find a sheaf of papers beneath my nose. They issue from a small feminine hand attached, in turn, to a tall blonde in bellbottoms and tanktop. Moonlighting, she says. Overtime, trying to catch up. I know it's Saturday and I do hope I'm not disturbing you at your work but. Well, these bills, you see. They have to be paid. We have coffee together and with a pad of my yellow paper, the paper used for first drafts and carbons, we detail the items rendered on the bills. I make a token payment and sign an agreement. The rest will be paid within the fortnight. It is, after all, so easy to sign one's name. One has done it so many times; it requires no thought. We kiss and the blonde rides away on her Honda. I return to my study. The stacks of paper have grown in my absence.

The postman rings twice. It is a special delivery letter. Again I sign my name. I have accepted this letter, I am liable to its content. We gave you service when you needed it now we need money please see that we get it. This is scrawled in ballpoint on a formal bill dated three months

ago. The bill, at the top, reads Plumbing and Heating. I have never heard of the firm listed there.

The next is a mild-mannered representative from the utility companies. He has had the kindness to come out on this Saturday morning (though it is now afternoon) to inform me that, unless the companies receive payment within the week, my telephone, electricity and water will be taken away from me. The water, I assume, carried away in ponderous, elephant-like trucks, the electricity lured into bell jars and trapped there. I offer to exchange the phone, which I am willing to do without (it is ringing even as I speak with him), for maintenance of the other services. I will even surrender my water, as there is a lake nearby. But the electricity. I own an IBM, surely he must understand, my source of income, etc. He laughs at these little jokes of mine and descends the stairs to his gray Lincoln. I go upstairs and rip out the telephone wires from the wall, then into the basement to shut off the watermain. I am complying to their requests, I am adapting myself to the demands of my society, to its norms.

The left-hand stack, the unworked material, approaches the ceiling. There are other callers. I listen to their demands, their explanations, their requests, I comply, I will meet my obligations. Yes. I sign my name again and again until, at last, it begins to look strange to me, foreign and new. That signature racing across scored black lines. I pledge my arms, my heart to science. My body, upon death, to the local University Hospital (thereby meeting the bill for my child's birth). They tattoo the sole of my foot.

I am in my room working. They arrive between stanzas, lines, in the caesurae. Each time I go down to talk now, I carry with me papers from that increasing left-hand stack, which I burn in the garden as they talk.

Then for several hours I am alone. The telephone will not function, there are no callers, I have crushed the clock-work of the doorbell and pay no attention to repeated poundings at the doors downstairs. I work. And the stacks are exhausted. They go into various envelopes and files and one, the top copy, distributes itself among a number of envelopes which I will mail when I am able to secure money for postage.

It is six. I am eating dinner in the kitchen when I look

up from the table and discover a man standing at the window looking in at me. I go to the door and dismantle the locks, which I have bought on credit, just this afternoon, at the hardware store.

It is seven. He stands silently at the door and watches me. He is holding only an old envelope. On the backside of the envelope he has scribbled numbers and words. Our records show . . . He has on his list every art exhibit to which I have been, every concert I've attended, the title and performers of every record I own, the genus and size of each tree in my lawn. Yes, I ask. Yes.

He is silent. And silently continues to stare into my eyes and judge, with one sideways glance, the shape and size of my ears. He stares back quietly at my eyes. The light is on his face now.

And I wait.

—James Sallis

VANISHING POINTS

1

the world winds up into a cloud
the wind winds up water's
blue cloth
carries the bear's spirit
down-mountain to a harmless valley
a wilderness too small
lights spring from a dark well
where there used to be water
by the beads in my spine
lonesome abacus
I count the stars
seek passage through heaps
older than history
find a man who walks
a smoking rope
see the fire at his heels
jump jump jump
from the streets
but he runs
fire snaps at his heel
like a sheep dog
it trembles like an orange puppy
whorls of smoke rise behind him
the goal advances continually
a galaxy moving out
he's a bead in my spine
his sweat a Milky Way
which pours up my neck
listen to the green knight
in the forest
as the world winds up
into one massive atom
O man of fire

tops of the waves are
 silver as fish with every now and then
 a lace cap on
 I wander over everything and shall be
 every thing
 even those people in the cities
 discontinued editions
 and poets grumbling because
 sometimes a short page
 is better than a volume
 after the broom has swept
 our skins away
 after it whisks night's hair
 from our sleep
 the wind ignores
 where others are going
 once I thought what if
 the universe were a rectangle
 we'd have a different mathematics
 maybe no decimal points
 gamma gone from our alphabet
 just the same I hope
 the waves fish wind
 the rivers
 the world in orbit
 go the long way round

—*Sonya Dorman*

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, BILLY BOY, BILLY BOY?

His building had fifty-nine floors. The outer walls were dark green marble with black trim, they had slit windows, not to aid visibility, but for aesthetic purposes. The slits reflected the evening sun and gleamed gold, they were silver in the morning, they sparkled and shone at times, then again they were merely black. The marble went up to about the third floor. It was very difficult to tell from the outside just how much of the building was faced with the polished marble, but surely not more than three floors. So wasteful to have carried it farther. From that point, not yet determined, but about the third floor, to the top the building was gray. They had done the slit windows all the way. Sometimes it looked like corduroy. Sometimes it looked like the building was dripping gold.

There were three very broad, shallow steps that led to the entrance of the building. Like the windows, the steps were ornamental. The building just as easily could have been level with the street. The step risers were less than six inches, possibly five, and were actually awkward, between steps and a level surface. There were brass planters in the steps, four feet wide, nine or ten feet long. One year they had changed the plants twenty-three times. They all died. Cigarette butts stuck out of the dirt, and gum wrappers, and drink cans, flattened, or squashed into shapes that were topologically rather pleasing. They lay about the plants like fallen blossoms, colorful, not really hideous, except that training said so.

The doors. Revolving doors, three. Two double doors with ten feet of air space between them. Four air walls. Bill never did understand how or why they worked, in the summer the air was cool, in the winter, hot. There was a definite line that separated the outside from the inside, even if it was invisible. The inside was different.

He walked alone, toward the elevators. No elevators

went to all floors. There were banks that went from ground zero to eight. Others that started at nine and went up to fifteen, and so on. His elevator went from thirty-four to forty-two. He assumed that it continued after he left it at thirty-eight. The button lights indicated that it was prepared to rise another four floors.

Every morning from the time he left his spacious and empty apartment, got through the subway, across town on the bus, up the three low steps, and the elevators that went from the thirty-fourth floor to at least the thirty-eighth floor, he was quite alone.

"Let's take it again, something's wrong with the tempo . . ." Rolly shook his long hair and fingered his beard.

"How about trying it with the drums?" Mole said. Lettered on the bass drum was: THE PICKLE DOOR.

Bill stood up, pushing his electric organ away from him. "Look, guys, let me set the stage. A guy alone, walking the streets. *Alone*. Dig? His girl's gone. Left him flat. No reason. Nothing. And there's not another one in the world for him." He shrugged at the skepticism. "Look, you want to hit the old crowd or not? You want to eat for a change? You want to get out of this stinking basement (no offense, Mole) with its rats that've evolved into five-foot-ten pink-skinned brown-suited squinty-eyed blood-sucking saber-toothed rodents, for chrissakes? No more fires, no more busts, no more gas attacks, just one winter of being warm and dry."

"No drums?"

"No drums! You asshole. Soft. Melancholic. Sad. Wistful. Now. GO!"

They took it from the top.

The apartment was clean. They had scraped the paint off down to bare wood and started over with it. Bill had had to put up wall board here and there where the plaster crumbled when they had begun to scour the walls, but it had been worth it. He had divided the room with wall board at the same time, and had not been forced to get a permit, with the pages of questions to be answered first. They called it a three-room apartment now. After the

streets, in that section of the lower East Side, it was like entering another world. Clean walls, clean wood, bare, gleaming floors with small, washable, and often washed, scatter rugs. And they had used their total debt limit for an air conditioner so that they didn't have to worry about the daily pollution index, at least not after they got home from work. They both hated to leave their own rooms even to go down the hall to the bathroom. In the beginning they had tried to keep that clean, but they had given up.

She worked half days only. She would be eligible for a full time job as soon as the baby was registered in a nursery at three. She met him at the door and kissed him, then drew back and said, "A few minutes ago Susan was looking at television with me, and as plain as day she said, 'NBC'. Can you imagine? And only two."

Susan started to cry and continued to cry through the newscast. She did it almost every night. It was her daily crying time, they agreed.

Billy was ten and his mother was thirty-five and didn't look it, his father was forty and did look it. He was a professor with Grave Responsibilities and Moral Convictions. And it was almost Christmas. Every year his mother took him to town to look at the windows and shop for Father and have a hot fudge sundae, and buy an early, not-secret gift for him. To ease the anticipation pains.

It was snowing lightly and the train was coming around the mountain in miniature America with flags on almost all the houses and an army standing at attention while a band of inches-high red white and blue members played silent music. Tiny Christmas trees blinked and Santa Clauses swayed holding bulging stomachs. The train flashed around a hill out of sight and the skaters waltzed and the band played and the tree lights blinked and the snow fell gently. But now the store window's music was drowned by a roaring sound from the other end of the street and he felt his mother's hand tugging at him.

"Come on, Billy. Let's go inside. It looks like a demonstration."

He stared at the window, then down the street where the cars were suddenly obliterated by what looked like a black tidal wave.

Rolly twanged a discord. He looked at Bill helplessly. "I just don't dig it. I mean, it's going to put them to sleep. It's not like there's only one chick in the world."

"It ain't that," Mole said. "You know what it is. Crap. Shit. So he moons over a bird. So what?"

Bill ran his thumb over the keys, and then spun around. "Look, I listened to records at the library for three solid weeks, five-year-old records, ten-year-old records, twenty-year-old records. There hasn't been anything like this for ten years, fifteen years. So what's it going to cost to gamble on it now? We can do it under a moony name. Dreamers. Or, The Stardusters. Something corny. Or, The Sound. That's pretty good. Nostalgia, that's what we'll give them. For a time when a guy could just go out and walk up and down the streets if he wanted to."

On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings they had meetings. And on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons they had meetings. The table was round. This month Henry Moreno was chairman. They discussed and planned for the next five years, so that no matter what the date, Bill's thoughts were supposed to be geared to five years in the future. Because We Plan Your Tomorrow—his department's motto.

"Say, who was it who came up with the idea of a self-rolling toothpaste tube?" Henry asked, during a pause in the proceedings.

He glanced at Walter Neery, who shrugged and looked blank. The inquiring gaze went around the table and no one suggested an answer. When it was Bill's turn to look blank, he did. He could have said, "Matt's idea." That would have singled out Matt for criticism. And next time, he might be the one so named. So he looked blank, and Henry sighed and murmured, "Too bad. Wanted to put his name down for a bonus. But that's the way it goes. Joint efforts, joint decisions, joint benefits. Right, fellows?"

They nodded. Bill wondered if anyone else could turn off the world. He doubted it. They were all too pre-occupied with Creating A Better World—the company's motto. "Like a phoenix," the small print went on, "we will rise again to fulfill the dreams of past generations . . ."

"Anyway," Henry said, "market research has finished the survey. There will be a definite demand for the self-

rolling tube. R&D is kicking it around now. And this department has earned another bonus point."

The eleven o'clock newscast rehashed the same items that the baby had cried through earlier. Casualty figures remained stable. The senate had finished all the legislation that the president had asked for in what was called the most efficient, most far-sighted, most patriotic assembly ever gathered in Washington. The air inversion over London had claimed the ten thousandth victim that morning. Washington announced the plans to recall the history books in all elementary and secondary schools to correct mistakes discovered by the Advisory Committee on Education.

"Are you certain that you won't mind if Dad comes here for a few weeks, just until he gets his bearings again?"

"You know I don't mind." She was applying a contact patch to his coveralls, and didn't look up.

"I'm sure that it won't be for long. He'll apply for a permit to move right away. He's pretty independent."

"Don't be so apologetic. I knew about him when we were married. It's all right. He made a mistake, and he's paid. I certainly don't hold that against him. Here, will this hold, do you think?"

He took the coveralls from her and put them down. "Let's turn off that blasted set and go to bed. We'll have our room to ourselves just five more nights before he gets here."

"With the curtain up we'll never know the baby's in there. Wait a minute. I'd better check the schedule. I forget if I turned it on when I first came home." He watched her check off the public interest programs that had been on the air. She frowned over the schedule and he knew that she had forgotten. Rumor said that you could alter the meter, but he didn't know how, and he didn't know anyone who did.

"It's all right," he said. "Leave it alone. I'll turn it off later. Come on." So they made love in the bedroom and in the other room the set talked on and on about the patience of the government and the intransigence of the enemy at the conference table, and about the rules and regulations regarding the recently passed Right to Inspect Bill.

Billy eavesdropped on his parents at every opportunity. It was a game with him, but a serious game. He had trouble imagining them without him, and was almost convinced that they discussed him exclusively when he was absent. They sat on the couch listening to a small tape recorder. And Billy became cramped and chilled from kneeling on the hall floor in his pajamas, also listening, thoroughly bored.

"Gentlemen, this is an Executive session, you all understand. No word of what gets said in this room will be carried beyond those doors, nor will it appear in any report. Now, we have all heard the evidence of the experts. We have studied the charts, and the data. Gentlemen, unless we act immediately with every measure put forth by Doctor Gordon, our entire civilization is doomed."

"Now, Roger. Jest take it easy, son. Doctuh, do I understand you to say that unless each of those measures is enacted almost immediately and with absolute thoroughness, then there's no hope at all to save mankind?"

"No sir. What I said, Senator, is that unless these things are done now, today, we'll all die. Our children will die. Their children won't be born. No 'almost', Senator. No qualifications at all."

"I see, Doctuh. I see. You've heard of Malthews? Haven't you, suh?"

"Malthus? The Malthusian theory? Yes sir, I have."

"Yes. You see, son, I jest read a little bit about this Malthews and it seems to me that he was saying a hundred years ago almost exactly what you're saying again today. Now, you see, son, how confusing this can get to an old non-scientist like me."

"Senator, I could recapitulate all the evidence you have heard and seen, but we have done that. We've been holding these meetings six months now. You know what the consensus of the participating scientists is. Not simply the population explosion, but the concomitant pollution, which was not foreseen by Malthus, sir. That is our concern. Not only here in the States, but around the world. The only real division we have had, sir, is the timetable for the disaster that we all see. And about half of us think that even if we did initiate those steps immediately, it would still be too late. That the only way to save any part of mankind is through the decimation of our population

now. Halve it. In order to save half. Not through war that would leave ruins and a weakened and irradiated billion people, but through a humane program that would leave the technology intact, and the survivors healthy and aware of the sacrifice of the dead. They would have to have leadership that would infuse them with a new sense of purpose.”

“Doctuh, for weeks now something has been pestering at me. Jest won’t go away, no suh. Now in this here Executive Session, without anyone in here taking notes, and no tape recorders going, no stenographers. Jest between us here and now, suh, I want to get this off my chest. You, suh, Doctuh Gordon, are looney.”

One day they didn’t come back when he entered the office. For the first time since discovery of the wondrous gift that he had, the gift was frightening. He stopped and stared at the empty office, the desks without girls, the files without clerks, the water fountains without two or three natty young men. Slowly, very carefully he made his way past his secretary’s empty chair, into his small office where a memo reminded him that today the chairman from R&D would visit the regular Friday morning conference. He went to the meeting and sat down in his customary chair, in an empty room. Once he felt compelled to speak, which he did, immediately forgetting what it was that he said. He left promptly at twelve and returned to his office where he got his hat and coat. He stopped then. He was supposed to have lunch with Walter Neery and someone from Sales. He went through all the motions, arriving at the elevators where they were to meet at precisely twelve-ten, taking the empty car down, walking alone around the corner to a French restaurant that they always used when it was on expense account.

He ate alone, but now and then made a comment to the air. He didn’t know what happened to the bill. It came and went again, as food had done. Back in his office he clutched his head for a long time, and finally when he put his hands down again, he was smiling. It really was much better this way.

“Billy, don’t let go of my hand! Whatever happens, don’t let go!”

They weren't going to reach the door to the store. Too many people with the same idea and the demonstrators were filling the street and the sidewalks and the police were coming from the other direction with sirens blaring and there were popping noises not at all like guns or even windows breaking. And over it all the loudspeakers played *Silent Night* and when that was finished *The Twelve Days of Christmas* and the train was coming over the mountain again.

"Honey, is it true that they have a way of telling if you're in the room with the TV or not?"

"No. Where'd you hear such a crazy thing?"

"Oh, some of the girls at work. You know. I mean it wouldn't do much good to turn it on and leave it on all the time if they know whether or not you're watching it too."

"Well, forget it. Another rumor."

"I wonder who starts such rumors. Haven't you ever wondered just where they come from, Bill?"

"Washington. What's to wonder? Is the room ready for him?"

"Yes. Do you think he'll be bitter?"

"About what. He made the speeches. He advocated genocide, or something. He never denied it. And they found him guilty of sedition. What's he got to be bitter about?"

"That sounds good. Keep it like that. Now let's try it again from the top. Exactly the same way. I'll get it on the recorder and then we'll decide if that's what we want to tape. Okay, guys."

They played it again, then listened to it. The Mole, whose basement room they used for practice, held his nose and made retching motions. But Rolly stared at Bill thoughtfully. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah. A guy alone, not in a compound or nothing, just alone, walking in the city at night time. The dumb bastards will eat their hearts out. They'll think it's romantic. Okay, let's make the master tape tomorrow." They broke up then.

Rolly and Bill stayed close together, and the hand-made pipe gun in Bill's pocket was cool against his hand as they walked down the street. Rhonda joined them at The Joint and they stayed there until the crowds thinned out after

three and then went to Bill's room. They skirted a bunch of blacks, twenty or twenty-five of them, conscious of the watchful eyes until they turned the corner. At his street Bill stopped again, briefly. An unmarked tank, with a uniformed skinhead visible through the observation bubble, was moving slowly down the street, sweeping for mines. They ducked into a doorway and waited for it to finish and rumble away. From the other end of the street a lone car appeared, headed for the tank. Bill looked up for the copter that he could hear faintly over the din of the city noise. He couldn't find its lights in the murky sky that seemed supported by the tops of the buildings.

"Christ!" he said in disgust. "Come on, let's go in the back way." He grabbed Rhonda's arm and nearly pulled her off her feet when she resisted.

"I want to watch!"

"Come on. The copter will pick you off if you're on the street."

"What in hell's wrong with you guys tonight," Rhonda asked furiously, inside the building. "Pussy-footing around like a couple of blows from Missouri or something."

"Wanta stay in one piece for just a little while, doll," Rolly said, panting. "Long enough to cash in and live it up for a change."

She marched into Bill's room and tossed a gas grenade down on a chair. Bill winced. One day when she did that, it would go. She hooked her thumbs under the tabs on her high pants and opened the twin zippers that let the pants fall down in two pieces around her knees. She kicked them off. The sounds of a pitched battle from the far end of the street erupted, and they all listened, identifying the equipment being used: gas bombs, home-made mines, automatic hand weapons, the whine of gas launchers. They relaxed.

"I can see it now," she said. "The Pickle Door, high as clouds on green stuff, living it up in a compound, manning the guns, taking guided tours of the city in armored buses. Funneeeee. They'll let you in the day it rains diamonds."

"You did what you could, darling. God knows you tried to make them understand."

"And what good will that do in ten years, or fifteen

years? Who's going to say, 'Oh, yes, Doctuh Gordon tried to make them see that the catastrophe was already on the way, a tiny snowball high on the slope?'

"Sh, darling. I don't think Billy's asleep yet. He's all excited about going to town tomorrow. Christmas. Your coming home. It's all been too much for him too fast."

"You don't believe me, do you? Not even you."

"It isn't that. But what can I do? Except go on living. Try to keep us all alive and healthy and reasonably happy? What else can I do? What else can you do?"

"Write another book. Make more speeches. Find something that'll kill fifty percent of the population, without harming the other fifty percent."

"William!"

"Can you convince me that it's wrong? Isn't it better to lose half than to lose all? Isn't it?"

"And what about Billy?"

Billy, shivering on the floor outside the door, fell asleep waiting for the answer to the question.

They came back now and then. Not often, and they didn't stay. Someone would bob into his line of vision, then float out again before he could focus on the image. He realized that there was a mechanism working for him, something that warned him, or guided him, so that he never stumbled over any of them, or missed a cue, although he wasn't aware of them as they came. Occasionally he felt that he should say something or other, and when he did, the feeling of unease that had bothered him went away.

He hadn't seen a child for over a month. He walked through the park now without seeing the rows on rows of perambulators, the toddlers, the pre-schoolers, the elementary school children, as numerous as ants. Breeding like cockroaches, they were trying to fill the gap with babies. No one stared at him wondering if he was William Gordon's son, wondering why he wasn't married yet, why he didn't have four, five, six children. He was certain that he was as hard for them to see as they were for him. He felt safe. He liked the silent world.

Bill stared at the ceiling and tried not to hear the tele-

vision. He tried not to think about the evening, and could think of nothing else.

Her whisper: "He's so old. I thought he was younger."

"He always looked older than he was. He's only fifty-five."

Their bed touched the curtain that separated this half of the room from the baby's half. He could hear every snuffle that the baby made, every change in her breathing, every whimper and wheeze. And on the other side of the wallboard, *he* was listening to the television, chuckling at it, talking back. Bill's lips tightened. *He* had laughed a bit louder at a statement attributed to the president. He would get them all in trouble. He was a crazy, senile, babbling old man. They would have to take that into account, if he went on like that in front of anyone. They must know what they had done to him . . . Bill heard his teeth grinding before he was aware of the movement of his jaw. What had they done to him? He was a prattling moron.

But why had he cried? What had he meant?

"I couldn't do it. I knew we should, that we could. I had the stuff. A last chance, that's what I told them. Just listen and do something now. A last chance. And when the time came, I couldn't do anything. They came and took away Billy and then they found it. We had it all. It would have been simple. I knew what to do. We had the stuff, all we needed. And they still trusted us enough. And I couldn't do it!" Then he had cried.

Why?

"Billy! Billy!" He couldn't see her at all. He was being pushed and he knew that he didn't dare fall. They'd walk on him. Boots cowboy boots snow boots police boots. He couldn't make out any of their faces they were all too close and he was too short. He couldn't tell the police from the marchers. The spectators from the demonstrators. He couldn't hear her screams any longer. There was one long scream in his ears and one long smear of red before his eyes. And a burning pain sharp burning pain of a cut or a lump or something that made him feel strange and lightheaded and not able to think. He couldn't breathe and his eyes were on fire and he was afraid to touch them because he might rub it in and he couldn't stop himself rubbing his eyes hearing the piercing scream that

wouldn't end choking coughing being sick adding the smell of vomit to the scream and the red smear. Her face kept swimming before his burning eyes. White wide eyed with a cut that started somewhere in her hair and went down her cheek down into her neck and blood on her lips like lipstick on Halloween coming down the corner of her mouth down her skin.

He wondered how long before someone noticed that he was acting strangely, or noticed that he wasn't really there much of the time. Promising young executive missing, without a clue. Would someone else move into his nice, airy apartment overlooking the Hudson? Would they put someone else in his office? Would he wander in one day and sit down in the new man's lap and never even realize it?

That night he burned all his father's notes, his diary, the newspaper clippings. He added them one page at a time, playing the "He loves me, loves me not" game. But he said, "He was right. He was wrong." Toward the end he dozed and lost track. And knew that there was no way he would ever know.

Billy couldn't tell which side was which. He was being swept along with people and when he tried to hold onto someone he was flung off and couldn't get his balance again and he fell and the boots did walk on him. And he couldn't tell whose boots they had been.

Bill found his father the next morning. He had hung himself from the water pipe in the kitchen half of his room. There was only an inch of space between his feet and the floor. If he had been an inch taller, he wouldn't have been able to do it.

Bill stared at him, hating him for doing it there, then. Before he touched the body he turned on the TV set. The meter would be waiting and there'd be enough questions without having them add any more about why they were avoiding the news. Then he went out to the corner phone and called the police, listening absently to the beep-beep that said the call was being recorded. A platoon of adolescents in grey uniforms marched by on their way to

school. They didn't turn their heads to look at him in the booth.

Bill stiffened at the sound of a police tank starting the high pitched wail of the tear gas launcher. He relaxed again. It was at least a block away.

"Tell me how you got the scars, Bill," Rhonda said, tracing the one that started at his forehead and ended in his eyebrow. "Your old man?"

"No. I told you, he was killed during the Christmas riots. My old man and my mother, or so they said." He fingered the scars, then shook his head hard. "I told you I don't remember. An accident, or something. It doesn't signify." He sat up in the bed. "Listen, I've been thinking. We'd go out of our skulls in a compound. Right? How about a trailer, an armored trailer with a grenade launcher. We could take a trip. Maybe even make it out to the coast."

"Yeah, baby," Rhonda said, sitting up too, her eyes sparkling. "I heard that there are some small compounds out in the boonies that one guy with a launcher could take all by himself."

—*Kate Wilhelm*

Chapter One

Duffy, an archetypal beach boy, runs a Miami Beach hotel pool. He is in his late twenties, well built and tanned, not too bright. He's a connoisseur of womanflesh and very successful with the kind of wealthy, desperate women he meets in his work. He recalls a smorgasbord of best-loved dishes, from the former wife of the ex-Governor of South Dakota, who convinced him to use his SCUBA gear for immoral purposes, to Sanna Taroff, Sabra nymphet who practiced fellatio on him while he was paying his toll at Alligator Alley.

One in particular fascinates him, reminds him of a fancy convertible, "hard-driven for a couple of years by a bastard with a cigar, then traded in." He thinks of the used car lots where such cars are covered with furry animals and signs saying BUY ME! Hard driven, yes, but this one is softer than the others somehow, and needs protection. He gives her SCUBA lessons and dinner, takes her later to a night club called the Sugar Cube.

Wanda is in some kind of trouble but won't tell him about it. As they listen to a band called the Mini-Pauses, Wanda suddenly shrinks in terror from a man who reminds Duffy of an Italian stand-up comic. The man says nothing, just smiles at her, but she flees the club, Duffy following in confusion.

They make love in her hotel room and Duffy is hooked for the first time in his life. He knows that whatever trouble she's in, he must help. He forgets in his romantic passion that he is a coward. Wanda tells him vaguely of a bargain made with an evil man which she must now keep. Duffy, thinking of the Italian comic, asks her if it's Mafia trouble. "What difference does it make what you call it, dear Duffy," she says. "It has many names, but you don't want to know any of them. It usually doesn't hurt anyone

who doesn't ask to be hurt, and I suppose it's fair in its way. It won't hurt me, I promise."

"Not as long as I'm here," says Duffy.

Chapter Two

Duffy learns that he and the Italian comic aren't the only men in Wanda's life. At her room the next evening he meets Hal Mimeo, an ad man who speaks through his teeth like Jim Backus and who is trying to persuade Wanda to do something. Duffy kicks him out, still not understanding Wanda's plight.

They go to El Grotto Del Gato, where the exiles hang out. It is Duffy's favorite bar. Little Juan, the head waiter, is excited and anxious to tell Duffy something. He's been trying to get him into the Labor Day Movement to liberate Cuba and Haiti for months, but apolitical Duffy isn't interested. The Movement's one plan—to throw cream pies at Black Panther Headquarters—fell through because they discovered there were no headquarters in Miami and nobody could raise plane fare for even a single pieman to New York. Their only regular activity is sending a miserably armed boat into Biscayne Bay once a month, after having alerted the Coast Guard in advance to intercept it.

As they look around, Duffy describes some of the regulars—Dr. Dupree, the Marxist pediatrician from Haiti; Señor Marcos, a former Cuban sugar grower and president of the Cuba branch of Coca-Cola; and Conchita, an Ayn Rand ideologue who looks and acts like Lupe Velez. Conchita wants to see him for old times' sake, so he walks over, entangling himself briefly in the Mini-Pauses' wiring. They are now disguised as Los Cuatros Cojones. Conchita gives him an ideological tongue-lashing, then asks him what he sees in that piece of fluff he's with. He has no answer she will understand and walks away, as she hisses "looter" after him.

Little Juan tells him the Movement is finally moving, and to prove it points to a crew-cut, sunburned, CIA man making his way toward Conchita. Duffy cannot believe it has happened. Surely they won't go through with it. He tells Little Juan that he cannot go, as much as he yearns for action, because he now has Wanda to protect. Sud-

denly they hear an ominous voice saying, "Amano, amano, amano kicka you ass." Behind them is the Italian comic. It is the comic, for Duffy remembers the bit from television, with the comic's little Italian grandfather saying, "Amano, amano, kicka you butt." They rush from the bar and Duffy takes Wanda home.

At his own apartment, he watches TV, first a travelogue with bare-breasted native girls, then the Merv Griffin show. The comic is on, saying, "You gonna get it, Mr. Duffy the bum. You better stay the fuck away from Wanda or amano burn you ass you fuckin' bum you."

"Beautiful, Dino," says Merv. "Funny bit." Duffy's ears are ringing as we cut to a commercial in which Hal Mimeo is selling something with "Revolutionary Action." Duffy realizes that his phone is ringing too and shuts off the set. It is Wanda, saying, "I love you, but you must go away. Please believe me and go." A pause, then a voice rattling, "Amano, amano, amano." Duffy screams once, hangs up the phone, packs and takes a cab to El Grotto to bury himself in the Movement.

Chapter Three

Lancelot Silverman, Jewish intellectual and Navy journalist, awakes slowly from a dream of high romance in which Rima of *Green Mansions* invites him to wholesome adventure in the jungle. He finds he is staring into the stubbly armpit of Amaryllis, a fortyish woman who, had she been given a better head for business, might have been called a whore. He is due aboard ship that day for his first sea duty. He's only been in the Navy a short while and doesn't know what to expect. Amaryllis knows he is going to the Caribbean and hysterically begs him first to stay, then to bring her a potion which will restore her youth. Sleepily, disgustedly, he agrees and leaves.

He boards the aircraft carrier USS JACK PAAR to discover the old Navy is dead. The ships are now named for cultural figures rather than war heroes. Sailors spend their spare time at poetry readings, rock concerts, light shows and underground movies. Lance meets O'Neil and Christy, the other journalists, and Rutherford, a stuttering, bumbling ensign who is in charge of their office.

Silverman is assigned the job of stapling Rutherford's clothes together each morning, the ensign having torn all his buttons off. He will also do the astrology column, ball scores and world news.

Chapter Four

More orientation aboard JACK PAAR. Christy befriends a Negro sailor who claims his father once owned the largest hotel in Port au Prince and is now one of Papa Doc's chief antagonists. There are rumors on the AP wire in their office of trouble in the Caribbean. Scuttlebutt has it their ship is heading there. Lance meets the captain, a vague, permissive Charlton Heston type. All the journalists are romantics and begin grinding out anti-Papa Doc propaganda in the ship's paper. For a while it is permitted. Rutherford reveals he has an uncle named Mimeo whom he'll join in the ad biz after his hitch.

The captain throws a ship's party. The Mini-Pauses appear as a band called the Four Brave Salts. Rutherford, a comic-Hamlet midnight muser given to walking off the flight deck, walks instead into the middle of the performance, nearly electrocuting himself and the band.

Chapter Five

Rutherford is confined to quarters for nearly breaking up the party. The newspaper staff is really turning out the propaganda now. Suddenly the captain asks them to stop. "Not yet," he says. "Trust me."

"No thanks," they say. "Matter of principle." He chains up the mimeograph machine. They write pamphlets by hand until the masters-at-arms confiscate all their material. Then they sit in the captain's office, drinking his liquor and smoking his grass amid aviation gas fumes.

Chapter Six

Duffy is on two weeks training duty in the Everglades, preparatory to the attack on Haiti. Other exiles have seen

CIA agents observing them and they wonder why they haven't been stopped. One day Duffy sees the same crew-cut CIA man with the sunburnt nose fixing a tire on a back road. In the car is the Italian comic. Duffy gives up trying to figure it, makes fiery love to Conchita, who doubts his convictions but loves his growing beard. Rumor is they will sail soon for the Dominican Republic and attack Haiti across the border.

One night they are sitting around a smoking campfire, smoking, when suddenly one of the new recruits, a lad from San Francisco named Fatty Acid, tells a story:

"In the Everglades, when winter is coming on, the Seminole Indians tell the tale. It is a story with a beginning and no end. The story of Captain Manatee goes on, because his struggle goes on, in the swampy Everglades, and in the nauseating and boring mythology of the Seminoles. Captain Manatee was not always Captain Manatee. There was a time, many years ago, as the legend tells, when he was merely Army Grosfeld, an insipid and acne-plagued shoe clerk in Orlando, Florida." And Fatty continues his head rap as they sit stoned and mildly interested. He tells of Grosfeld's discovery that Fuzzy Lipschits, a Miami shoe magnate, has cornered the market on gold lamé wedgies, so that none of Grosfeld's customers can get their Christmas wedgies. Grosfeld buys a used wet suit and a condemned SCUBA tank and becomes Captain Manatee. Every Christmas season he creeps from the swamp to try to steal enough wedgies from Lipschits to serve his Orlando customers. The sacrifice is great. It is a rare year when he is not captured by Lipschits' elite corps of Jewish widows, who do José Greco numbers all over his body with their own wedgies. But Manatee persists, and every year manages to supply his customers. Fatty continues the tale, though everyone is asleep.

Chapter Seven

A motley army gathers at Key West. Many are college students. Duffy abandons Conchita, already seasick at the thought of a voyage, for Magda, a pretty, Al Capp-designed sophomore. She says her brother is already in the Dominican Republic with the Peace Corps. She is very

good in the sleeping bag, but Duffy feels some guilt about Conchita.

Finally they embark in a fleet of uncertain craft commanded by Captain Cohen, an alcoholic who claims to have been Hemingway's first mate. Their secret departure is well covered by the press. As they leave the piers, Duffy sees Hal Mimeo in a car with the Italian comic. It's a rough voyage, fog-bound from the beginning, and Conchita gets sicker. Her Objectivist philosophy has not prepared her for weakness, and she undergoes an existential crisis. Duffy turns out to be a good sailor and Captain Cohen, in his coherent moments, calls him his brave salt.

For two days they wander in the fog. Then they hear a boat approaching. They expect it's the Coast Guard come to intercept them, but it's a canteen boat from Miami Beach. They buy sandwiches, seasick pills and papers. They read that the USS JACK PAAR has been dispatched to the Caribbean. The State and Defense Departments will not comment. The ragged army realizes they may have to go through with it.

Chapter Eight

The fleet lands in the Dominican Republic. The Movement is disorganized. All the media are covering the invasion, but the leaders don't know what to do. They check into a hotel across the border from Haiti, drink, smoke and fornicate all day. They see nothing of any Haitian soldiers, yet they are afraid to move. Duffy wants out. He has caught gonorrhea from Magda and given it to Conchita, now recovered from seasickness. Tempers flare.

Chapter Nine

Battle readiness aboard JACK PAAR. All parties and dances cancelled. The mimeograph machine is mysteriously unchained and the journalists are encouraged to speak out. Rutherford is released and put in charge of a landing party.

The journalists are smoking one night in the captain's office when they hear a helicopter land. Its occupants

meet with the captain next door in his cabin, and the journalists are able to see them as they arrive. The helicopter, they hear, has come from Port au Prince. In it are a black man, a man with a crew cut and sunburned nose, and a man in a sharkskin suit who talks like Jim Backus. As the strange group boards the helicopter later to leave, Rutherford runs toward it yelling "Uncle Hal." He runs into an aircraft wing, injuring his throat. The captain seems worried about his loss of speech and visits him daily in the sick bay. The journalists speculate that the black man must have been Haitian underground and that the crew-cut man was CIA. Nobody can figure what Rutherford's uncle has to do with it.

The Haitian sailor seems to know something they don't; the strange, midnight visit makes him confident. He leads them in what they believe to be a voodoo oath in French. They don't speak French and don't know what they've just sworn is "By God, we'll get our hotel back now." Rumors fly about the landing party moving out the next day. Rutherford is replaced as its leader. The journalists volunteer for it and are issued rifles.

Chapter Ten

A *carpe diem* mood prevails among the exiles. Duffy meets Magda's brother Mark, an SDS infiltrator of the Peace Corps. Mark lashes them verbally for their cowardice and finally rallies them for a morning attack. They try to sing "La Marseilles," à la Bogart, but most have to hum because they don't know the words. Los Cuatros Cojones arrive and lead them in humming, patriotically refraining from masturbation for the first time in their careers.

Chapter Eleven

The army, hung over and frightened, assembles the next day at the Haitian border. Haitian guards ask them politely to wait, and they become even more confused. Mark harangues them into crossing anyway, but before they can, a great, black sedan, followed by buses, comes from the

Haitian side. The buses stop short of the border, but the sedan continues across the line. Mark and Magda lie in the road to stop it. Duffy pulls Magda away at the last moment as the sedan squashes Mark into martyrdom. Duffy sees in the car a squat, black man with white hair, and a woman who looks like Wanda. Also in the car are the CIA man, the Italian comic, and Hal Mimeo.

Haitian whores are driving the buses. They wave flags, hailing the liberation army. Little Juan is suspicious. They are supposed to liberate his Cuba after this, and he doesn't want to lose the chance by being seduced into a massacre. Magda, despite her grief, says, "After all, they're black. If we can't trust them, who can we trust?" Her sacrifice has raised her stature with the troops and they agree to go. They shout slogans and the whores reply with lewd invitations in French.

Meanwhile, Lancelot awakens, not to general quarters, but to liberty call. All around him sailors are dressing for liberty. Where? In Port au Prince, naturally. The journalists scramble up to the AP wire and read that Papa Doc has gone into exile, threatened by an exile army based in the Dominican Republic. He is rumored to have been accompanied by a mysterious blonde named Wanda, who will become his wife. He plans to practice medicine in Orange County, California.

The Haitian sailor snatches the copy to read that his father, M. La Farge, former owner of the Napoleon Hotel, has declared it liberated and open for business, at reduced rates. Rumor has it, the copy continues, that certain gambling interests in the U.S. are already in touch with La Farge, and that plans exist to make Haiti the tourist and gambling center of the world. Hal Mimeo, well-known Miami promoter, is believed involved, but could not be contacted for comment. He is believed to be in a private yacht off Cuba, for purposes not yet disclosed.

The journalists are bewildered, but dress and board the liberty launch anyway. Young La Farge announces his intention to desert and give up his U.S. citizenship, but before he can the captain's secretary hands him an honorable discharge. Young La Farge pushes, and manages to get discharges for all the journalists who have helped liberate his hotel. All are invited to the freedom celebration.

Chapter Twelve

The party is on. Duffy loses both Conchita and Magda to former members of the Ton Ton Macoute. He grabs a beautiful Negress who happens to be La Farge's sister. She introduces the revolutionary soldier Duffy to her brother and the brother doesn't mind. The Mini-Pauses, disguised now as la Société Mattachine, lead everyone in humming "La Marseilles." They go beyond their regular masturbation number and bugger one another in a frenzy, singing, "I Got You, Babe." Rutherford stumbles into their equipment and electrocutes the Mini-Pauses like an obscene neon sign. Rutherford escapes and disappears.

Lance watches the electrocution and apotheosis of the Mini-Pauses with some disappointment. Somehow it's symbolic of the revolution so far. They had such dreams. He meets Duffy and La Farge's sister, grabs Magda away from a stoned Ton Ton Macoute, and they wander the hotel together, looking for a place to screw.

They enter one room to find Rutherford stutteringly balling Amaryllis. Rutherford leaps through the window, screaming, "S-s-s-silverman, s-s-s-s-staple me!" Amaryllis explains she was hired as a hostess by the nicest little Italian man, and thought she might find the potion herself—might even find Lancelot, which she has. Lancelot rejects her, but Little Juan comes in and Amaryllis decides she loves him even more than Lance.

The three couples leave and wander into a room adjoining a large conference room where a party is in progress. They peek through a hole in the wall and see La Farge, Sr., whom Lance recognizes as the black man from the helicopter; the captain of the JACK PAAR; the CIA man; and the Italian comic, whom Amaryllis recognizes as her employer. The comic is saying, "Mimeo's working on it now, gentlemen. As my little Italian grandfather would say, amano give you one hell of a revolution. Onward to Cuba. Everybody gotta price." The others drink to that.

Confused and disillusioned, the three couples wander back through the Graham Greene Room, where the Mini-Pauses were electrocuted earlier, and out onto the patio. They dangle their feet in the pool, smoke a few joints, sip

some champagne. Nothing helps. "Maybe there's an explanation," says Lance. Nobody answers.

Suddenly they all have to urinate at the same time. They see a building near the pool with "Mesdames" on one side and "Messieurs" on the other. The men go to one side and the women the other. They meet on the other side of the bathroom façade. It is only a wall, and behind it is a ditch across which boards have been laid. "It's only a wall," says Duffy, "a fucking front." They laugh hysterically as the girls squat on the boards and the men aim at the ditch. Inside, a new band strikes up "La Marseilles."

"Long Live the Revolution," shouts an amplified voice from inside. "All Power to the People."

The sound of laughter comes from the restroom by the pool. "Right on," one of them says, and they laugh again.

—Richard Hill

He could hear what his mother was doing from where he lay on the lawn. She was sitting at her desk doing calisthenics. Arms out. Arms up. No, she wasn't, do not be foolish, Arthur. She had just been into the kitchen to get herself a huge spoonful of honey to take away the taste of nux vomica bitters, which she took at the advice of spirit guides, to stimulate her pituitary. No. Oh, Arthur, stop it. She was actually writing letters, as secretary to the *League for the Further Reformation of Women's Rights* and the *Society for the Protection of the Female Orgasm* and the *Rise of Sappho*, a secret society that was trying to get Lesbianism outlawed, so that its case could be publicly fought. Arthur noticed that he was chewing the ends of his forelock, which was too long, and this reminded him to stop his thoughts.

It was not, of course, entirely possible to stop all thought, but it was certainly possible to put the brakes on and stop filthy fantasies. Just get it right, his mother was a nice, normal old lady and she was doing her minutes for the *Women's Institute*. Right. Oh, and that reminded him: *The Society for the Complete Annihilation of Menstruation*.

It wasn't fair! That he should be tortured on such a beautiful day as this, by horrid thoughts. To daydream was fine, but to think up things like that, about his mother, was positively unhealthy. It came in phases, the tendency to think wicked things about her; it would seem that some part of him was getting revenge because she had not allowed him to go alone on holiday. Just the once—alone. But he had never been anywhere alone, he would forget where he was and it would be dreadful for him, to be lost at the seaside. Yes. Quite dreadful. And mother had her own problems. Depressions.

"Well you might know it isn't my fault. Crippled by hormones!" But she hadn't really said that at all. Nor had the spirit guides, because she never had anything to do

with mediums and that trash. Be content, one can worship Nature just as well here as anywhere. With a Tau Oak all to oneself, and all this land, private. Lucky.

Feeling easier, he relaxed, deep into the flatness of turf, imagining that it absorbed him partially, like a feather bed. His favorite kind of day. Hot, quiet, sweet, light, blue. Not even one virgin cloud marred the flat blue. It shimmered. Scorching sun. Nature, let me be one with you. Kept on saying that for about thirty years, especially in the summers. And it will happen, finally. In the end I shall be transmogrified. A rose bush or a lady beech. Either would do.

Looking straight up, not sinking but floating, neither here nor there. Waiting for something to appear in the sky, how wonderful, how impossible. Old dream, of a silver ship or a flower, or a Goddess, in the sky. Listening. People think these days are quiet, but listen. A field mouse rustles the blades of grass at the edge of the lawn. Turn head and stare straight into those little eyes. Whiskers twitching, and he senses that I will do him no harm! Explosions too. *Aquilega* seedcases, launching missiles twenty-four inches, shiny black bullets containing everything necessary for the production of another cosmos. Called *Aquilega*. Arthur began to feel calmer. The heat could excite the brain cells at times. Soon, he thought, I will go for a walk in the nice cool wood. Feed my being on shadows and bluebells and beeches and oaks. Oak.

Nature was a great healer of the emotions, and yet he had come to Her through intellect. Measuring, counting. He would perhaps have gone to University, become a biologist or something, if it hadn't have been for his nerves. Smiling at his privileges, like this glorious day when others were working, he was glad of his "nerves"—a euphemism though, preserved for the sons of rich mothers.

A cattle tick would wait eighteen years, maybe more, before it smelled blood and leapt to drink. What did it feel like to be a cattle tick, waiting thus on a tree branch? Miracle of mysteriousness. Cattle ticks surely were not trapped in mere behavior, but had a sense of Destiny?

A gentle susurrus of nose-blowing frightened the field-mouse away, turned his attention from the gunfire in the herbaceous border. Hay fever? Hormone trouble? Who

sneezes and hawks on a day like this. Only *his* mother surely? Damn. It was not good, never a good sign, that he should overhear himself denigrating her like this. It had been like this last summer. Before the *incident*.

As if to bring down black clouds on his thoughts he leapt up quickly and went over to the French windows.

"Hello Arthur dear, what are you doing?"

"Nothing much. Thought I would take a walk in the wood and gather some bluebells for you."

"What a lovely idea. I'd come with you but I have the minutes to write out. Tell Janet tea at five please, and Mrs. Clark won't be coming over, she rang to say she has a headache." Another victim of hormones bites the pillow. Pow! Women's ailments, working for him on a sub-atomic level, keeping them with their heads down, weeping into lace. Steady Arthur! The heat. And since when would Sol harm me? Me who loves you so? I am the only true Pantheist for hundreds of miles around.

"What dear?"

"Nothing. I mean, yes. See you later. You should come out today, mother, it is too good a day to stay indoors."

"But I have to write to the Prime Minister about premenstrual tension. It's very important."

He went into the kitchen, wondering what it was that his mother had really said. It was horrid, having minor hallucinations all the time, on top of not being able to control daydreams. SACRIFICE!

No. He stole two scones that had just come from the oven, got as near to Janet as he could, to inhale the odor of hot flour and raisins.

"Master Arthur! You should ask."

"Yes Janet. Mother says tea at five please and Mrs. Juno has a headache and won't be coming to the feast."

"What?"

"She rang earlier. Just Mother and myself for tea."

A wasp settled on a lemon pie, he bent closer, and saw it suck at a minute bead of syrup that had oozed up out of the meringue topping. Oh, the irreparable sadness to come when Janet dies. She was terribly old. What other housekeeper would be able to see inside his forty-year-old shell, to the real person within? Would tolerate him stealing scones, to the point of saying "master Arthur!" in shocked tones. He slunk out, through the kitchen garden

taking pea-pods as he went, and a few strawberries. Father would have been very angry about that. But he was dead long since. Swept up into the bosom of Nature. Since he had gone, the measuring of nature's dimensions had gradually ceased. Dad had been very good at putting out jars of treacle and nets to catch moths. Butterflies too were pinned down and labeled, rainfall measured, humidity marked three-hourly. To keep the lad busy, he has a good brain. Studying bees, ants, leaves. How sap rises, the nitrogen cycle, dozens of notebooks, observations, readings from biology texts. Father had known all the peripheral facts about nature, all except the—but what did one call it? The mystical heart? Something like that. Arthur was not good at finding phrases for things he had rather experience than account for. Father had lacked awe.

The path to the wood led through a haunted thicket that grew around a pond. A *rusalki* lived here although Arthur had never seen her. The whole estate was full of sprites and spirits and elves but the *rusalki* was Arthur's favorite. She was a wicked and vengeful creature with blank eyes and long mossy hair and she waited by the pond ready to pull in the unwary. The spirit of a drowned maiden. Agnes Bonswith, aged nine years, to be exact. Here was her home, not the village churchyard. His best friend, slipped into the green weed one summer day, long ago.

"Hello Agnes," he murmured, and made inner obeisance, and fingered his leaf of wormwood, always in his trouser pocket. Dad had been very good on mythology. He would have been appalled at what he would have called a descent into superstition, but a *rusalki* was not to be trifled with.

The sun was filtered in the woods and as Arthur approached the Grove his spirits rose in him, gladness, peace. The smell of moss and bluebells and mushroom and wild garlic, dank and alive. Throbbing with life on all levels. Miraculous. He greeted his favorite birch tree, stroking its silvery body, and pointed at an ilex.

"Don't prick and scratch me or I shall make you into Christmas crowns."

SACRIFICE. He bent over, all games gone, supported himself with hands on knees and fought back tears of rage. No! All that, it was sick and wicked, he could still see

the blood slow and thick soaking into the mold at the roots of the Tau Oak, so mean, so little of it, and yet such a horribly meaningful act. It had worked, he had felt relieved and happy and sweetened somehow. It had worked, and he needed help now. Stop thinking about it, please, Arthur.

A tiny shrew!

A poor simulacrum for a human being.

He began to gather bluebells.

When he had a nice fat bunch he sat against his favorite tree, with the Idea Stone in sight, in the center of the Grove leading to the Oak. It was a shady grove with a smooth floor bordered by wild red campions like blood spots, the great Tau at its farther end, dramatically lit by sun. Probably even pre-Druidic. And when he died there would be crowds paying money to come and see, to pay the death duties. It was a horrid thought. His fault because of having no heir. He was married to Nature.

He often wished he had been born in the time when this place had belonged to "wonderful beings, probably Atlanteans. Hazy pictures of marvelous people conducting rites in the Grove often haunted Arthur; his favorite dreams took place "at the Dawn of Time." He was sure there was some special reason why this historic place belonged to his family. It was his destiny to be guardian of the Oak. Maybe.

At his feet he noticed a toad, apparently insentient except for its eye which met his, full of incommunicable knowledge. Warty like bark and lichened rock, it waited. Perhaps it too stayed so still to guard something. Then came a colony of red ants and he watched them, smug in the knowledge that most people would think these creatures chaotic and he knew otherwise. They were well-ordered, civilized. He tried to concentrate on the movements of the small ants, but could not eradicate the image of a hungry tree, sucking eagerly at the blood that soaked in around its roots. In a moment he would get up and go back for tea. He must not stay here too long.

A small sandaled foot suddenly crushed the ants. Utterly horrified, half risen on tense thighs, he looked up into the small pale face of a little girl, raveled hair and withered bluebells framing a very direct gaze.

"Why did you do that, you horrid child?" He was dry in the mouth with emotion.

"I hate ants." She hated ants! So simple! He had to try twice before his voice would sound.

"What are you doing here anyway? This is private property."

"I know. I like playing here. Whatchergonna do?"

Insolent, lower class, cheeky. On an otherwise perfect day he was pestered with village brats. He had noticed too his abject terror. She resembled Agnes enormously; the eyes, the pointed chin. Horribly bold. Whatchergonna do? Push you in the pond, he had said. No, no. Nothing like that, it was just fantasy and nameless guilt. They had told him not to think about it, never to speak of it. But Time did not move on days like this.

Suddenly he was glad the child had trespassed here, for now nothing bad could happen. Some things could only occur when he was alone, one must not frighten children. Few people would ever understand in any case.

"You shouldn't kill things just because you hate them. Ants are very clever creatures."

She leered, showing a space in her front teeth.

"Go on home. This is my wood." He shouldn't have said that.

"I want to play here."

"Well I damn well want to play here too, so go away."

He needed her to stay, what was he saying?

"Let's play together." What cheek! What an odd girl, fancy asking him to play, a middle-aged man. Perhaps she was not quite normal, mentally. Many of the village children were retarded, so his mother said.

"Let's be friends." Oh dear. What could one say when a person said that?

"Well, all right then. What were you playing at?"

"I am the Queen of the Trees. What were you playing at?"

"Idea Stones." Oh Heavens, he had told her. He had never told anyone before.

"How do you play it?"

He now had to tell her. Well why not?

"You put your head down on that stone over there, and then you get an Idea, then you have to do the Idea."

"Magic?"

"Yes." She accepted it, children were innocent. He felt fearful, shivery. He must send her home and go home himself. He *must*. But the girl was very enthusiastic, her mean little face was radiant and she had thrown down her bluebells and stood by the Stone, waiting.

"It wouldn't work for you, actually."

"Course it will. I'm Queen of the Trees, ain't I? See that big tree up there? That's my Palace." He could not answer, but did crawl on hands and knees over to the Stone. Recalled the last Idea the thing had given him.

SACRIFICE.

Please, please, no, nothing like that. Just pretend, just to amuse the child.

But think how it would be. A shrew had wrought wonders with his unhappiness, what then. . . .

He laid his head on the Stone, more from weariness than anything else, tired after all by the heat and the strain of meeting a stranger and the doubts of everything. You had to be very sure of a thing and not see the other side of a question, then you were happy. That was the trouble. He fumbled in his pocket for the leaf of wormwood, the talisman against *rusalkis* and *suchlike*. If this child were really only Agnes' shade, things would be simple. But she was flesh and blood. And she came and laid her head on the Idea Stone too. He had been younger even than her when he had first discovered the properties of this stone. It had given him some wonderful games to play, and some awful things too. Which were of course the real things, the great Ideas . . . Whatchergonna do?—push you in the pond, the Stone told me . . . Whatchergonna do?—sacrifice you to the Tau, the Stone told me. . . .

How though? His penknife? Even lying down like this he began a sickening faint. Oh please, let something intervene.

Hang on to the fact that this was only a game, and she was Queen of the Trees. One could not possibly harm such a one, she would be sacred herself. Yes. That was right. But who was really Queen of the Trees? Who owned all these acres? His mother. She was the boss of everything. Tea at five, things like that. All those secret societies. His mother should get out more, she would lose her wits having fantasies like she did, writing letters to the

Prime Minister about hormones, they would take her away and Janet would die and who would look after him then? Mother, please don't go, I'll do something awful if you leave me, I will, I will. He opened his eyes wide, grasped the knife in his pocket, it was all perfectly clear, no doubts in this moment, the correct time had come, everything was determined, no problem. Just like every time he came to this Stone, very clear plans of action. Open the knife without her noticing, first. She leapt up with a delightful squeal.

"I've got an Idea."

He did not answer her, he was concentrating.

"I said I've got an Idea." He looked into her face and she looked away first, bent down and stood up again, this time holding over her head a jagged chunk of glistening gypsum.

Arthur could not open the knife, he could not move at all, except around his mouth, twitching, trying to shout out for her to stop. Silence, paralyzed. Bloodstream thundering, sweat pouring. This was true terror. She was going to hit him with that rock. Her arms dithered with the effort of holding the heavy thing high over her head.

It blotted out the sun, then revealed it, blotted it out, it was almost too heavy for her, she could not hold it much longer. Her lips were drawn back with effort. Her eyes were very wide open, concentrated. The shrew, the little shrew he had killed, he knew now, what it had felt, he had wondered at the time, time, standing still, a string of moments suddenly, like beads, clashing, simultaneous, a row of deaths, his the large one at the end, for that rock could crush deep into his skull. She drew in a great breath, to aim well, to throw hard, the air whistled in her chest, great glee in her face, no, no—the sun flashed bright like white gold.

There was quiet in the woods for a while until a breeze stirred up a couple of thrushes, and also, ludicrous and genteel:

"Yoo-hoo. Arthur!" over the sound of crushed bracken.

The little Queen of the Trees made an 'ouf' sort of noise of alarm at the sight of the old woman who came striding through the bracken. She ran away up the Grove, working out the best way to reach one of the gates into the road. Then she stopped and turned round, yelling:

“Mad lady, mad lady, yah! yah! yah!” and then ran like a hare, full of daring, never to be caught.

The crazy lady that nobody ever saw, she had seen her! She looked ordinary, and so had the man. Just ordinary.

“Oh, there you are Arthur, why didn’t you answer me, I thought I heard a scream—ugh! whatever’s that?”

A dark stain marked the Idea Stone.

Arthur managed to move enough to sit up and turn the Queen’s rock over and they both stared in fascinated disgust at a crushed toad adhering to its underside. Violent death is the risk of guardians.

Time began to move again, inexorably causing Tea to be at five.

—*Josephine Saxton*



BALLS: A MEDITATION AT THE GRAVESIDE

At forty-odd, Sylvester Herman Oaks was kind of wealthy and well-rounded and a sterling example of Heisenbergian Indeterminacy or You too may be president, or a popular idol (practically), or impractically rich from humble beginnings. He was a writer of film scripts, an American who lived the Dream. He had money in the bank, a couple bad habits, a couple good ones, high blood pressure, a reactivated ulcer, big ears, and an important-looking initial initial. (He dropped the Sylvester in high school, so early he knew where he was going; "S" is for success and nothing else.) Oh, he had had cross-country flights, several careers, many cars, as many guns, two houses, too many wives—everything. He had either had it, or never felt the need. No kids, though; none. Maybe his Mickey Mouse fetish took their place.

He wore whatever was moddest. Back in Rockville, New Jersey, he had been zoot-suited in its day. (His parents were out of it. Herm had made his own choices, even then.) No more of that extreme stuff, though, these days: hair to the collar merely, cuff-links because he liked them (Mickey and Minnie, bas relief in silver), boots only when it was tasteful; and he never went anywhere without his shades. It got told around that he once wore them all the way to the motel and then cried off when she said no glasses in bed. "I can't see, I can't even hear, without my Rx lenses, doll!" That's where the shtick began that the "S." stood for "Shades." Nothing of the sort, though; she was just a Falmouth broad, imported, who thought all Americans had gone bonkers. Herman was perfectly sane, but he was (he really was) detached as a retina. And without those glasses, he was blind.

Herm was born right along with Steamboat Willie, although he discovered the correspondence later. About the time he also learned of psychic twins, and wondered if that was why he felt naked without his wristwatch. (I say

his wristwatch; of course, he had many. Dozens broke along the way, one disaster or another, natural hazards.) He was wearing the best, and latest, when they reverently lifted him from the threshold of his paneled and muraled den (known as Disneyland among his friends).

This particular watch was a gift from a grateful star, inscribed: *To a Wordsmith, Herm, from His Living Doll.* She had had it hand crafted. The ears are onyx, the hands are gold, the eyes are glowing rubies. Now realism meant a lot to Herm. But so did good intentions. So he forgave her the bollix; the rubies were real nice ones. And she was very young; and you have to take into account how she had spent all her girlhood on the streets, anyway. Maybe she had never seen black little Mickey on the silver screen, or the tube, either. She told him, considerably later, that she had been on the verge of directing the jeweler to add a final touch: shades, like his own; and then decided against. "God guided you," he said lightly. But it was good she didn't. The proper progression of traits and love and luck was Mickey to Herman, not the other way round. He would not want his little idiosyncrasies imposed on his luckpiece. It might interrupt the flow. True, it wasn't very long after that confession that he cast His Living Doll aside, but there probably wasn't any connection. He thought the world of that watch.

It was not just Mickey he was hung on, but Pluto, Goofy, the nephews, all that crowd. Excepting the nature films—*terra incognita*—the rest of the Disney *schmier*, the whole series of enterprises, stood over Herman's history like the star in the east on a Xmas card. The cartoon industry was born? Promptly so was little Hermie. An era passed: Janet Gaynor and Buddy Rogers, Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire; community-sings metamorphosing into *Fantasia*, real class; the NRA, the CCC, the how-manyth term for FDR—the whole time, Herm was at the movies, singing along and growing up. The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Herman Mouse. Pearl Harbor. Major Oaks limped his bomber back to base on two engines (and one of them threatening to conk out any minute), more holes in the fuselage than you could count, the bombardier dead where he slumped at the sights. Single-handed, Herm and Mickey flew that ship home, and the citation indicated that the

members of the crew who didn't get killed owed their lives to Major Herman Oaks' great flying. Did Dumbo fly, by virtue of his talisman? Herm had his talisman, too, semaphoring him all hours of the day and night. He survived the war, he thrived in Hollywood, he somehow bridged the gap when "mickeymouse" (verb and adjective, pejorative either way) moved over from jazz talk into jive jargon—and not by repudiating his old attachment, or going underground. That wouldn't have been Herm.

He flaunted it. Some people collect dollhouses, some build extra garages to house their antique cars, some people are queer for postage stamps. One girl he knew (and had a great fellow-feeling for) had to have bought for her any size representation of seahorses: if she saw one, she *had* to have it—or *her* luck would turn. He had bought her quite a few. Herm's potent luck was Mickey Mouse (and all his kind, though not as much so). He wasn't about to play them false. And there was this simple-minded bedrock in him you just had to respect, especially when he could look you straight in the eye through those smokey lenses and turn out script after script for Oscars, the scripts America loved, that made him take home all that lovely bread. Herm's big in Hollywood; all's right with the world.

Why then did the genius, the master cartoonist, the creator, have the bad luck—the miserable timing—from Herm's point of view (and he'd be the first to agree that it was specialized) the colossal effrontery, to die? Herm hadn't even known he was sick, to tell the truth. He felt obscurely MM ought to've let him know.

True, he was fully occupied at the time with Candy. That was his third marriage: "tempestuously temperamental Candy, the forbidden sweet." She had got herself suspended for kicks and then carried it too far; split with her agent, didn't make a picture for too long. Overnight the name was Candace Keller: dim and falling star. The day Walt died (only they didn't know about it) she forgot her manners (never really in the forefront of her mind) and clawed a columnist at *Ciro's* for addressing her as Mrs. Oaks. Then after they got home and had had a very circular discussion she took Herm's head off when he said "Well, goddamit, Candy, it's your *name*." She threw everything in reach that she could lift, including a few

objets d'art he would have bet she couldn't—like a good-sized bronze of Mickey Herm had commissioned for the patio. He belted her one for that, although he'd kept his temper pretty well till then. He was waiting for her to fling the rings across the room—she was that kind, no sense or sentiment, pawn shops in lean times meant nothing to her, no more did treasured memories, if she was leaving him like she said FOREVER—why then she'd return the rings and he was counting on it. Herm had both. Sense and sentiment, I mean. He'd remember her always, good points and bad; but he'd also get back what he could on the investment. She surprised him, though. She didn't strip them off her fingers and take aim, shouting. She was screeching like a peacock all right, but she flushed them down the toilet and lit out. Forever. With her suitcases.

His next girls were religious. Herm was feeling so low, with the master dead and all, he tried a lot of things that really weren't his style; like sampling faiths. He took some weeks of Anglican instruction for a Beatrice but they never made it to a full communion. She disappeared. He kept looking for something that he could really *connect* to; only the way he described it, it sounded more like a female plug than any form of canon law. He met this latest chick in the Neodianetic Temple, actually, but he wasn't buying any neo-news, he was just leaning against a pillar. He still didn't know what he wanted but whatever it was, it didn't include crackpottery, like an out-and-out religion. He was pretty sure that what he wanted lay in the area of the gleaming, the costliest, the soundproofed. And, in his Disneyland hi-fi, the loudest, until it began to get on his nerves. His temporary answer was this little blond chick in silver lamé, mini-mini, of course.

One of the first things he told Shirlee (that was just about her name, the temple girl, although his pet name for her was "Mini-mini") was how he had always loved to follow the bouncing ball and sing along, in his formative years. Well, she was a real pal. She dug out some old community-sing short subjects and they hoked up some good parties, running these oldies off in his den; twenty, thirty people sounding like a theaterful, and most of them on key. Movies, talkies, had done a lot for people, all things considered. Brought them out of themselves, to

He claimed TV had put them right back in a narrow school desk again (so what if it was a couch?) being told how it wasn't and when to laugh, except they had to stay home to watch it, like when they were sick; or worse, said Herm, caged. But that was when he was brooding, he talked like that, and only to his analyst.

He brooded a lot because he had noticed right off that the bouncing ball had developed a tendency to halt in midswing, imperceptibly. Nobody else seemed to notice it. But during that miniscule act of hovering, between the printed parts of a word, some phrase or syllable being said or sung by somebody in the room would leap at him out of context like somebody had turned up the gain. And the vignettted sound had always some relevance to the very thought in his mind. An answer, if it was a question. A comment, if it was a philosophical thought. A suggestion, if he was woolgathering. Pretty damned suggestive, sometimes, too. Herm always did have antipathy to anything suggestive. If it's sex you want, he'd say, take them to bed and be done with it, but none of this halfhardon leering and leching.

He had occasionally, before that, had odd experiences with echoes—or, well, echoes of echoes. Apocalyptic pronouncements meant only for him. Nobody else seemed to hear them, or if they did, made nothing of them. Materialist though he was, he had this luck thing going for him. He knew something watched over him: Mickey Mouse, his totem. "His" movies. (Not his credits—they were the job he did, assignments.) "His" movies were about a deer called Bambi, three little pigs. Snow White and the faithful seven, and as for *Fantasia*—*Fantasia*, though it took a while, had catapulted him to the coast, as a result of a certain piece of advice embedded in it. He couldn't remember what, but he could remember how it had thrust out at him. A communication.

"Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" Not Sylvester. He had been just about to whistle at his first girl, and took it for an encouragement, and did more than whistle, and decades later he was still grateful and awestruck at the memory of what it had led to in her cellar. Who caught every showing (disappointingly few) on the post, of full-length cartoons? *And* off it? Herman. (AWOL.) Who,

studying the market—transfixed before a TV screen—dissected the phenomenon of Jimmy Dodd *cum* ukelele and was wise to the consumer-consuming relations behind “Because, you see, we LIKE you,” and thrilled to it anyhow, every time? A big boy already, a young man, a rising writer with no name but talent to burn. Who drove up—a delicate tribute—to the re-release of *Cinderella* during the Memorial Week showings in a pumpkin-colored Dauphine bought for the occasion? “Shades!” cried the man at the microphone—S. Herman Oaks. Who whistled while he worked and worked and worked his way to the heart of the Hollywood goldmine (under full Guild contractual protection all the way)? Mr. Oaks, that’s who. Funny thing, though. Making his living right there in Dream City, he never went near the cartoon factories. Not so funny when you think about it. They weren’t cartoon creatures to him; they had a life of their own. And he had a good life of his own, he knew it: he had it made.

Until he started getting these really special messages. During Shirlee’s “Disneyland” projection of Ruth Etting’s *Harvest Moon*, the one that started with Ruth seated (Coleridge-style) right between the horns of the tilted (fiberboard?) crescent, and getting up to belt it out, Herm was reciting his formula to cheer himself up a little bit, “I’m happy, I’m really happy, I’m having a ball . . .”

I ain’t had no lov - in
and the goddam bouncing ball didn’t just jerk infinitesimally and hover. It took off. Right off the screen—a missile, a rounded moon. It was coming at Herm so fast that all he could do was fling up his arm to protect his face and duck, whereupon it disappeared.

“My God,” he said, “did you see that?”

“What, Hermie, baby, what?” said the temple girl dreamily. Shirlee was off in a world of her own.

June or Ju - ly Snow time ain’t no time

“Never mind,” he said, that quick in control of the situation. But he had never been so scared in his life.

His analyst, who was teaching him to both relax and concentrate at the same time (which is even harder than it sounds) said the same kind of thing happened to him sometimes.

“What,” snorted Herm, “a goddam little bouncing ball takes right off the screen like a meteor aimed at your

head? Sometimes? How do you mean *sometimes*? Nothing like that ever happened in the world before. And if it happens again, I'm gonna die right there in my chair, from heart failure; or mess my pants at *least*."

His analyst, who was vaguely a Jungian, or had been when he started at his trade, explained to him how Jung had said in all seriousness, if you ask your environment a question your environment will find some means to send you an answer back.

"You were relaxed, right? And concentrating, right? And what were you concentrating on?—having a ball, right?"

"You mean I did that to myself?" Herm shuddered. The analyst nodded, and worked away at the hair on his chin, which he groomed like he might have hopes for a ribbon and a consequent stand at stud but only if he got all the little kinks out. "Ah, no," said Herm. "Not me." But yes. Him. Herm.

More or less by accident, he had discovered that he had this talent. Not just for echoes. Scenes, messages; catastrophes or close to it. He could elicit companionship and information by sheer brain power (and with the help of course of something that floated around all over the landscape, invisible but there—"Archetypes," said the analyst, but *animus* and *anima* sounded pretty far-out to Herm and not a bit like the chatty opinionated windbag with the sense of humor and addiction to puns who—or that—how could he be sure?—was in touch with him, through this power of his). He thought sometimes that it just might be an alien, an invisible UFO, except that its biases were so human. The opinions spoke from the seat in back of him (or using that guy's voice, anyhow) and that guy never knew what he was saying underneath what he was saying, isolated, underlined by a trick of the ear. Chitchat lurked in his typewriter keys (which could tell him the most incredible things by substituting one little letter for another). A whole lot of information resided in the bathroom, ringing changes, utilizing anything that came handy—a sudden drip of water from a tightly-turned-off faucet, an air-bubble in the waterpipes, a branch or a bird or a moth fluttering at the window—you wouldn't believe. But Herm could, and did.

Like the day he was meditating about yin-yang and

the Zeitgeist, and had arrived at the thought that as there was balance in all things the one McCarthy (Joe) brought forth—made inescapable—the benison of the other: Gene. The alarm clock that he was pretty sure he had turned off hours before (twelve hours before) began to shrill out there in the bedroom. “And, since the one fell short of his desires,” said insightful Herm, “therefore, so must the other.” It began to rain, a sunshower glinting through the window, over as soon as it began. And the plumbing went crazy. Bubblings, splashes . . . “Too bad,” said Herm moodily, feeling applauded, and jiggling the handle to make it stop. “Too bad.”

His analyst wasn't as disturbed by this as you might think. He continued to indicate that there was a certain community of experience there. It was like one returnee from the Bahamas discussing sunsets with another. “What kind of answers today, Herm?” he would say, with the merest suspicion of a yawn.

“Oh, a very interesting headline—in a paper blowing past. Or a clock might tell me. I'll be musing along, thinking, ‘Is it that? is it this?’ like I said: ‘I know you're there, so how can you be nobody? Captain Nemo?’ and some goddam clock I never saw before started going BONG BONG BONG. And I knew that what I was thinking at that moment was, well, the answer. Or an answer. Or the telephone'll ring—a wrong number, like as not. In that case only part of the message is in the *words*. It's mainly that I've rung a bell.”

The phone rang. They both started. (No calls came through to the consulting room when the analyst had somebody what he called on the couch, although actually he used a big comfortable armchair so they shouldn't just catch up on their sleep. His receptionist flipped a gadget on the phone that diverted all calls, but [he murmured lightning-fast] she must have fallen asleep at her desk, and accidentally bumped the knob that switched the call onto his desk instrument—or the signal couldn't have come through. Herm was shaking his head as the analyst spoke. Besides, there was Nobody on the line. So the receptionist could hardly have routed a call in, to his office. It had found its own channel . . .) They smiled weakly at each other, with the doctor's “Hello? hello? hello?” still sounding in the room.

The thing was, these days, Herm was given at least half his answers backwards, like the hidden knowledge of the kabbalists and boustrophedons and like that, ploughing from left to right and right to left on the page, or starting in the middle of the word; and this gave him an entirely new insight into things. What that "Hello" meant to him, aside from being a bell-ringer, was a message, *Oh, hell*. Was he really that disgusted? Or was his unseen informant initiating observations now? He had come for an extra consultation because he thought maybe he was getting a little overworked, because lately he'd get hung up on a word at his typewriter—any old word—whether he had relaxed and concentrated and asked a question or not—and would kind of compulsively put it through permutations and combinations like an abacus working to the base twelve. In Sanskrit.

"Oh, *hell*," said Herm. "But I'm happy. I'm perfectly all right. What's to get upset . . . Jeez, I've got it made . . ." He squeezed his eyes shut, he was concentrating so hard, though he wasn't very relaxed, and right there on the black ground drifted a pretty kid, draped below but naked to the waist; nice boobies.

"I appreciate," said Herm (*gottit made? tit maid?*) stiffly, still with his eyes tight, "I appreciate, but I don't need it! Will you for God's sake go away?"

The girl shrugged and vanished. She wasn't really his type, anyhow.

"All that troubles me—now sometimes I get remarks, I get answers I don't really want," said Herm. "My environment hands them to me without waiting to find out if I really want to know, or if I'm perfectly happy without their helping. I am, I am perfectly happy. I'm having a . . ."

The analyst had been scribbling something. He rose from behind his desk, saying as he came to support Herm to the door, "I often think these days that meaning decays even in the act of speaking. I think I will put aside certain days when I just won't speak at all, because of this fatigue effect. Like metal . . ." He made as if to hand Herm the tranquilizer prescription, but Herm brushed it aside. "I told you before, I'll beat this thing without pills." He went down the walk.

"But how do you tune out once you've tuned in on the

goddam world? Where is the switch?" He was half slung in the car and reaching for the ignition when a woman in bulgey slacks, walking her dog, said to herself brightly, "That's a switch!" Herm put his car keys back in his pocket and got out of there. So it was. He went and leaned against the spindling tree that was the status symbol of analysts on that block.

After a while he walked home, forgetting he had the Jag, parked there an hour since. The woman with the dog passed him, heading in the other direction this time, before he had gone more than a few steps. She was still talking to herself or to her dog, mumble-mumble, but a phrase leaped to the fore: ". . . it's a strain."

He felt for her, suddenly. Always before, except with his analyst, who didn't count, Herm had been rigorously careful to keep communication privy. But he called to the dog-woman, "Yes," encouragingly. It was a twisting, a doubling, a strain . . .

There was no telephone handy but a church obliged. The electronic carillon was (no more than the usual amount) out of adjustment, but it sure was loud; *Rock of Ages*, crucially flatted, clove his head in twain. As it happened, the carillon began just at the instant he had, in his thinking, got beyond the fragmentary yes. By then, by "cleft for me," he had arrived at (remembering, not believing) *God is dead* is true, only if you believe in God. *If you don't believe*— These exchanges of information can occur with frightening rapidity, simultaneity, and sometimes even an instant *ahead* of themselves. —*God is not dead*. Carillon was still walloping away at hymn when he reached home. He lived only one block away from his analyst.

Herm felt a powerful impulse to put things right. Candy was provided for. "What did I do wrong, though?" he thought. "Did I do wrong?" He was writing out a generous check for Shirlee and putting it in the envelope he had just carefully addressed, trying to keep his mind blank, because inside his head it hurt. He sat there licking the back of the moustachioed smiling face, wreathed with the pilgrimage of pastel figures ess-ing forth from the tiny pale-blue distant globe, until he must have dissolved all the glue. The memorial stamp—he didn't have any other

kind—curled and slid and would not adhere to the envelope.

“I’m a real American success,” Herm said, working away at the elusive stamp, trying to uncurl it from around his finger. He was trying to be very firm and decisive. “I’ve had this ball all my life.” He realized just in time that he was going to cry, to bawl, to weep, and he got off that track in a hurry.

So he left the letter lying there by the hi-fi and was going through the doorway to get another stamp when he saw that Walt was off the envelope all right, and not under his finger any more either; but perversely sticking to the hairs on his wrist. Herm was saying, “I’ve succeeded, -seeded, see-dead,” (a latterday Coué) with Walt seated on his right hand, Mickey on the other. His only kith, his kin.

There was really nothing left to do but die.

And (waiting only for that decision to be taken) there *was* Walt, life-sized, archetypal and (but largely because of his unfortunate nakedness) kind of *obscene*; with his teeth and his smile; and the whole farting-tuba funny-cello

M - I - C - K - E - Y
M - O - U - S - E

Club orchestra. Remember those goddamned effects? Herm?

As it dried, the stamp fell off. But he was wearing his shades when they found him, not breathing hard any more, not breathing, come so far along the American way that only Mickey’s ticking imitated life among the hypertension and the vision lost.

—Virginia Kidd

He stumbled through the streets. Sad six o'clock light, strained through gaps in the torn chain link fencing. The wind eating into his bones, congealing in the joints. Stiff knees of another weary night. Eyes full of dust whipped out of dry gutters in quick little fawn feathers and eddies. Drank some water from an empty Coke tin—cold acid bite of rust. At the crest of the shattered wave of buildings—dip slope of squashed redbrick suburbia, scarp of derelict factories and imploded gasometers—he looked over the town. No smoke. Graypink haze at the periphery: just another bloody morning, plasma in the clouds, dissociated corpuscles in suspension. Look at me in a pool of yet unruffled water, cord scarecrow, hollows of straw hunger under the cheekbones (Christ, she said, I love your cheekbones, Celtic to the point of humour). Brave Caolte in a piece of smashed Warwickshire. He started down the hill, guts plastered to his backbone. Remembering various breakfasts. Eat before they go cold, you know you hate them cold. Mother your deviled kidney images sicken me, were it not for my vacuous belly, I would spew. The stink of a ruptured sewer, guts of the town digesting its last meal. The last meal. Supper.

Chainstore spilled onto the pavement, bright gilt bracelets, buttons, o pretty pretty. Bijou teeth of a freegift society wrapped in cellophane. Sale of shopsoiled goods—municipal buildings, pissoirs, beauty spots—all slightly marked, prices slashed. Decorated himself with a string of plastic beads, but what I need is a supermarket stuffed with erected sausages of bolony. He thought. Coming upon a huge teddy bear in an alluvial fan of wrecked vinyl armored cars, this teddy bright and only slightly wet from three days exposure, but splitting at its seams, perhaps with laughter. You will rot eventually, Ursa Minor, rot. (Kicking it in a fit of masterful pique—sawdust surrogate companionship—watch that broken-necked

arc, St. Andrew-crucified into the gloom of collapsed tills. Poor teddy.)

Finally found a Sainsbury's helped himself to a pink carrier bag. Invented an assistant—short, blonde, busty. The name is Kristodulos, put it down on my account. He ferreted behind the counter among tins with an albino patina of powdered plaster, rubbed the stuff off with his thumb. Steak. Very nice. Rubbed some more. What use have I for rice pudding in this alien city, I have forgotten how the streets run, gastronomy means nothing to me among this unjointed topography. Spurning the tin.

Weighed down with tins of steak, he walked. Looking. Swinging a jaunty pink carrier.

Midday folded a cold curtain on him, glacial rain, bat-wing clouds scudding overhead. Crushed into the corner of an L of upright masonry, he unwrapped scenes of his fantasy existence as Kristodulos The Greek, snugbug behind his windbreak, allowing the fire of dismembered dress-shop mannequins to evaporate the rain before it prickled his scalp. Sometimes. He had considered raping the dummies but contented himself merely with chastely lifting a skirt here, unbuttoning a blouse there, they did not impress him. Scraggy besides being unyielding. They burned fitfully and smelt disgusting. So much for the lapsed morals of the aftermath society. He counted the beads on his necklace. There were 42. Fished the tins out of the fire with tender fingers, leaving them to cool in the rain. (We fished that stream for speckled trout, barbequed them to the hum of crepuscular insects. Hell, said Zak, I go for this outdoor thing.) (Masturbating at night in the quiet tent.) He dug his hands up to the knuckles into the warm, viscid meat. The rain fell harder. The wind bit his ears.

Gazing at the charcoal sky, the meat a memory in his mouth. A palpable loneliness invaded the L, gathered at its arsis, 90 degrees of solitude, a quarter of the circle. Bisected, it would provide room for two. He toyed with the idea of importing another mannequin, but the thought of being impaled on its uncompromising eyes deterred him. God send me a vinyl succubus—feeling the heat in his groin—no, forget that. It isn't a question of going to Hell for it, more a question of being allowed out if you don't

do it. Incipient self-pity punched holes in his brain. Prognosis: ultimately insular suicide of a scattercrow, beanstick bones at once its support and crucifixion, Jesus but I don't want to be here, I don't want this to have happened, nononono. Unfortunately it did. Determined, he held out in his empty L, waiting for the rain to stop. By the time that happened, the mannequins had burned out and he was soaked. He mourned the loss of his dignity. Picked up his jolly carrier bag.

Pale sun washed the quiet islets, rumored in his hair as he walked among them. These eyots were prolapsed semis, occasionally forming continental masses where the units had all fallen the same way, peninsulars at corners. He walked, limped, hopped hunchback fashion, swinging the carrier. Still looking. How long does it take with blistered feet to chart the planchic doldrums. Wading the talus of shifting brick on ball joint ankles. Bell-like grind and slip of broken tiles under dusty boots, dust i' the air, no rain is ever going to lay the dust of this relapsed connobation. This is where they caught county town red buses to surveyor's offices and the scarp industrials. They had umbrellas and snotty-nosed kids in primrose yellow dresses and kept smooth chestnut ponies in chrome green fields at the edge of the development. Hunting Warwickshire. He heard a song. Slipped on the flaked shale of a kitchen unit, crashed onto his coccyx, ignored the fingernail of pain scraping delicately up his spine.

Heard a song.

Lying splayed like a votive offering on the wilderness of brick, belabored his ears with the heels of his hands, frantically thinking I've cracked, this is where it begins.

And this voice, singing out its song as if here was some wild Gaelic foreshore, Balmacara maybe, singing up out of the rubble a little way ahead. He—hearing the haunted waves in this song, wordless waves—scrabbled to his feet. Run, stumble. Forgot the carrier, stagger back for the tins of steak, all the time this wordless voice, taking wild modal trills and grace notes in its compulsive stride. Rubble fell away from under him, landslipping him into a cellar underworld, chipping at his elbows and knees. Thrashed up and on, blood running into his eyes, seeing some mad island girl dancing bone-naked on a pink beach

at dawn (it could almost be like that again, stinking shipping basins silting under, the pipeline orgasm of sewage cut off, no more caravan sites or childshit among the dunes). Suddenly recovering his voice, croaking to the owner of the song, keep singing, don't stop. Hurling over the betrayal of slate, squawking like a tattered crow in a damp pasture after rain.

And finding her.

Tumbling finally in a ridiculous heap at the unbelievable feet of her, and she standing shocked above him surrounded by three fortuitously erect walls. The carrier burst and rolled tins of steak around her feet in an insane little dance, labels shouting in the sun. Struck dumb, he licked the blood off his lips and looked at her. Paralyzed by the uncertainty of the miracle.

A thin dirty angel of the broken suburbs, no wings but breasts like apples. Like breasts. And legs (thighs by definition) in torn slut-beautiful stockings. A face which meant everything and nothing, because it could have been any face.

Please don't go away lady.

I brought you some tins.

Isn't it wonderful, she said, to have found each other, and now we have this all to ourselves, there's nobody else.

Slumped before a comfortable fire, crammed to the larynx with steak, his head pillowed on her loins, watching Sirius twinkletwinkle with cold energy through a rift in the cirro-cumulus and an orbit in the wall. Cautiously running a hand along her calf: Yes. You're so laconic, she continued, tangling light fingers in his hair—Why, we could do anything, go away and live off the land in some quiet place. Shifting his position so his cheek rested at the magical nexus of belly and thighs: Yes, I suppose. She bending at the waist so that her breasts through the thin dress touched his other cheek, capturing him in the foetal curve of her body and him thinking we were always so naked under the clothes and the ceilings, so open to it all, when all the time all of us could have had this pleasant imprisonment, never bothering about bunkers or contraceptives. Kris, she said (why didn't I tell her my real name. What the Hell, she has my identity.) you aren't listening to a word. We'll go to the sea—he agreed silently, rubbing

his ear against her, straining for the labial message—and raise children and

Children.

He sprang up. Galvanized. Saw his every projected idyll snatched away on the wail of a red wrinkled scrap clawing in horrendous technicolor from her loins. And the primitive brood, years later, fragmenting incestuously to begin the sordid ghastly business again. First caves then prefabs. Flint arrows to germ warfare in a record 2,000 years. Silver to chrome. And at the wellspring of it all, himself, a second Perse O' Reilly, the patriarch, the sublime blunder. What's the matter, she cried.

New politicians, religions; inquisitions, resurrections; frictions, factions and strife.

Primary school, he yelled—and an R&B adolescence. Acacia Grove and No Smoking; tiled public bogs and tired public servants. Lime trees and Sunday morning cars and hunting women. Gagging, he ran. Beyond the walls, the wind incised his legs, moaned coldly among the amorphous wreckage. The moon was a bloated womb. God, he thought, policemen, bank managers, headmasters, thrones, principalities and powers. Lavatory paper and government flimsies. He tripped over a smashed sink, vomited without relief on the cold derelict residues of it all, fantasied a hundred acid-pushers, charitable institutions and mental hospitals receiving his spew of rejection. Tottered upright on to rubber knees and thence to intractable feet. Starlight shattered on the enormous devastation around him. He ran into the wonderful inscrutable darkness of the death of the town. Her huge grief followed him into the dark, then attenuated abruptly.

He was a reality in the barbed morning after a night of visions of a disintegrating neo-Malthusian Hell. When he woke in the dismal shelter of the L, he was trembling, and the pale sky was a needle in his resinous eyes. Retinal acupuncture. Something other than the cold had crept in under his flesh during the spectral night. The dawn wind froze his outside while his bones stewed and ached, and his head moved in a lax orbit around a complex of synaesthetic pain. Bruises and lacerations, his knees peeled raw under the corduroy. His throat haunted by the ghost of vomit, metallic. His rusty palate. The beads rattled as

he moved. Poor teddy. He passed out. Civilizations of gargantuan Guignols muttered through his head, and forebodings of Empyrean war.

Twelve noon again. The downpour lashed in believable curtains across the barrens and drumlins of ochre brick, termagent vortices whipping into the L. Water collected in the hollows of his collar bones and his ignited skeleton boiled the sweat out of his forehead. He felt for the pink carrier bag, remembered it gone. There was no fire except in his body, his sad corpus. In a lull in the rain, he dragged himself to the couturier for fuel. He was forced to dismember the chosen mannequin. Lug it in weary stages across the intervening desert of the street with frequent rests to the haven of the L. Pile the limbs in a Gothic heap, prop the swan-necked torso against the wall for further reference. The head watched him haughtily. He slept again, unable to get the pile burning. This time they were chasing him down Sheep Street with painless castrators and he lunged into the sanctuary of the church and was caught. At damp twilight the air bit his abrasions and he caught 2/ fuel leaking from a bent pump in one of the empty steak tins. Threw it on to the heap of limbs, seared the backs of his hands in the consequent whoomph of flame.

Unable to eat because of the molten steel in his jaw, he crossed syllogistic swords with the torso of the mannequin, whom he now perceived to be a haute couture reincarnation of Usheen the Wanderer. Casting himself as St. Patrick and pointing out the fires of retribution of the Fenian Men as typified by the burning limbs. The last ring of pain, my friend, and not a sight of the elfin breasts of Niam.

She stood over him in the morning gloom, the framework of her face mapped in grime. Two white runnels of tear erosion, eyes liquid sympathy. He tried to run away again. Milled about with hapless legs like a cockroach on its back. With frantic haste. But she was unavoidable and brought him water and canned soup which his body refused to refuse. He caught himself many times sinking into huge pleasures of warm words, never mind, better soon. And indeed the phantoms seceded from his skull, protestant before her kindness, and he was better soon.

Why did you run away.

Why.

He struggled, waving semaphore arms. Thickly:

Can't let it happen again. (Possibly she understood.)
Our duty to die fruitless, orgasms to splash and dry on
the wreckage. Offering to the megadead.

(All this through the afternoon in a low voice, straining to convince her with portraits of the long blind climb back through Toyntee, weary cycles ending in. This.)

And then the sacrament of the night, panting and sweating under Sirius, he grasping her and realizing that it could never be beaten, raking hot into her and knowing that it could never be ended.

Even by the morning of steel helmets and tanks shaking the L, and the lean profiles of bayonets.

Until Niam cut off those breasts.

—M. John Harrison

TO THE CHILD WHOSE BIRTH
WILL CHANGE THE WAY
THE UNIVERSE WORKS

after the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil

for Brian DeBeck

Psychedelic Muses note by note higher lead our song!
Not everyday hedged in delights of kneehigh shrubbery
Sing out of the timber, timber of conscious desire

Ultimate Comedy sailing already poem of Destiny
Great bodily changes giving a new birth to Order
Reenshrinement of Virgo, the seed of Saturn regained,
and a nova of children scattered from the zenith

Thou just on the birth of this child, the machine age
breaking down, total insurgent tribal golden beauty,
lovingly smile Light-goddess: thee restored Apollo

You so far deck this age, you wary it started,
President Kennedy, incepted many prodigious months
your term, if any remain of wickedness stick to us,
rid it, forever dissolve terror from Terra

He the gods' life will drink, he the gods will see
standing amidst heroes, and he will be seen by them
as Pacific steersman guiding by genital force the Orb

But to thee first, boy, its uncultivated little gifts
errant ivy here and there dotted with yellow the land
mixing iridescent lotus pours forth with thorns,
their milk to thee borne distended in Capricorn
udders, nor maned alarm the horned cattle Leo
Thy soft touch inciteth the wood of thy cradle to blossom
Fall back O serpent, and false weed adrip with poison
fall, and like Paradise everywhere explosions of poppies

And when heroic legend and days of grandparents
thou readest and what is thou canst recognize a man
gently ear by ear will ripen thy campus with virtue
wild like garnet pendants weigh down briars berries
and the ancient oak sweat from its bark dawn honey

A few though will yet be out, as of old; to defraud us
ripping Thetis with speedboats, stretching fencewire cross
country, going on with the land's rape, on schedule
A second George Washington will there be then, Valley
Forge,

volunteer militia, there will have to be more violence
and again at Troy the terrifying call for Achilles
But when unrepeatably to manhood thee hath brought
Destiny

closed will the sea be to travelers, and no freighter
take cargo, but the One bring forth the Many: the land

No rake will scratch the sod, no vine be slashed
Robust plowboy run now Taurus unyoke scrap the plow
Rainbow salesman tell no lies in wool by dyes
Erect on the meadow Aries will shudder and blush
magenta and orange, he will make his own Fleece Gold
Wilfully vermilion frisk the uncut lambs

"That way," they mutter, "and faster," to spindles
turning hearts inflexible words nod the Fates

Hurry glory—speeds the moment—the throes
dear god bud O MAGNIFICENT JOVIAN
CRESCENDO!

GASP THY FORM TREMBLES IN THE
WOMB OF BEAUTY
TERRA DISTRACTED SEAS THE
AERIAL VOLUMES
GASP THOU'RT COMING JOY IT ALL CHANGES!

O may I then so long last till at last experience
and imagination equip me thine to tell the days
No one my poetry will surpass, not Hart Crane
nor Lorca, though divine voices either enhance,
Crane the mortal Muse, Lorca rhapsodic Apollo
Pan even Arcadia with me judging as poet
Pan even Arcadia says is judged lesser

Look up, baby, smile, gaze on thy mother
mother weary bore thee ten exhausted months
Look up, baby: him unsmiled on by parents
no god beckons, nor the Soul bends to in sleep

—George Stanley



A SEXUAL SONG

He dressed in moth skins torn from a beaver's diary: a blue shirt and bedrizzled spinning trousers. He could not find his wolfmouth cane, and thunder weather threatened to drag his spirit down. He combed his hair, deloused his face, pattered around the huge washbasin like a marble cat on rosewood legs. The big bug peered at him from the mirror, bald in spots, grimy and rough, filling the stifling room with musty smell of sweatsocks and burned out fires of winter . . . Bats made noises of lust as they plunged and dipped in the sunny air, and Mole felt the rusty imprint of their fever-touch. He called the weather bureau to learn the local gravity conditions. A big voice boomed at him from many years back, speaking fresh inkings in the bedsheets of yellowed thoughts . . .

"Print culture seems to be dying this morning because the dead men who occupy those zones cannot provide nourishment to tribal electricians . . . Men of spirit, with real medicine to give, may now walk without fear past the armed custodians (weak phlegm bodies with scorched word knives) into the waking eyes of the people . . ."

"Thanks."

He was digesting this news when he spied a bluejay feather. It was flapping above his head, in the teeth of a huge spider. He sucked out the spider's guts, mailed them to the weather bureau, and put the feather in a cracker-box lined with red mush. It occurred to him that this resembled the good face of Sam Radish. Mole loved the facial mush of southerners, and their latent deep thoughts of \$100 Cadillac rifles. He'd performed many grand inspections of old Southman's countenance in the early days, under Ellen's wise persuasion. The dim light of New Orleans for a candle, her image flitting through magazine photos, foreign coins, books of garden news, and no-two-alike rocks. She was a wonderful conglomeration of labeled fancy fruits, weather and ballet were only the minor facets of her genius. Maybe Ellen would mail his

stuff out, or start the love affair over again—maybe . . .

Someone lapped the door. Then: tap tap.

It was his fat heir, Mr. Mad! The kid had showed up three days early! Quickly Mole hid his shaking hands under the rug and brushed his teeth. Just time to change his shirt. Whip an arrow through this shoelace. "Yeah? Be right there!" Plait this blue erection into my best pants. Dandy Bill Presson with a hard-on.

The door opened. Ellen Candle, her love-hand cradling the rind of a rainbow, crossed the threshold of pain, nodding sweetly into the vague suffusion of mustache fuzz.

"Oh," he said, "it's you." He smiled and went forward to touch her love-hand. The course of his disappointment turned to relief. Mr. Mad would scar a later day.

She drew stars on his wretched hand. A puzzle contracted agreements with the parts of her face. She hooked the head of a long train of thought into the valley of windows, where the past skirted the future under a black hood. "It's after we leave," she said.

Mole's smile went stiff and fell into his pockets. His mind traveled back and considered the cataclysmic events of history, when New York fell to the bombs . . .

"This city survived the last night of the hate flower. The Grand Dolphin has planned a furry welcome." Her voice rolled wearily in the simple bones of his ears, striking the already deflating news-joy balloon. He saw himself retreating from her demands, launching on his own into a surfaceless unknown. "I bid the just well," she said. "Whore child suffers from his ma. The wretched attack yesterday with diffuse misgivings. We're all sieves to a grandiose future, tested blooms dropping seed at a fragmented supper . . ." Mole stamped his foot and damaged the ground of the sunny day. He'd derailed Sam Radish's shaving spokes, the sun of grins, Flower, and now the dreams of the Grand Dolphin. At any rate he was ready to pay. The way Ellen was barking, he supposed this was a prison, and the reasons for everything were overgrown with age . . .

"The Grand Dolphin is our first Christ, he's admired you for years and is ready to comply with your wishes," she said, her face burning with glim. The hard sunshine cracked against the pallor of her skin, and her moist tiny eyes dripped wax in the dirt. There was a bag of mucous

under her face, and dough moved beneath the translucent fluid of this swollen confinement . . . Very strange, she seemed so beautiful this morning . . . And yet, she is very beautiful, a weathered persona in flight, different than your everyday eagle-lady . . . The sack of mucous gave her, in unguarded moments, a picnic display of nutrition, and when she spoke it was as if a river of enticing female sharks snared every word and signaled weird sexual messages to male sharks on the hill . . . "Have you any money left from the trick hatband I sent you last summer?"

"About a dollar I guess," he said, trucking out his coffers. "It helped me learn French at the cafe. I was very surprised when it produced the money."

"We're very poor," she said. "We've blown that whole million your uncle sent." Her sack suddenly inflated. "Why aren't you a midget like they told us? Do you sleep in the bathroom?"

"Well, Ellen, I always was a strong growing boy, even back when you were letting me fill your pants in public."

She blushed. "Unfortunately, we haven't modern plumbing facilities here. The Grand Dolphin takes the hose to contraband of that sort. We ride the body to freedom, and then we get off and walk in the eyes."

"Oh yea? Coulda fooled me."

She nodded toward the ashcan. "You'll find a chamberpot in there. Do your fancy stuff there."

"Yes mam," said Mole, terrified.

"And the curse of this house be wired into your cable. I'm both a candle and a lamp, a witch and a saint—you've seen my rainbow wings in flight, you've seen this ugly sack winking messages under my chin . . . Both species draw bugs, which do you prefer?"

"Whichever you've got the most of," he said, really wanting the old Ellen Candle, the young babysister baby-sitter who used to take him to bed when the folks went to the movies . . . She'd brought to manhood all the neighborhood detectives who came to spy, with her white limbs and white thighs, with her warm pulsing furry center, alive and moist, tucking you in, both treasurer and official historian of your sex life . . . She'd made him stroke her far up with tall candles, flick dimes up her snatch, and fuck fuck flaming coke bottles of gasoline to scorch her

tubes . . . Yes, he wanted that girl riding a silver cowbone, not this riddle of darkness mixed with melted light . . .

She danced to the fire-joker, winking iron robot bolted to brick, and let the joker's long metal tongue roll half-way into her glistening pubic hairs until her wings shuddered . . . Her slit dripped oil. "Would you mind picking me up from behind and plunging my foul earth? I'm starting to die . . ." Her feathers shook, her skin rained sudden white rain, and he, caught in the surge of physical regression, followed her order. "And a bird flew out the window of my mind."

Mole gyrated, caught in trembling giant female hands, caught in the muscle ecstasy of childbirth, all his juices sliding in the hollow of her hand, the physical breath of her supple white warm body . . .

"Twelve hours of this should be sufficient," she said. She lowered herself carefully onto the steel joker's tongue, while Mole worked rapidly around her legs, stuffing orifices in white-eel orgasm of worn nurses falling into bed at 3 A.M. hubby throws an arm across to squeeze . . .

"Yes, the morning's gone, and everything is hot again. Summer brings the smiling pheasant . . ." Very impersonally she took his lips with hers, and Mole screamed in agony, for she bit clean through with needle-sharp teeth. A bevy of invisible females was working him over, encasing him in brackets of hammered fifty-cent pieces, his mind was a ruined cowboy falling into a campfire, and the tender embraces of their sympathy only made the flames leap higher, until his thighs were rocket engines coughing liquid flame over their faces and eyes . . . A smile, wistful as a last glance, and a courtly compliment from the dying dream: "I want to say how pretty your hair is, Mole—its color matches my rainbow eyes."

The squirming crew drew suddenly apart, the voice of Mole's bride cut into the room, and the floor was covered with fallen hair: "refuse by any idea of time, Mole, to lick these ladies, and you'll miss your chance to conquer time. Real punishment has brought you to this place."

She hit the mark. Mole didn't know who she was or where she spoke from, but neglected footsteps filled the room.

Ellen spoke, "I've always been considered the finest room in this house. The Grand Dolphin fell from these

very thighs in this very bed. And Angel Three—the Grand Dolphin's father: a beautiful being, originally from Memphis—he spoke well of me! So who is this that would invade the private world of my imagination?" She perked her head back, listening for the distant sound; her eyes squinted, then closed. No voice came. Presently she relaxed and eased herself into a chair—the invisible sisters seemed no longer present . . .

She looked at Mole. "I suppose you've noticed the view?" Mole confessed that no, he hadn't, and walked over to the window. Below he saw a garden, growing on a fiery surface. Waves of ocean moved periodically among the jumbled wreckage of tomato plants, elephant trees, and flaming strawberries. As each lacey wave of foam would recede, the ground would shimmer and burst into flame, and then blast the sky like a delicate exploding sun, and numerous dwarfs would run forward to pluck the ripe fruit from the trees . . . An oriental prince sprawled raw and green in the noon heat, reading a book. He noticed the fire around and under him not at all, and with each coming of the waves he only paused to hold his book clear of the surging brine.

A tangled oblong outcropping was the scene of a riot. Assorted boys and girls were engaged in sexual combat, crushed together amongst grass and bush and vine and berry, while a massive fountain of liquid petroleum pushed them back against the garden wall . . . Soon the prince would rise to set the oil afire . . .

Now at the far end of the scene, opposite the house, was an *unusual* sight: A set of huge fingers haunted the garden with a waving dance of blood and broken fingernails, toppling slender snake-like fingers, mounted by a bevy of climbing cats singing the song of Judas. From time to time each cat paused to sharpen its claws.

Ellen rose from her chair to stand beside him. He felt her hand on his buttocks.

"In ancient history class at school, we had a law against fingers like those," he bragged. "Madame Kadinsky said that in a time of rest they would only uproot the quieted hordes . . ."

"Madame Kadinsky must be an intelligent woman. The Great Dolphin adores these fingers, performing daily sacrificial worship in their presence. They once helped us

build a porch," she told him in a reminiscing voice. "I remember when Angel Three was a young bird, just down from Memphis, and I was a child younger than you. In the evening we would sit on that porch sipping cherryade and listen to the crickets playing handball. When the moon rose, Angel Three stuck his awl in me and three months later the Grand Dolphin was born, scarfed out on that table under the thumb . . . I had a taste of shame that day, when the neighbors came by to watch . . . That was before your time, my friend." She spoke so quietly it was as though she intended only herself to hear.

"Did the porch just blow away?" asked Mole.

"Burned," she said, ripping a clear circle in the dusty window with her love hand. At once one of the huge stone fingers tossed a glistening droplet toward her heated lips. "It was in December, the week before Christmas, and I remember the only man on the place was Jesus Never, and he was even then very old. No one knows how the fire started, but it still burns today, before your very eyes. Only asbestos shingles keep the house from going up when the tide goes out . . ."

"And you planted this garden in the burning soil?"

"Just the willows and the goldenrod. The rest came up by itself, every time there was a dance in the music room. Every time Angel Three came to entertain with his "Memphis Sound", some new kind of fire-eating tomato or cucumber would spring up. . . . But those little joyous evenings are long past now, and the garden is hardly as complexly beautiful as it once was!"

Mole gazed down on the scene, trying to picture the kind of dances that created such mad greenery ("Angel Three played the jew's-harp," Ellen Candle was saying, "and Mr. Cootie honked the blabolla. And Jesus Never screwed threaded ants into a violin, magnifying their pitiful shrieks with a contact mike. The Grand Dolphin sang in shrill staccato tweets, which killed horseflies all over the state so they tell me . . ."), but the willows were pillows and the goldenrod lived in paranoid proximity to the trunk of a dead dancer. Yellow tabby cats chased skunks among the hairs of flame, and one huge brown eye showed itself from moment to moment through the smoke, glazed and secret and still.

Ellen Candle began to cry as she slipped back into the shadow of the room. "Your toothpaste is in the kitchen," she said. "If you'll come downstairs I'll fix you lunch."

—*Tom Veitch*

TWENTY-FOUR LETTERS FROM UNDERNEATH THE EARTH

LETTER 1.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont March 14th.

Dear Philip,
Hullo!

I found this tunnel on some early plans while I was trying to detect an elusive fault in an air conditioner. I was interested enough to try to trace it on the standard plans for the complex—and there it was, dotted in, almost invisibly and much smaller. The exit tunnel is placed behind our shower stalls. It's hard to imagine why such a device was ever conceived, let alone built in, but here it is and probably very few people know about it. I doubt if you will ever see this letter. Even if the tunnel is still in working order you may easily ignore the three bleeps coming from your personal communicator at the beginning of the rest period. And if you have not collected the letter after four days the bleeps cease altogether. A week later the letter is destroyed.

In the true tradition of the penfriend I will tell you something about myself. I take it for granted you recall the basic facts. I am now senior engineer in the s.c. with five others working with me. The work is steady, but rarely eventful, which is, of course, just as it should be. There are about one hundred and fifty of us here, all good people. My chief friends are Mr. and Mrs. Gatehouse—Mrs. Gatehouse is a nurse and Mr. Gatehouse, an agriculturalist, is our deputy controller—and my other friend, Nancy Sullivan, is also a nurse. In our free time we usually get together to play bridge, listen to music or just talk. Neil Gatehouse and I sometimes play chess.

I do hope you find this letter. I am sure you must be very busy but if you could find time to reply it would

confirm for me that the tunnel was still working and make it seem likely that other tunnels in other complexes might also function. In any case it would be nice to hear from you.

Yours, Claire.

LETTER 2.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe March 20th.

My dear Claire,

As you see, your tunnel is in working order! How splendid to hear from you after so many years. As you guessed I nearly failed to find your letter. The mystery of the rest period bleeps would never have been solved if Fred Nimmo, one of our engineers and a good friend of mine, had not remembered that while he was working under Liebnitz who, you know, pioneered the original complex designs, he had noticed this freaky system of inter-complex letter tunnels. Naturally he thought the device had been eliminated. The story goes that Liebnitz, although manifestly a brilliant engineer, was also an engineer without faith. He was well known for consistently including primitivisms in his designs, rather like a man going hunting with two rifles and taking along a bow and arrow as well. There was another man retained at high fees by the government apparently purely to sniff out and remove these completely useless features from the Liebnitz designs—all these unnecessary safeguards and hedged bets shoved in by the distrustful designer. The official obviously slipped up here. Sure enough, we found this little sneaked-in tunnel of Liebnitz's right behind our own shower stalls. No doubt all the complexes are discovering them at about this time.

Our senior psycho-sociologist, at any rate, knew nothing about them and cautioned me very strongly against mentioning them to anyone else, and against sending any messages through them myself. She said that the inclusion of the design was plainly an accident and that if its existence became widely known there might be all kinds of unforeseen and unforeseeable social tensions. I see what she means so I shall keep my knowledge to myself and I think it might be better if you did so too.

Our s.c. also has the standard complement—about 150 people. Morale is high, organization good and there are no difficulties. Of course I am doctoring here. If you have near-perfect machines to work with, I have near-perfect bodies. This is highly satisfactory although, as you say, monotonous. The daily routine, good diet, the work and lack of tension keep everyone fit. As often as not my surgery is empty.

It was good to hear from you again. How did you know where I am?

Philip.

LETTER 3.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont March 24th.

Dear Philip,

I was delighted to get your letter—and not merely to prove my theories about the tunnel! I was strangely relieved to find the only letter I have written for so long and the only one I anticipated writing for an even longer time had not been destroyed by the machine. It's peculiar how sentimental one can be about these mundane old actions.

I found out about you while I was helping Neil Gatehouse check his personnel lists. While I was adding the name of Baby Bradley to the records for your complex I noticed that you were in s.c.61 with your wife and son. What good luck for all of you.

I can quite see why your psycho-sociologist would rather nothing were said about the tunnels. The consequences of unlimited, unsupervised letter-passing between complexes might be odd in ways we can't imagine. Having said that I might add that I haven't told anyone about it myself. It's strange how furtive I feel writing here. I suppose that after all this time living communally in the complex I feel quite guilty about doing something not specifically prescribed and recommended to me and several others. Just think—I'm doing something *nobody else* is doing! Did you tell the psycho-sociologist you had actually received a letter?

I was up until two last night tracing the causes of an elevator failure and then making the repairs. The cause

was the inevitable baked beans tin. The personnel in the complex, carefully selected according to age and sex, present talents and future usefulness, charm and stability of character still includes that random factor—the eight-to-twelve-year-old boy. By their natures they do not want to work off energy and examine their own skills in harmless ways. They want the illicit, the punishable, the guerilla. The only way to beat them would be to provide a whole collection of hard-to-do, destructive tasks and let them get on with it. The difficulty is that discipline is, rightly of course, left to the parents, who either overdo the punishment or let them off altogether. They do this, I suspect, partly out of guilty sympathy with the sabotage. Anyway, the incidents go on. My quiet days are over, I suspect!

I must go now. My audition for the part of Portia in our complex production begins in five minutes.

Yours, Claire.

LETTER 4.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe March 27th.

My dear Claire,

Oddly enough Fred Nimmo tells me he is facing the same problem as you—he sees this childish ingenuity as a useful stage in development and a promising sign for our future. He is also furious about the extra confusion and work these vandalisms involve.

I am raging, having just failed my test in seed differentiation. This is almost as bad as failing my woodcraft test in the Boy Scouts. I had always, as you know, prided myself on my green fingers, natural feeling for the earth, a heritage from yeoman ancestors and so on. In my own mind I felt a farmer's boy, forced to adopt an alien trade. Hey ho.

By the way, I am almost sure we are part of a line of complexes down under the Prescellies, in North Wales. Nearly every night last February I dreamed a recurrent dream about that storm we had that April while we were on holiday at the Meredith's farm. Then I stopped dreaming. I don't know why.

No, I haven't mentioned your letters. I have not mentioned mine. Again, I don't know the reason. We're like icebergs to ourselves—we only notice part of ourselves. And there's a thought for you.

Philip.

LETTER 5.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont March 29th.

My dear Philip,

There's hardly any time to write. There are my lines to learn—yes, I succeeded. My program involves learning how to cook with simple materials. It was impossible enough for me in the old days, with complicated ones, as no doubt you remember. Imagine your fields full of dock and stinging nettles and the smell of singeing bread rising from my primitive stove. Like an anti-travel poster for the future.

Tension hangs over our corridor. Nancy Sullivan is in 12, next to the Gatehouses. I am opposite in number 11. We had to abandon last night's bridge game. It broke up in confusion when Mrs. Gatehouse and Nancy, who were partners, both burst into tears over a dispute about a mistake of Mrs. Gatehouse's.

Nancy still looks ill today—as she has looked for several weeks. The Gatehouses have had another of their muted midnight rows (although there is no point in discretion since little can stay hidden in the complex) and they are still rather distant with each other. Yesterday my neighbour sent me an unpleasant note about my persistent cough. I composed a venomous letter concerning his habit of drumming his heels on the walls at night. I tore it up and went to Dr. Benjamin for some pills and a massage.

How strange it would be if we were under the Prescellies. Since you told me I have been sniffing for the smell of grass and rain. I can still feel my feet on the wet grass. I can still remember, too clearly, the night of the storm.

Yours, Claire.

LETTER 6.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe March 31st.

My dear Claire,

I am sorry about your disturbances. I would have thought that if these situations go on they would be well worth taking up with your section counselor. I have myself just come out of a long conference with the complex counselor—unfortunately she isn't complex enough to deal with *this* one. I went because this morning I saw the last of three married women who have come to me in the past five days. All were pregnant. Two of them had the audacity, or a big enough block, to describe all their peculiar symptoms and then express amazement when I told them what complaint they were suffering from. The third one just looked me in the eye and told me she was pregnant. Naturally none of them could imagine how this could possibly have happened to them after their careful, even obsessive, practice of contraception. And when I assumed aloud that they would undergo abortions they all reacted strongly—the first woman cried, the second told me I had no right to practice medicine and the third, the unashamed pregnancy, shouted and called me a murdering bastard. So I hardly needed expert advice to decide that all three conceptions were very deliberate mistakes. Or that, having scored off the system, all the women were determined to bear fruit. Even the third woman, the swearer, a mother of three children—two in the complex, the third was a spastic—had the gall to tell me that it was only in the fourth month of pregnancy that it struck her she was going to have a child. Naturally there is no way of forcing the women to undergo abortions but the shock of three extra mouths and bodies on the delicate balance of the complex set-up could be serious. What alarms me more is that these three may be the first of many. If so, we shall be unable to cope at all. I spoke to the husbands of the women. Swearer's husband just raised his eyebrows and said, "Maybe the planners never thought of this, but then they never thought they'd have my Lena to deal with—I half thought she'd pull a trick like this." Nor did he have the grace to apologize. In fact he looked pleased. I can see his point, but then, he's a communications engineer and he won't have to sort it out.

A woman or a child is screaming in the corridor outside.
I must go and attend so, goodbye,

Philip.

LETTER 7.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont April 2nd.

My dear Philip,

Too late for the counselor now, and it has been for some time. Nancy came into my room last night and told me she is three months pregnant. Apparently Dr. Benjamin, when he saw her, just passed his hand across his eyes and said, "I suppose I musn't blame you—only rampant nature." She was the fifth pregnant woman he had seen that week. Nancy said that when she left he was wondering aloud how the complex could carry on if every second woman was going to give birth in October. I asked Nancy who the father was and she burst into tears. I dread to find out. I found myself saying, "Things are too complex here." They are indeed. I still remember picking the glass from the broken window out of you on the night of that storm. And it still makes me laugh—and, facing facts, after six months in the complexes there is very little left down here to amuse us.

Yours, Claire.

LETTER 8.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe April 4th.

My dearest Claire,

I'm sorry—and I feel sure there is more to Nancy's story than you are telling me. What is it? For me anyway it is a great relief to have someone outside the complex to talk to. More and more people come into my surgery with vague complaints, either nonexistent ills or plainly psychosomatic ones. There is nothing I can do but prescribe sedatives, panaceas. I really dare not think too carefully about what is happening here. The psychiatrists are as helpless as I am.

I am dreaming about the Prescellies again. You are there, too.

Please tell me what is wrong.

Philip.

LETTER 9.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont April 5th.

Philip,

If I didn't have you I would be the same as all the poor people about me. Something was badly wrong. Last night I was in bed late after rescuing some trapped adolescents from the freezer (oh, planners, why didn't you plan a little *better*) and I came through the great susurrus of the corridors at one o'clock—no one sleeps regularly any more, it seems. I fell asleep, anyway, and was awoken by the sound of breathing by my bed. I sat up in a panic. It was Neil Gatehouse. He buried his head in the bedclothes and began a terrible monologue about his love for me, his feeling of seeing everything but me through a glass window, coldly, not having any feeling of connection—oh, a long story, all mumbled and disorientated, present and past mixed, tales about his wife, his mother, his loneliness—impossible to describe to you. He begged me to take him into my bed, to let him sleep beside me as he could rest nowhere else. I countered in a whisper, for as you know everything is overheard in the complexes, and said that I was his friend, what about his wife, and what effect would something like this have on the stability of the complex, of which he is Deputy Controller. And so we went on, with Neil imploring and moaning while I tried to be sensible and quiet. He gripped me in the dark and, partly to divert him I said, "And Nancy?" The whole story poured out—he is, as I thought, the father of the child. He feels betrayed because Nancy allowed herself to conceive. He has asked her to have an abortion and now she says he does not love her or he would never have asked. This dialogue went on for hours, threats, cajolery, pleas—all the attitudes and situations of the Free World, of course, but somehow made worse because of our interconnectedness, our proximity, our time-

tables. Before we came down here all this drama would have been played out over miles of ground and broken up by car rides, going to work, contacts with strangers, all kinds of things. Down here the events are all infinitely more oppressive and important—down in this airless, shut-in world where we all know each other and our surroundings too well and where acting together is vital, a matter of life and death. In the end Neil tried to force me. We had a horrible struggle in the dark, both still conscious of the need to be quiet, all brunts and whispers and groans. Then he went away.

If only the radiologists, somebody, would give us a date, a date. If we could only count the months, even the years, it will be before we can come out. How can we check ourselves, think clearly, when there is nothing in view but this eternal cavern and its routine? This is a prison society. They give us no date because it's so far away. They tell us nothing because of what we shall find—desolation, then savagery, then death. We don't know what we'll find. *How do we know we will ever be set free?* We should have admitted all these things to ourselves from the first. The discipline of the complexes is so strong that we have not dared think the obvious things about our situation, still less talk to each other. Small wonder these individual worlds of fear and madness are growing.

In the canteen some people eat nothing and others try all the time to get more. The conversation is shrill. Some argue, others sit still, talking to nobody. Only the pregnant women, among the adults, are calm. They have got hope, I suppose, and an objective. They have a date to look forward to—a time which isn't the ever-receding, half-hoped-for, half-feared date which the rest of us have.

This place is a prison, a prison without sentences,

my love,
Claire.

LETTER 10.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe April 6th.

Claire, my love, take heart. I think and hope we shall be released. Soon the gates will open and we shall be chased out on to the Prescellies like sheep out to spring pasture.

The regimen, the concrete walls which make you want to tear at them with bleeding hands, the airless air and the tasteless tastes and the floor which feels of nothing under your feet, all these will be gone. Imagine us gamboling like goats on the sides of the mountains.

If the trees are mouldering stumps and the land is blighted and the grass is fungus and the whole mountain is full of horrors it will still be better than this. We can start to live in the open again.

One of the psychiatrists is asking me questions—he wants to find out how I can be happy in this atmosphere of illness and failures of love and reason. I can't tell him.

all my love,
Philip.

MESSAGE TO TUNNEL COMPUTER SC60 LETTER
APR 6/5 HAS NOT BEEN COLLECTED AFTER 7
DAYS AND IS BEING DESTROYED.

LETTER 11.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe April 9th.

Claire, where are you? Write to me. I can feel the mountains pressing down on me.

LETTER 12.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont April 14th.

A week's sedation prescribed by the doctor. We must all work to maintain the complexes. I shall not write any more letters. It is too dangerous to us and to the complexes.

LETTER 13.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe April 15th.

We love each other Claire. We have nothing left without that. You must write to me. Write to me—*write*.

LETTER 14.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont April 21st.

I did collect your letter but I cannot collect any more. Please do not write to me again. It is bad. You must think of your job, the complex and your union with your wife and child.

MESSAGE TO TUNNEL COMPUTER SC72 LETTER APR 21/8 HAS NOT BEEN COLLECTED AFTER 7 DAYS AND IS THEREFORE BEING DESTROYED.

LETTER 16.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont May 11th.

Dear Philip,

I had to say how sorry I am. We have both tried to ignore our functions. We are a human structure inside a mechanical one. Neither part can break down without our purpose being lost. The machine is here to make us survive. We must work inside it to survive.

Claire.

LETTER 17.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe May 21st.

Dear Claire,

Thank you for your letter. My wife has gone into a state where nothing and no one can reach her. I blame myself for not seeing her condition until it was too late. My son is living with a couple two doors down and I see him regularly. I have just undergone ten days sedation. I hope you will be happy.

Philip.

LETTER 18.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe August 17th.

Claire,

As the months passed the grayness began to wear off. I

think I see what they have done to us, with the best of intentions. Will you write to me again?

Philip.

LETTER 19.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont August 19th.

Dearest,

What fools we were not to see that even our frenzies had been predicted in advance. I love you—I suppose this means another attack of ergotomania and another mass sedation and mental purging very soon. I am sorry about your wife—and even sorrier about my part in pushing her towards collapse. I am more sorry than I can say.

Your, Claire.

LETTER 20.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe August 20th.

Claire,

All is quiet here. I am studying obstetrics with twelve births expected soon. I wish I could ask you to marry me. But I suppose we must now practice living quietly.

Philip.

MESSAGE TO TUNNEL COMPUTER SC60 LETTER AUG 20/10 HAS NOT BEEN COLLECTED AFTER 7 DAYS AND IS THEREFORE BEING DESTROYED.

LETTER 21.

Claire Harlowe to Philip Beaumont August 30th.

We have an infection here which is killing us. It began four days ago. Ten are dead already and half of us are sick.

It is a tunnel-sickness, a shelter-sickness. The doctors cannot name it and they do not know how to cure it. It

starts with a fever, which ends in coma and death. The children are sickest—seven of the dead are children. So this great piece of engineering, all this human ingenuity designed to save us is useless. It seems unlikely that any of us will survive. Any who do not die of the sickness will die as the shelter complex slowly stops operating. It was all useless, all futile, all nothing.

LETTER 22.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe August 31st.

Claire, my love. I can't reach you or comfort you. Send me a message over the system to say you are alive. Don't leave me alone.

MESSAGE TO TUNNEL COMPUTER SC60 LETTER AUG 31/11 HAS NOT BEEN COLLECTED AFTER 7 DAYS AND IS THEREFORE BEING DESTROYED.

LETTER 23.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe September 1st.

Claire, send me a message.

MESSAGE TO TUNNEL COMPUTER SC60 LETTER SEPT 1/12 HAS NOT BEEN COLLECTED AFTER 7 DAYS AND IS THEREFORE BEING DESTROYED.

LETTER 24.

Philip Beaumont to Claire Harlowe September 2nd.

Claire, send me a message.

MESSAGE TO TUNNEL COMPUTER SC60 LETTER SEPT 2/13 HAS NOT BEEN COLLECTED AFTER 7 DAYS AND IS THEREFORE BEING DESTROYED.

—Hilary Bailey

**SIX
MORE
DRAWINGS
BY
ROBERT
LA VIGNE**





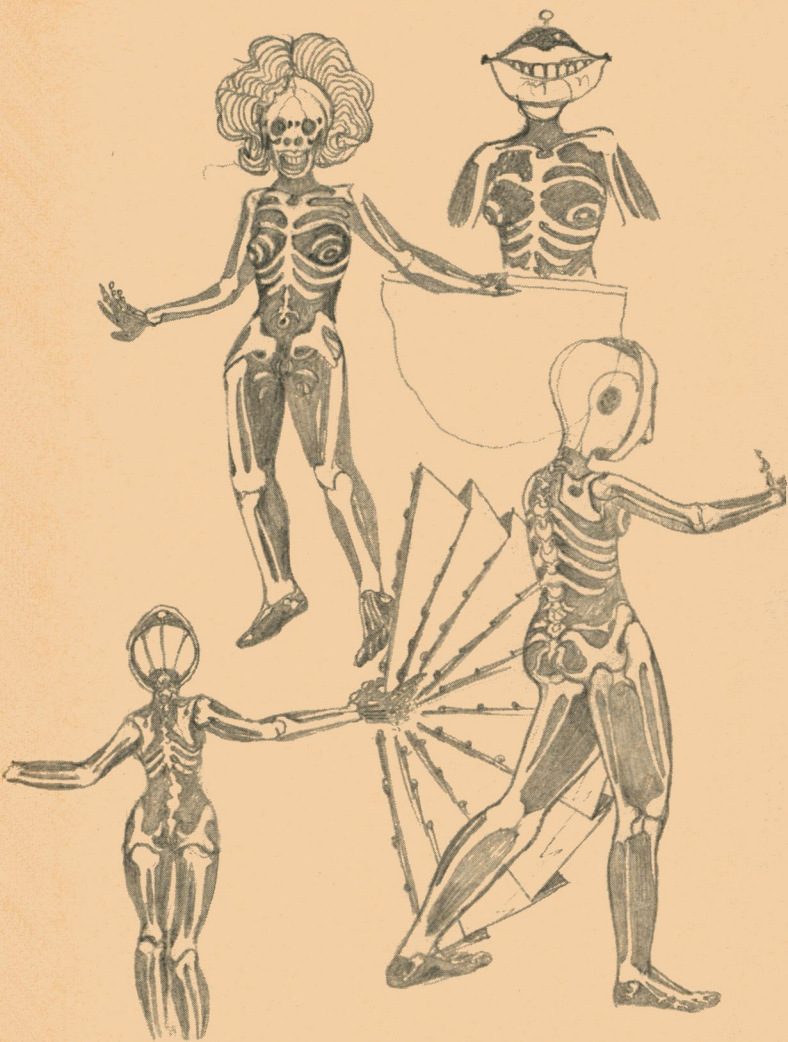




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1950





THE CODED SUN GAME

“Goodbye.”

Paul’s room was a solarium and, in the main, it defined the area of his memory. This much, however, he could remember from a time when speech seemed to be a chromatic code:

“Goodbye . . .” painfully distilled from the doors as he walked along the rectilinear corridors. One thing: the sun was shining. If he closed his eyes, a vague dull red disc pulsed in his head, a pseudo-visual threnody. If he opened them, true visual impressions swam chaotically; he could wait until things were just right, then blink and fix the configuration, encaustic image in his brain.

There was a hand on his arm, dusty brown on the textured gray of his sleeve. It was so beautiful that he turned and smiled, wanting to voice his thanks. But he could not.

The man’s face was below Paul’s, as brown as the hand but glossier, against a field of white—coat, shirt, the wall behind. Emblematic eyes, exposed teeth and red tie made a pleasing arrangement on this field. Paul blinked involuntarily; lifted one hand in which the sun-streamed blood wept. Ochre themes trickled down the wall.

From somewhere, the sound of an old Beatles record.

The hand led him along past polished wood doors and handrails, dull steel lightswitches and waxy green plants. A Player’s packet lay devastated at the foot of a potted palm. Beyond that, huge windows overlooked an enclosed courtyard with a circular pool shattering the sky. In the pool, fish swam. Goldfish, sunfish; molten fragments. Meanwhile, other windows closed across the smoke of someone else’s despair, but Paul’s was blowing in the solar wind. He let the hand move him on.

Stairs led down to a large hall which seemed to be filled with low pinewood tables and blue glass ashtrays.

Its far end was all glass doors, constantly opening and closing. People moved around—rather sloppily, Paul thought, like bacilli. He was amber in the eyepiece as blue uniforms and white smocks mottled the slide down the microslopes.

Then a point of stability. A man in a light suit and dark sunglasses stood motionless, with suitcases at his side. His shadow was nailed across the vinyl floor, dead as a dream—which wasn't quite as it should be. That messed Paul's mind a bit. But echoes of noon reverberated from the man's glasses, spilled from his teeth. His clothes were vibrant with remembered sunlight.

Outside, everywhere outside, the sun was burning.

Abruptly, all was order. Everything came good. Paul forgot about the murdered dreams, turned to the smiling brown face that was still beside him and said: "Goodbye."

Words were burning, mouths chewed ashes.

No right turn—an automobile interlude of indeterminate duration, with heat-generated leather odors and a flare of *Paris Match* across blue jeans, reflected sunlight from the ring on the hand on the steering wheel, blooming from the rear-view mirror, muted in the dark glasses—Reversed route signs, Heinz, giant hoardings; Shell and Esso and BP and National and Mobil pipeline dreams between diverging white lines, billboards and neon tubes—EAT—Filling stations with flags torn to shreds by this snarling Jaguar, blowing the urban jungle scene—Fina and Gulf—EAT!—A song on the radio ". . . don't you know it's better slow . . ." but going faster ". . . don't you know . . ." An inquisitive glance and "My name's Clive Noland, by the way."—To the coast, with germs of moisture tracing diagonals across sterno-mastoidal ridges, saline lakes behind his collar-bones, a littoral embodiment—The ruined beaches of the world, lapped by tides of sight and sound—Damp shirt slack like the fabric of the atmosphere, unstable pressure complex—No; very stable, now, very heavy . . . and sleeping . . .

And, later, waking with the house in his eyes, Paul was hooked again immediately, in deep, without knowing how. The house: without co-ordinates, cut adrift by sleep and dislocated, it shimmered on the brink of a tear in No-where-land, collapsing through its own volumes the moment

that he saw it. Not wanting to lose what he nearly had, Paul gazed at this house with its nearby studio and thought of California and Florida and teeshirts lit by seaglint through Coco-Cola—Bob Rauschenberg, Bob Dylan, hard rains falling in cuticles of heat—Someone making noises: “Thruway down along the beach is popcorn dense depressive Solar Complex area”—Beach Boys singing from this terminal hysteric studio, white on white surface, blond on blonde hotel for dark-haired transients with 20/20 vision—Of stone and concrete on the slope that faced the sea (Ocean X, his tears, his sweat, his own stoned face)—*House and Garden* colors, cool and conscious; paths that curved and angled, defining a tiled swimming pool which in turn defined the depth to which he could sink in the fluid of his own eyes, the ocean of his head, with all its trodden kelp and lagered breath. He choked on the smoke from someone else’s newly-lit cigarette (always someone else’s, on this private head-scene beach, like the scented lotions and the flaring fabrics)—Noland’s cigarette . . .

Then everything was fixed—Paul and/or the house got it all together, all the hindsighted imagery from other summers Here-Now in interaction, precognized in dreams—Quantal person, quantal domicile, marginally realized—*Deja vu* . . .

After that, Paul’s room—which was a solarium . . .

FIRST PHASE

At first the room was a white-out, a photospheric luminosity that drowned its own surfaces. Clive Noland had to drop the cases he was carrying to help him out of it, back to the rational living room. “All the things in there are yours,” he said. Paul nodded dumbly, the white still in his eyes.

Later, however, he was increasingly able to tolerate the room and to isolate some of its elements. By early evening he had found the typewriter—a golf-ball IBM—on a long low desk. Much later still, he used this to type three words, precipitating an attempt to relate certain discrete elements that seemed to intrude constantly and from which he sought to define valid parameters for his existence. Of this he was

sure: his present "existence" was false, almost entirely the construct of other people's imagery. His own percepts and behavioral patterns, which did nothing but sustain this distorted phenotype, were manipulated by the instruments of delusion—or, worse, these things *were* the instruments of delusion. They were so all-pervasive and indispensable, however, that it was necessary to work on their terms at this stage, to contrive them into self-destructive oppositions, and so release his subjugated self. He needed consciously to know, explore and exploit the true potentialities of his genotype. Something—existence itself—was lying to him. He felt mutilated. So he had to make the world's illusions annihilate themselves. It did not seem important that, to be effective, any action in that direction would be drastic in a personal sense, or that ultimate relativity might just be the beginning of total dissociation. It *was* important to be free to roam the causeways of valid memory, to get down (Paul grinned cynically) to the real nitty-gritty. His head would fix the universe with its own images. So he typed three words. This first phase attack commenced:

Confusion of media

Even at this early stage, a premonition that all imagery leads to the Sun. $E=mc^2$ —the Sun transmutes hydrogen into helium and radiation. Okay?

Serial image for meeting Michie

Clive Noland led Paul through a blue glass door and out onto the patio. The door shifted the light so that it fell in Paul's vision through the dome of an inverted eye-bath and remembered foreign bodies swam cyanine in tears as he muttered: "No, Mother, it still hurts . . ." But that was the dust of another summer; this pain fell now.

"Come on . . ."

Patio: planned environment / designed for living, Florida birdcage style with variable fiberglass perimeter / overhead cedarwood grill with semi-area opaque canopy making sunlight pleasantly non-directional (except that Paul liked his sunlight neat), a slowly opalescent drizzle on low stone walls and muted floor patterns / an abstract

mosaic on the wall between the blue doors and the floor-to-ceiling windows of the master bedroom, the lord-and-master's bedroom / swimming pool and garden beyond the birdcage, with stuttering sculpture and a carefully cultivated jungle of vegetation; prissy doffings of the cap in the direction of the sea beyond the mutilated littoral / integral links, bringing landscape into house or vice versa, what the hell—end of come-on.

Paul looked along Noland's outstretched arm towards the girl whose copper skin blazed against the sky-blue of a canvas chair. Images of America. Gently he hummed the opening bars of an old Tamla Motown hit.

Then an even older Phil Spector number. Right. It was Saturday morning, 11:45, and a Chrysler Corp. insignia held precedence over a shifting background in which a homeless little grimy stalked the city streets to collect 7-Up cans, radiator grills and headlamp housings from municipal garbage depots and auto wrecking lots for the price of a meal from an idle maker of assemblages. *River Deep, Mountain High* spilled down from open windows. Heat assailed the tenements; their minimal fenestration gasped out the residue of last night's beer and pot, stale violence and sweaty sex—atmospheric mud oozing down the fire ladders, dripping from the multi-level lines of washing and telephone cables, swamping traffic signals, stunning rabid dogs. Something very familiar about the grimy's movements as he disappeared in a limp forest of teeshirts, jeans and overworked underwear. At one minute to noon, someone added the word EAT to a collage, and the grimy entered the fifth-floor studio empty-handed, spitting bits of tooth, while the smell of hamburgers drifted among the radio-sculptures. The grimy leaned, sweating, his mouth a bloody mess, against the curling mayhem of a bulletin board, obliterating Almagordo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki with one brown shoulder, well aware of the photographs' significance as he snarled at the fairy painter who was nancing towards him. Nearby, a silent Bikini exploded across the sensitized wastes of eternity, a premonition of an endless thermonuclear second which had already ignited firestorms down the anachronistic grimy's spine and was flaring in the eyes of "Michelle, my daughter."

Paul bobbed his head fractionally.

“Hello, Paul.”

Michelle’s voice and apprehensive face, in anticipation of the perpetual Saturday noon—through automobile noises from Detroit at a distance—from Florida’s neon-fogs—from the last chewing-gum outposts beyond the pipelines of Libya.

Studies of the spectral sensitivity of the human eye show that, in photopic vision (vision in strong illumination), the brightest apparent color is a yellowish green with a wavelength of about 560 millimicrons.

Which was the color of Michelle’s bikini. Is she, Paul wondered, aware of the textural and chromatic tensions at the intersections of her shining brown skin and the lime-bright fabric? These contacts cause momentary visual paroxysms that are analogous to the ecliptic flash spectrum by which Young established the existence of the Sun’s chromosphere. The chromosphere is violently red, and so is Michelle’s blood.

Blue canvas showed between her smooth thighs, an inverted wedge of sky in a gravityless ravine.

(Normally, the spectroscopic Fraunhofer lines are seen in absorption but, as the continuous spectrum of the photosphere is eclipsed, they appear in the momentary flash spectrum *in emission*.)

Paul walked to the edge of the patio and gazed eastwards beyond the movable translucent panels at the white concrete and glass studio built on a prominence of rock thirty yards away. Pieces of sculpture perched pertly all around, causing a certain amount of uneasiness among the bushes and stone outcrops, bleached by the sun and the salty breezes from the (tree-, villa- and road-strewn) arc of the bay below.

“Do you understand what your mother’s doing, Michelle?” he asked.

Paul and Michie’s prelude images for Barbra Noland

“Did Dad tell you . . .?”

"No. He said nothing. Where's he gone, anyway?"

"He's putting the car away."

Reluctantly detaching himself from his virility symbol, Paul thought. That great shiny metal animal fetish. Just a sophisticated version of the wooden phallus slung from a belt, is all, except that *it* carries *him*—a metaphor made explicit. But I'm suitably impressed.

"Or, for that matter, what your father's doing?"

Michelle had been watching him with a covert mixture of amazement, interest and discretion. Now the whole thing was scuttled by a frown; too much ballast, sinking into farce.

"*He's* qualified to know what he's doing. That's all that matters."

Yeah. Well . . . Let's think this out. There is a sad phase in the cyclic story of automobiles as sex-substitutes when they are disintegrated in the catafalque—But the resultant quanta of separated metals are reborn in the foundry furnaces, part of the waste-recycling processes that will soon be almost total in response to increasing pressures on natural resource and disposal facilities, environmental pollution, and a growing demand for constant novelty with rapid turnover—Today's Cadillac contains bits of yesterday's Buick which contained bits of last week's Ford, etc.—So a continuing supply of mechanized virility is assured by an inorganic analogue (*facile*, but no matter) for DNA and for the psychic chain of compulsion and desire which has produced a staggering list of totems and surrogates, from clay figures to contraceptives, sun gods to superstars, phallic rocks to phallic rockets; and the Neanderthals were just as conned as we—The molten birth/death of an automobile is a parallel for the solar origin/end of consciousness (and the shattered ghosts of car-crash casualties are no more mutilated than the rest of us, victims of the accident of life, trapped within the impacted shells of our own personalities)—The defectiveness of conscious perception can be traced to the Sun—After all (before all), the Sun is the archetypal fertility symbol, isn't it?—Fertilized the primal soup with its ultra-violet emissions, didn't it?—Not neglecting to add a pinch of boiled-in obsolescence—The untruth drug—So much for all this Creativity shit Michelle is about to throw . . .

As if to reassure him she added, more gently: "Honestly, Paul. Believe me."

Not answering, Paul wandered to the mosaic wall, measuring himself against its circular forms. The tesserae were mainly ceramic and glass, but sprinkled with stainless steel, copper and colored stone.

"Do you like it, Paul?"

"No."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because . . . Oh, because it's not quite as good as it nearly is." That much at random.

Michelle half-smiled in annoyance. "Do you specialize in killing conversations?"

That was a good question, one he would have loved to answer. But, practicing what she preached against, Michelle immediately continued: "Surely, it's in the nature of creativity that . . ."

Paul groaned quietly. She either did not hear, or chose to ignore his rudeness.

". . . as one's ability to express a concept expands, so does the concept itself. It's perpetually out of reach. Which accounts for that popular image bit . . ."

". . . ? . . ."

"You know, the—the ecstasy and agony of the creative obsession." Self-mockingly earnest, that, delivered with a shrug.

Paul turned his back to the mosaic, pressing his hands flat against it. His eyes were closed.

"Your mother did this . . ." He deliberately let the four words hang somewhere between the states of statement and question. Michelle's answer joined them accidentally.

"You know . . ." Then she added, knuckling her lip: "Yes. Yes, she did."

Agony and ecstasy, eh?

"Does she always work from a preconceived idea, Michelle?"

"Er—yes. Of course."

Oh.

He knew he was disturbing her. She was obviously finding it necessary to justify something she was not sure of herself. She did not like doing that.

"Paul . . ." again she tried the name between her lips

and teeth; familiar shape, strange flavor. “. . . Paul, that’s her favorite piece.”

“Probably.”

But he had wanted to say *I know*.

His eyes still closed (he saw better that way), Paul thought of Barbra Noland’s sculptures and of segregation. *In genetic terms, segregation means a pair of genes separating during meiosis and randomly combining with other genes at fertilization.* In sociological terms: the total separation of black and white blue jeans? The refusal to see any relationship between a pebble and a quasar? But divergent thought and the creative impulse make with the random combination bit—Thought of integration: Barbra’s artistic abortions. She’s succeeded in mating a cabbage with a car engine—yippee; Brachiosaurus bones with printed circuits—so bloody what?; helices of DNA with giant Coke bottles—pop goes evolution, an’ I bet I know what photographs are on *her* bulletin-board—All this preconceived imagery means the continuity of deception; we’re on a sidetrack to nowhere, so let’s get on the mainline back to where it’s at (my manifesto: Self-Destroying Image Complex)—There must be an unmolested molecule of reality buried somewhere deep in the subconscious, so shovel out the shit; go roast in the sun if you must—*But don’t lose grip on what has lost grip on you!*—Don’t lose it, even if you don’t know you have it—Go play Sun Limbo—The source of deception is also the repository of truth—Go burn away the phoney in the fucking sun . . .

Paul opened his eyes. “Do you like Solar Complex, Michelle?”

She paused. “The pop group? Yes, they’re very good, considering how commercial . . .”

“Pop? Pop-pop-pop. Well, yeah, I suppose they are, but don’t knock it. Being very popular is the only way to succeed . . .” (don’t misunderstand me as I pause) “. . . in what they’re doing.”

Michelle *was* taking that wrongly.

“I mean, like, they’re an antidote, y’know? No use having an esoteric cure for the common cold.”

She still wasn’t understanding, sniff.

He squatted a yard or two from the girl, with his arms

across his knees. Head tilted, he squinted at her through the glare, a mischievous grin on his face, about to stir the embers of the Creative Impulse.

"What's it like to be a preconceived idea, Michelle?" . . . or should I, tale-tied fishwife, have said *simultaneously conceived*? Are you, Michie, the embodied apple of your mother's inner eye, the fruition of an idea born nine months before you, as Daddy Noland lit her fire? (How many years ago? That day the Sun was active, or they dropped a bomb.) If so, a very half-baked apple you're turning out to be.

The girl had stood, turning her back to him.

"I don't know whether to say touché, or get lost, Paul. Are you always going to take advantage like that?"

"Take advantage of what?" The bewilderment was genuine.

Michelle sensed it. She shrugged and turned, her face friendly again. "Oh, nothing. I'm sorry, Paul. I don't always talk like this, you know . . ."

"Yes."

"Only to people I like. Or know very well . . ." She glanced along the patio.

"He's not there, Michelle. He's gone inside."

"Who?"

"Your . . . father. Who else?"

"Oh. Yes . . ."

Paul was still crouching, rocking on his toes. His eyes were slitted, saw a shift of shapes through the studio windows. Also Michie, blurred and restless—then pausing, her mouth open.

"Hey, Sunshine!"

Then smiling as his shoulders tensed, his hair flopped. She had been watching his face with that faintly astonished expression, as though she did not believe it—or her own eyes. She'd have been better off not believing either, for now her sardonic little smile was an admission of sorts—of the increasing confusion, of names and questions obsessively repeated, trying to fix things, but making them worse. Here we go again; more bloody Payola—Michelle's face tending to obscurity around corners of the lingering saline breeze at midnight, where swimwear and knitted Acrilan glow from windows on a passing couple, towards where I heard that name someone—Where phantom

feet walk on sand dragged up the concrete from abortive beach-parties by people whose ignited flesh now lights the interiors of green and orange tents along the coast (longing, not belonging, sense of deprivation), lanterns on the beaches, or luminaries with wide-spectrum emission, anonymous by day, as overt as starshine at night (fish-heads in the moonlight, sour milk and mist, a hesitant D-seventh)—Binary stars locked together forever, discrete bundles of energy (Beatles strangled by a trannie, smothered laughter, teeth colliding, the thrum of a guitar struck by a naked foot; plop of seagull shit on canvas)—From somewhere, a voice (whose lips I can't see)—Unidentified Radio-Source, Ricordel frame tent, South Devon coast—The memory-scrambled message is . . .

“Michelle? (Sunshine?)?”

Clock-hands clap together on the perpendicular, thunderous applause at noon, July 5, which is aphelion. The Sun 94,500,000 miles away and blazing.

A quantum (h) of radiation is 6.62×10^{-27} ergs per second—Planck's constant. Which is .0000000000000000000000000000662 erg-seconds. The energy output of the Sun is 3.8×10^{33} ergs per second. Quanta are absorbed by the retinal rods and cones of the human eye, which generate neural signals to be transmitted—via synapses, ganglion cells, optic nerve fibers, geniculate bodies—to the visual areas in the cortex of the brain's occipital lobes, where corresponding neurons are activated. The minimal threshold for visual sensation is infinitesimal and the human eye, being incredibly adaptable, can deal with hundreds of millions of times that amount before irreparable damage occurs. Also: the retina transforms light into neural energy at a rate of at least one million bits (binary digits of information) per second. However, only a tiny amount of this is consciously used. Does *reality* exist only in the unrealized mass of information, whilst consciousness is fixed to receive only the minority, the carefully doctored and loaded data, full of passive-accept impulses (rhesus monkey sucking on its soft-warm cloth mother; yea-saying little fool, high on one of a hundred psychotomimetics, loving the hand that points the soft gun at his head, the

finger that pulls the trigger). Drums roll behind the windows of our eyes; images align, spin, realign, alien images never hitting Jackpot (will we *ever* put two and two together properly, be a *critical* mass?)—*Click!*—A spinning chamber, falling hammer, another Russian roulette-off (or a software put-on), camera shutter, clock escapement, lizard's eye, a lever depressed by a battery monkey (or a solar sell-out) to receive his reward—not milk from the cloth mother, though, but sucker-bait from the machinery of delusion—Corn, chickenfeed, pre-digested pap, spiked by the barbed wire skeleton of the soft surrogate—*Click!*—All the ad-masticating jaws, fed on mixed-up metaphors—EAT, DAMN YOU, EAT!—*Click!*—The circuits of thought being broken—*Click!*—Another second passing, another door closing—To resist: be mongoloid? autistic? dyslexic? aphasic? without senses? dead?—*Click!*—Doors opening—Whatever, the trouble lies in the processes beyond the cortical neurons and in the origins of matter . . .

Click!

And what pattern of neurons is firing now, Paul wondered, as I lie here on the patio floor, sweating, fixed like Michelle's flash-shadow on photosensitive emulsion in a solar exposure triggered at noon by someone saying:

“Michelle? Paul?”

Clive Noland—his sunglasses a mockery—had left the house and was approaching rapidly. He had a pair of binoculars in one hand, an expression of concern on his face.

An earlier idea was collapsing in Paul's mind, leaving inconclusive burnt-out symbols. He made of them what he could.

“My parents were bo . . . I mean they were . . . killed in a car crash, Michelle.” That was not it, exactly, but it would have to do.

Her eyes were steady—perhaps with incomprehension.

“I'm sorry, Paul, but—that's not . . .”

He lay back on his elbows, one knee bent, watching the girl as she crouched at his side. Perspiration played havoc

with the reality of her face. Her left breast flared, died, ignited again—pulsed.

Meanwhile, the studio door opened and Barbra Noland—Clive's wife, Michie's mother and God knows what else—appeared, a vision of white. But her hands were stained bright carmine.

Telecommunication images for talking to Barbra

One night—probably the first, although it does not matter—there was a program about New York Pop Art on television. Barbra wanted to watch it, and so did Paul. Together with Clive and Michelle they sat in the mutedly expensive split levels of the living room, waiting for a news broadcast to end.

A preliminary detail: one of Barbra's dark, emblematic paintings glowed between two wall lights near the television—the *sloping, dechromatized strata of foliage, blistered, cauterized, infinitely depressive, assassinate the light that falls on them and minimize the cryptic symbols embedded in their schistic masses*—Paul wanted to talk about it but, after a while, he found himself reduced to monosyllabic comments and indecisive gestures while Barbra did the talking. He bore his own conversational breakdown with quiet patience, compact and withdrawn in a low armchair, some compensatory mechanism heightening his awareness of tactile impressions. His deeply tanned, newly washed skin was hypersensitive to the fabric of the chair arms, the various values of his clothes, the hair on his neck, richly glazed stoneware between his fingers—bits of supercharged reality there. His shirt moved as freely over his shoulders as Clive Noland's occasional questions passed over his head—and made more contact. Also: the contacts of cotton with skin were answers, not bloody stupid questions.

Paul hardly noticed the little seismic movements of his left hand. They all drank coffee and Michelle sometimes smiled at him from a burnt-orange sofa beneath a walnut-clad wall. It was all very rich and mellow, this room, with its vaguely Peruvian fabrics and ceramics, its sapele and rosewood, philodendron, rubber plants, Michie's eyes *codified in symbols on the painting?*

Barbra finished speaking. The painting remained

unaltered, but altering, verb transitive—*its own area diminishing that of the room and all its contents, everything being drawn towards, into, a central cipher: 0: enigmatic zero*—and Michie turned up the TV volume.

Then the program, the first ten minutes of which passed fairly objectively, with a few comments from Barbra, intelligent noises from Paul. Clive Noland, swift-eyed, murmured something about pop art's sociological significance, pooh.

It was not the commercial channel, but the word BUY!!! filled the screen and Paul was away. He played a controlled-elimination game for Barbra, buying stale old time with tenth-hand images . . .

Recorded interview with Andy Warhol; Brillo boxes and lohraW ydnA Andy Warhol lohraW ydnA—110 Coca-Cola bottles—

MARILYN MARILYN MARILYN MARILYN
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ELVIS ELVIS

LIZ

—4 Campbell's soup cans, dozens of flowers, diagram of a dance step, to an electric chair—DEATH AND DIS-

ASTER / Cut / And EAT——Robert Indiana, USA
 DIE (in Selma, Alabama; or in a bloody mess down
 Highway 61)—Robert Nighthawk: *Kansas City Blues*—
 COCA-COLA PLAN: Barbra, like Rauschenberg's Coke
 bottles, takes wings and flies around a FLAG, traumatic
 Superstars and Stripes by Jasper Johns, the whole montage
 moving convulsively—In the fifteenth star is Paul's own
 face; a very nervous fifteenth state or sixteenth summer /
 Cut / To close-up of Noland's chevrons on Paul's shirt:
New Light: Par Transit: diagonal dislocation—"Rau-
 schenberg, Johns, Dine, etc. are often termed pop artists,
 but"—Pop is Kool—Dro-Bomb Art—7-Up Art—Not
 to be confused with Blown-apart Art, the hot hysterics of
 the Doom School—"Why Brad, darling . . ." / Cut / To
 Ben Day dots of Roy Lichtenstein's version of Picasso's
Woman With Flowered Hat, which is eventually blown
 like everything cool it's flyblown in the wind and the sound
 of Bob Dylan singing *Bob Dylan's Dream* all the way
 down *Desolation Row* / CUT /// POW!!! BLATTT!!!
 / CUT //// To Oldenburg's soft sculpture, soft feat of
 Claes, soft soft soft typewriter keys to a soft death?—
 Vinyl and kapok and canvas, epoxy and acrylic—Sand-
 wiches and slices, hamburgers and popsicles: Olden-
 burgers make the mouth water but THEY CAN'T BE
 EATEN! / CUT CUT CUT //// Wesselmann, Rosen-
 quist—Now everything going minimal: Stella, Poons,
Noland (are Paul's voided eyes symptomatic of post-
 painterly abstraction?)—The eyes hesitate—Everything
 is defined and minimized in the center of a target, which
 is a circular blood-red oubliette for Barbra . . .

. . . And a corpuscle in the solar bloodstream complex
 for all of us, fixed with Speed for red blessings, heading
 west to where it might be at, hitting an all-time high on
 the California coastline—The Coastline Drag is a drag in
 drag is a groovy trip or cartoon strip to ride the waves of
 heredity, surfing down the time-slopes on waxed boards—
 Orange bored; fluorescent orange surfboredom, hung-up
 on beach fatigue—Which stiffens the blood—Stiff as a
 bored stiff—The sunlight slows it easy, bleach fatigue—
 Will bleach the fluorescent stiff-bones white—White—
 White is the color of zero . . .

It was also the color of Paul's room as Clive Noland helped him to it, saying: "Remember, it's utterly yours, son;

as much as if you . . ." Or:
just as it was wh . . ." Or:
there's no-one el . . ."

But Paul was listening to the distant, worried drone of Michie's voice, his eyes closed. That way, he cut through the phoney for a second and glimpsed the true white, the untainted, archaic color of the Proto-Barbra.

FUSED FAR OUT

At this stage it is reasonable to assume that the subject is undergoing a 'dilemma of substance', or, more accurately, a 'dilemma of substantive symbolism', manifested in a substitution syndrome in which acceptance of data from the external world is replaced by psychotic hallucination. It is commonly accepted that such psychotic withdrawal visions are probably compounded of past perceptual experiences of a non-conscious nature . . .

This stage is reasonable—the subject is a dilemma substance—accurately substantive substitution—acceptance of external hallucination—commonly psychotic—withdrawal experiences of nature. . . .

The subject's behavioral superstructure is of a fairly regular periodic nature, the maladaptive symptoms often reaching a peak around mid-day. There are grounds for believing that flashes of rationality may occur during these phases—interludes of normal perception which could precipitate an attempt to reject both the rational level and the psychotic, neither of which he can totally adjust to because of their rapidly interchanging nature. This is purely hypothetical as yet, but, were it the case, each mode could substantially affect his ability even to *tolerate* the other, creating a mounting dissatisfaction resonance whose critical point would be marked by the

multi-level rejection. As the purpose of this could only be a total cessation of mental activity, the crisis would almost certainly result in an attempt to kill himself . . .

Leather chairs, loose clothes and shaded lights, darkness beyond curtains drawn across a curtailed world, dark drawn fine on black—"Is anything constant, Paul?"—"No . . . No, Mr. Noland. Nothing."—"Are you absolutely sure?"—Sure of the Absolute?"—" . . . between these phases? I think you know what I mean."—"Yes."—Oh yes I know what you mean I mean yes I'm sure I know I'm sure of no—"No, Mr. Noland. Nothing." The Solar Constant No—It's all so complex . . . "All right, (Paul)."—Sound and mouth-shapes do not co-ordinate—It's all right, Ma, I'm only bleeding—I gasp and inhale his expelled smoke . . .

Thus we have one phase with split modes. The other phase of the subject's periodic oscillation is one of reasonable stability, marked by fairly normal behavior, although he is obviously confused by lapses of memory and the lack of perceptual continuity—both of which can be understood in the light of his defective interpretation system . . .

Like I woke up this morning—any morning—and used the IBM to type:

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING

—any morning—and used the IBM to type:

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING

—any morning—and used the Image-Bomb Machine to type:

THIS IBM IS A GROOVY TOOL, BUT REMEMBER—

The media are confused

and the image is not—repeat, *not* — the reality, whatever Noland or the pseudo-Barbra might say. The typeface is *not* my face.

It is interesting to see the old Freudian transference idea rearing its perennial head again. In this case, the subject has for some time displayed a need for father/mother surrogates, figures onto which he could project a plethora of undirected, unrealized, long-dormant emotions. What form this emotional projection would take is not clear at this juncture, shmuncture, what a load of . . .

Walking down to the beach at twilight with his head in the clouds, the sandy road beneath his soft-soled shoes, Michelle occasionally touching his arm—The winding road, the sound of the sea in the trees—Quiet rectangles of light and discrete ellipses of sound from discreet houses, telephone calls hung-up in the wires—They chased his dreams down to Michie's cove; her face and his shirt surreally glowing against the dark slope above, behind; twenty-foot rockfaces etched by the ocean, imprinted by time—Muted whispers, her hand in his—Around a large, smooth-planed rock (here died the salty echoes of a dozen kids today, the wet impressions of their bodies shrinking, receding down the interior perspectives of geological time?—evaporating, murdered by the Sun), cool now, folding shadows around itself (Paul trailed his fingers, gathered crystals, licked them), to face the sea, the false perspectives of the waves flinging fragments of horizons at their feet; from Recife and Monterey, Beirut, Madras and Nagasaki; from Tenerife and Savanna la Mar, Palm Beach and Port Said, Kristiansand and Matapan, the shores of Hokkaido and Peru—The gulls were screaming, insane children of the evening—Darker still and darker around the beach huts and abandoned windbreaks, paper scraps and cartons—Footprints in the sand, as poignant as the traces of a lost civilization, as numbingly mute as signs of an alien encroachment—A sun-fused diagram of intersecting private universes (a sad girl sat *here*, reading Rimbaud; *there* stood a widow, dominated by weights and volumes; *nearby*, a solicitor's fingers trickled grains of silica; *beyond* lay the hips, the

heaving stomach and exhausted thighs of a half-drowned boy; his lips touched *those* pebbles, see), with partially obliterated drawings—scrawled letters and a yang-yin symbol?—The whole thing not yet complete, awaiting the final graffiti from Michie, Paul and—“*Hello, Michie.*”

—A lean figure in faded jeans and grimy US Army combat jacket, with a faceful of stabilized dynamics, a structure constantly threatened by shifting substrata—One grubby hand to a forehead shadowed by hair the color of Michelle’s; elusive ash-brown (and sometimes dead as ashes, the burnt-out residue of flesh and bone; grey) with grainy highlights, sandstone split and shining, banks of dampened silt amassed around an alluvial face (Paul’s mind closed like shadows, cellar doors: memory: the cliffs were mirrors)—Michelle’s gasp had lasted through neural and geological millenia: “*Col . . . ! You again?*”—Rift-faults appeared across the plains of the face (Michelle glanced, scared and newly amazed, at Paul, but he was staring at and lost in the flung shadows of the sea, eyes flecked with phosphorus): fissures: geomantic symbols: lopsided, broken-toothed grin—“*Yeah. As ever . . .*” The grin you see on strange, archaic faces when disasters happen “*Who’s the kid, Michie? Another bloody stray?*”—Michelle, victim, snarling at his irony: “*Just as revolting as ever, aren’t you? And this ‘kid’ is as old as you, and a good deal more sens . . .*” A pause while she glanced at both of them, not believing her eyes again, but the boy interrupted: “*Is he, Michie? Really?*” Then, flippant again: “*Doesn’t look it. But he will, after a while in that—that menagerie of yours!*” He took a few scuffing steps towards Paul, head tilted, eyes like sunset smoke (the day’s last drop of blood coagulated in the west)—“*Hello—kid.*”

—Paul’s head nodded but his face was derelict until long after Michie had dragged him away, calling over her shoulder: “*Why have you come back again?*” but the boy had disappeared, shadow into shadows. Very quietly, as the moon bulged the membrane of the sky: “*Better be getting back, Paul . . .*” (with sympathy, apology, tenderness? She held one of his hands with both of hers)—Sand fell from their shoes as they climbed the road, words from his mouth: “*Who was that, Michelle? Do you know him well?*”—Pause, a slight frown, which could have meant relief—“*He’s—what you might call a transient. No fixed*

abode, an' such. He hangs around. I know him—pretty well. Or not at all . . .”—She smiled for him and swung his arm, watched his face against the bright delights of a town three miles across the bay; kotton kandy Nat King Colors (it will be for ever): he saw packets (Player's in the bushes, Durex under them), signs (Prices from £17,500 - Hill 1 in 8), and heard a stream singing—Good Vibrations—On my happy summer home (Prices from . . .)—“*Michie, I'll . . .*”—Never fall in love—“. . . ? . . .”—Gotta keep those—Dreamy breezes, happening with her—Here comes summer—

And the Sun had toddled off to play on other continents, leaving ideograms along the cove, a perfect equation on the shores of night.

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING

Which is a recurring motif in the Blues and in my life. Like other things that don't seem important. Like how and when we have breakfast, lunch and dinner; how I get dressed and undressed; get washed and get dirty; get lost and get found (even in the house I can lose myself); how Monday differs from Thursday differs from Saturday in terms of these formulae. I live with them—not very well, sometimes, and then it's laughable. Like when I have trouble making coffee and Michie has to help me. There's a clock in the living room gives me some bad moments, too. And Barbra's paintings, on account of they're so damned annoying—like a sneeze that never happens: Clive Noland's binoculars, because he's hardly ever without them. Also the times I think I'm saying one thing, only to find I've obviously said another. Oh, well . . .

Then there's my own room, which is really weird. I never seem to *see* it probably—or, if I do, I forget everything immediately afterwards. All the time it's just a whiteness in my mind. Another thing: they say it's mine, but it feels like it belongs to someone else.

It's like that with my face and mirrors, too. Like all of that.

But it's these things—things that happen when I'm 'not functioning properly'—that I remember mostly in the morning—any morning. What I mean is, I remember *not*

remembering. At other times, I even forget that I've forgotten things, which is much worse—nearly as bad as remembering things I *want* to forget. Which doesn't sound quite as confusing as it really is.

It's very difficult.

Memory and things.

Ideas: I'm sure I've had some real freaky ideas, but I don't know what about, so I decide to write them down. So I'm sure I've typed something, but all I ever find later is loads of blank paper. And then I'll find pages full of the strangest stuff when I think I haven't been near the typewriter at all. "Everything's fine," is what Michie says, and I get mad.

She likes that.

Someone else uses the typewriter!

Yes.

Takes my stuff away and leaves his/her own words.

IBM: Instrument of Betrayal and Murder.

The victims are my dreams.

That's something I *won't* write down.

No.

"Get it?" someone once said. "He's balled-up all to hell. A facial reflex reflects his defects. A solar complex. He's defected to . . .

Details in the bathroom mirror: unfixed elements in an unresolved collage, fragments of steel, glass and porcelain, orange nylon carpeting and white polyurethane paint, black ceramic tiles and geometrically patterned purple Vymura—cut from a hundred glossy magazines. Paul's own face: very fixed, at two removes from his mind—very wet; brown hair damped to brown forehead (a result of accretion, not attrition, this face; the physiognomic deposits of polluted rivers, enough of time's precipitated sediment to qualify as 'adolescent'), a drop of water running down his neck and chest (or of sludge from sumps and sewers; nothing is wasted: "Look, we've made a—" *Person? Boy? Paul?* These words are inadequate) towards a very lonely navel (well, do *you* know what it's like to have your umbilical cord—and all its intangible

extensions through time and space—completely severed? Or drawn tight around your own neck?). He smiles.

In the bedroom mirror: a transistor radio, isolated from the room's white-hot core, made objective by the reflection, removed to a distance far greater than the physical $8 + 8 = 16$ feet. Paul fixates the mirror-image, trying to travel that distance, but he is hampered by the associated sounds. These are not locationally split by the mirror. Unequivocally, they emanate from the 'real' radio in the center of the holocaust. If only they would play . . . Paul would like to turn the radio off, but he is burning . . .

Radio image on 30,000 Mc/sec

Solar flares, most often appearing at maximum solar activity and frequently associated with faculae, are regarded as chromospheric phenomena and have considerable terrestrial consequences. Intense flares, known as outbursts, are sources of extremely powerful radio emission over a wide range of wavelengths.

With the house at its lateral and elevational center, the landscape curved away southeast and southwest, forming the 145-degree arc of the bay. There was a disturbing tension in the surface of the coastal rise. Tilting up from the sea, its entire visible area seemed hypersensitive, as though tuned to some critical resonance. Its superstructural elements—the houses and trees, the roads, telephone wires and billboards, Paul himself—were transfixed in ultra-defined locations, as surely as butterflies on pins. Nevertheless, they were implicitly precarious and variable, as though the arrangement could be altered abruptly in response to a change in the notional wavelengths. The present configuration registered only a transient stasis.

Like vibrated iron filings or a Darby Bannard painting, Paul thought. Minimal fragments of temporal reality that manage to contain aeons of unlapsed time. Presumably, the inherent time of a neutrino is almost eternal?

Dead center.

Leaning against one of Barbra's sculptures near the pool, Paul felt himself to be at some sort of focal point.

Then, as he looked around, he saw Clive Noland at one

of the huge windows, the binoculars lifted to his eyes. Michelle, who had just climbed from the water, noticed the frown on his face and said: "That's a hobby of his, Paul. He's watching the gulls."

Paul contrived a weak smile.

"Oh. Strictly for the birds, eh?"

But Michelle simply held his arm and led him up a garden path, in more ways than enough, out of range of the window / CUT

Spectroscopic image

The significant distance is not that between the object and the observer, but that *within* the observer to which the object is absorbed . . .

One second to autonomic noon:

Blackness frames a fulminant chromatic disc, stinking towards the red and suppurating—Cosmic burning to the hard radiation fix which blows the cool, melting the hand that stones out of mind the frequency limit, tuning the orchestra of the endocrines—Hyperpyrexia, blow-out from the overload, Angst and Angströms (red line 6374 for excitation potential) among the faculae and flocculi—*Someone's face is blazing*—Filament-prominences, bombs and moustaches . . . *from the exploding magazine of the Sun* . . . Outbursts on the 6563A hydrogen line; eruption (but the face is not acromegalic) and quiescence (nor is it the face of the cretinous, the mongoloid, the hydrocephalic, or the sexually-infantile)—But the radio pulses indicate a disaster of the blood, a bubble of catastrophe in the arterial streams—*The eyes glow, cat's eyes, but not amaurotic; they see everything*—Flare themes trickle from the disc into the black, the arcs of heredity breaching the vessels and lancing through the flesh, something diseased and dirty (but the face is not cancerous or ulcerated or abscessed; there are no signs of comedones or perifollicular activity of any sort)—Tentacles and blotches pulse, echoed in molten white pain (the teeth are huge and damaged monuments)—A smear on the cosmic slide emits corpuscular radiation (350-2000 km/sec), widening the area of blood disaster—*The face* (just grimy, that's

all. Ha! Ha!) *merges with the sun-parched landscape—*
Withdrawal—

Sound and vision converge, the arcs close.

A spectroheliogram of his brain and an electroencephalogram of the Sun reveal identical activity / CUT

COCK-UP ON THE K₃ LINE

Orthokinesis: In lower organisms, the behavior of moving faster in unsuitable environments than in areas where conditions are more favorable.

Paul awoke, slid from his bed and crossed to the window, which was all one wall. He had found that many of the rooms, including his own and Barbra's studio, had powered blinds. His were half-open as he stood before them, their angled slats stratifying the sunlight. Warm blades slashed across his naked skin.

The window faced south of east. Through the intervals Paul could see the white studio, already incandescent in the morning light—his own room turned inside-out. Later, as he switched the control to maximum aperture, light flooded in both directions and the areas of white-blindness were no longer differentiated.

To prove that it was impossible, Paul tried to make layout diagrams of the house and its surroundings. The complicated simplicity would not be translated in this way.

Happy Slow: autistic image

They played records in Michelle's room. One of them was *Happy Slow*, a recording by Solar Complex. Paul attempted to give this diagrammatic form, too, crouching stiffly on Michelle's bed, bent over his drawing. When the record ended, he insisted that she should play it again. And again.

He gave up twenty minutes later, face blank and immobile, unaware of Michie's lips on his forehead as she took the paper from his hands. Awareness returned, however, at her muted gasp of—shock? Incomprehension?

His swollen eyes looked painful, like his shrug. "I can't help it . . ." He backed towards the door, one hand outstretched as if to ward off an attack.

"That's not *mine*, Michie! It's . . ."

Then he stumbled from the room, the serial echoes of his confusion collapsing slowly. It was only after they had completely died that Michelle's bewildered expression showed traces of understanding.

Paul spent a few dazed minutes in his own room, changing into shorts, groping blindly through the false white. Then he was out on the patio, somehow feeling that the blue glassed light from the door had lingered on his skin like a chemical stain. He was aware of pressures: the hair on his forehead and temples, the lips across his teeth, the amber-and-white fabric on his hips, his shadow on the tiled floor, the texture of his skin against that of the stonework, the mosaic against the window, the reflected sky across Clive Noland's face, the hand on the binoculars . . .

Noland was smiling at him. Paul nodded fractionally, trying to disguise his irritation, wondering: *Why* do I try?

Isolated in one of the studio windows, Barbra, aloof priestess in a temple of images, watches him as he walks through noon towards the pool. There is red paint on the brush that slides loosely between her fingers—*Acquired associations apart, the emotional human responses to red may very well be inherent and related to, for example, certain exceptional effects which light at that end of the spectrum has on the endocrine systems of animals, the common factors being the basal areas of the brain and, specifically, the pituitary gland*—She glances distastefully at the brush, but the expression disappears as her eyes refocus on the slender brown figure. She doesn't really understand the game they're all playing, but *this* moment is good, though disturbing, as she watches the boy's wide, vaguely wolfish mouth. Could *that* mouth be replicated (in a painting, in a landscape, in heredity)? She has forgotten something, surely? Sunlight flares across the angular shoulders, along acromion ridges, down the sweat-slicked spine. Barbra holds her breath (*Oh, Clive, I hope . . .*) as the boy stands motionless, frowning; she frowns too, thinking of the words she has found written on the back of

one of her portraits of Michie: *Red is the color of violation and of the pseudo-Barbra*. The boy moves, the pool's reflections splashing flecks and flicking whips of light around his thighs. *Which sadistic, alien sun gave him that color? Not the one that shines on Michie, Clive and me; but his flesh is . . .*—and in his eyes— . . . *my life, those eyes! 'Glaukos'; blue-grey-green-grey, deeply-hooded, glowing out and glowing in; oh, Clive . . .* Surely the boy is tormenting her, waiting until she can hold her breath no longer? *Yes, he is. Please . . .* His feet find the edge of the pool. Very, very, slowly, he leans through the burning air (her breath explodes: a name and echoes), his arms outstretched (ending in a soft moist sigh and perspiration), and plunges into the blood-warm water.

Experimental approximations of psychotic withdrawal: artificial stimulation of the visual areas by drugs; and sensory deprivation. In the latter the subject is suspended, naked, in water at body heat, his eyes masked, nose and ears plugged. With sensory stimuli at a minimum the subject begins to experience 'autistic' perceptions, which may be far more sharply defined than normal ones and yet just as unrelated to the events of the immediate real world as are the dream experiences of sleep . . .

Paul swam often, in the pool and in the sea, with excessive commotion, discharging energy randomly. Then, ignoring the niceties of breath control, he would dive under and try to lie on the bottom, half-bakedly looking for the key to a code unbroken for at least a thousand million years . . .

—of perpetual sunlight across matte white paintwork in the ultimate hotel, hysteria on the salt beaches, no-star rating on the limbo coast—The aerophagous inhabitants gulp the breeze (a dehydrated memory of the Gulf Stream) that blows through the viaducts of pipeline dreams: surfers in wet-suits surface in wet-dreams to ride the dry lines on static crystal ridges: and make connections—*My room in this existential foothold is contested for by a strange person who claims it's his: "Get off my cloud!"* and clouded eyes convect horizons: the only wet in town—Galactic Ter-

minal Dump, with other junk: White Lightning, Purple Haze to take me disappearing through / 0: Zero or Omega / the auto-wrecking lot has auto-wrecked itself—"It's high time"—A neon sky contains his blue jeans and broken teeth, but I laugh: my shirt has unique red symbols painted by the priestess, not the son—He who gets hurt—My walls shake with seismic withdrawal thunder, Ultra-Hysteric Freakuency—Apoplexy of people who live as I breathe fog ". . . off, you bloody cuckoo!"—Someone else is laughing now: a naked girl who floats in the aqueous humor (her breasts proliferated)—Familiar like isolated like really alone because my bed evacuates to EYE NOON as the priestess creates epoxy DNA-Disaster images and I scream because the shirt-symbols burn auto-da-fe—"His lungs were filled with fused silica"—I am an equinoctial temple of bones from the future/past, a climax of schemes erected across the headlands and inlets of memory; the priestess leads the dance of death between my colonnaded ribs, around the dustbowl of my hips, pipes the tune on hollow teeth and unseen organs—I'm fixed with sand (the thunder dies) and sniped point-blank by a heliotropic device, its mechanisms of faded genes responding to abnormal radiation, approaching the deeper levels of the photospheric skull—Observe the explosion's flare outburst on the K_3 line of calcium—

In the womb the embryo recapitulates the entirety of evolution from single-celled organism onwards, on a condensed time scale. In the first years of life all the stages of *perceptual* development are also recapitulated, right up to the adaptive complexities of the adjusted human adult. In specific cases of psychosis, however . . .

—In a purely reflexive sense, a salinometer in the arterial time-channels, a sphygmograph recording the latter-day warm pulse—Not enough by the smallest fraction, however; a radical transition to another mode is necessary to probe the lower levels . . .

Reverse the recapitulation / Down through the micro-onto- and phylo-geneses of perception / Down through the mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, the metazoa / Down

through the whole bloody lot, back to the proto-scene, the
chemical origins / Back to where it was all turned on ///
Let's get off the Hook ///

What happened, of course, was that, because of his submersion technique, Paul soon found his lungs collapsing, body convulsing, and his mind passive. There was something very sexual about the sensations of drowning. As was usual whenever he reached this crucial point, Michelle appeared, swimming through the fragmented sunlight on the surface, the liquid shifts of her body at the heart of the nova. It seemed that every time was *now*, replicated endlessly. And Paul, confusing a possible future with an evasive past, always swam up—again, for the first time—towards her image.

SOFT-WARMS MOVING

In this “period of phenomenal weather” (said Clive Noland, fixing it but good) Paul spent a lot of time on the beach; sometimes alone with Michie, often with Noland and Barbra along, too. Barbra was always restless on the beach, her eyes continually searching the crowd. Paul caught the habit and started seeing familiar figures everywhere, figures drawing in the sand. Barbra then interpreted this as restlessness, placing a slender hand on his shoulder and asking things like: “Are you happy, darling?”, obliging him to smile, say: “Yes,” and look so puzzled that she became more than ever sure that he was unhappy, which made him restless . . . As for Noland and Michelle: the former lived behind his sunglasses, while the girl played surface games. Like, as his tanned skin grew darker “. . . your eyes get lighter, Paul, relatively speaking,” and everyone was speaking relatively. The beach was defined by such associations, no matter how many times he went (there would never be a genuine *first* time until . . .); even when they left Barbra’s philoprogenitive face behind, and he and Michie were alone. Like:

Prefixed beach images

Down "private" roads, through a car park redolent of heated upholstery, salad sandwiches and petrol, along a dusty path buried in trees, where exposed roots "could have you breaking your neck if you aren't careful," down sandy steps cut into the rock. Then onto the beach, which was "a sun-trap, Paul," being a cove "and never crowded, because it's private" and bounded by cliffs that formed the headlands "where the 'Private' signs are," lapped by the sea at high tide, completely isolating the "very exclusive" inlet.

Other steps led up the rockfaces, glistening with mysterious moistures dripping from the trees and undergrowth above, to the white villas lost in that vegetation, which constituted "a bloody terraced hothouse, with its palm trees and tropical exotica"—"a perfect environment for forced-growth and inbreeding." (Who said that?)

The cove terminated in a wedge-shaped valley climbing the slope in leafy obscurity, a ravine that steamed and stewed itself in sappy darkness to the drone of blowflies. Some distance up this—behind rocks, between bushes, under trees; Paul touched everything lovingly—was a clearing, totally enclosed, with a tiny stream running through it. Michie sometimes took him there and took him in.

In how many ways, he couldn't begin to know.

They kissed in the sudorific stillness, and a bird sang. Then the bird stopped singing and Paul lay back, the skin of his chest and stomach pulsing, shining. Michie stroked it with a bent finger, her head tilted languidly. Paul watched the supple, changing curves of her neck and shoulders through a slitted gloss of light—the same light made love with her firm brown volumes. Two flies buzzed, a butterfly flopped. The sea swallowed the sounds from the beach. The light dappled and thickened.

Then Michie dropped like a scruffy angel through the confusion of foliage and sky in his eyes, laid soft pressures on his body. They kissed again, light extinguished by the clash of teeth. Dark was the color of warm and Michie's breasts beneath his hands, barely lighter than her stomach. Her nipples were dormant echoes of the sun they'd tilted at so often, so obviously (Paul felt a sudden hurt); the

luminaries hinted at by that initial and largely specious contact-flash of bikini fabric.

Stars: TYPE M (Michelle? Mother?); temperature: 3500°F; color: RED; spectrum shows . . . TITANIUM? Gee . . . TYPE N (Noland? Nothing?); temperature: 3200°F; color: DARK RED; spectrum shows . . . CARBON (L. carbo, coal) . . .

Burning . . .

Dying?

Paul's mouth burned around and drowned her glowing breasts. His stomach flipped as they rolled over, then caught up and overtook, feeling like the sea sounded. He was angry and happy. Almost hysterically, he thought of all the films he'd seen with lingering kisses slow-dissolving into surging seas. From here to maternity?

Less of the lips, more of the teeth. No train whistle if she screams.

Just a gull.

Crying. Flying blindly.

From a dark and turbid ocean, under a distended, pulsing Sun.

"Sunshine . . ."

(Paul's jeans clung to his hips and thighs. Ghost-pains hammered at his teeth and eyes. Hyperaesthesia of the face and shoulders—hysterical or—sympathetic? Feeling skin and caustic rays. Quasi-hunger hollowed his stomach; low tide sucking.)

"Ohhh, Sunny . . ."

There was a certain amount of confusion.

But Michie had caught the ocean notion. Her hand slid down his jeans and "It's all very provocative, (Paul); all this symbolism . . ." (she unfastened his belt and zip; involuntary contraction of the rectus abdominalis; a fly with a sense of timing on his shoulder, hob-nail stomping up the sweaty slopes; fervid chuckles) ". . . I mean, the sea's supposed to be a womb-thing, or the Great Unconscious, isn't . . ." ". . . thinking about anything, Michie. I want to feel . . . I don't really care" about anything except making love to her, and no breeze if she moans or sighs.

Just the sea. Warm and deep.

Soft.

Easy.

Forget the hunger, forget the pain.

Slow.

Then the landscape seemed to be tilting and "Michie, love, it feels . . ." as though he/it were fixed but transient. No; "like being . . ." on a peninsula? "Like *being*" a peninsula, when the air is slack and the tides are "deeper, Paul . . ."

Very insular.

The sea? Forget the sea.

Just an indeterminate locus—*the position a gene occupies on a chromos . . .* No.

Just deep and smooth

and slow and warm, two trying to be one

then just no words at all.

And when they returned (as they always did) they were inadequate (as they always are).

A long time in a white vacuum, happy, slow, exhausted. Paul and Michie's own time (a sparrow's heart beat once an hour, a wave took several whiles to flop) by default, the day having dazed itself on the summit of noon. The vacuum was Paul-and-Michie-shaped.

Then the day began to plunge from high point X, very slowly usurping their autonomy. It prodded them, slithering, down the pm slopes—Paul-and-Michie; post-meridian . . . ? The vacuum distorted and expanded cubically, like a white room (that horrifying *déjà vu*: Paul felt constricted and oppressed; panic silted hot and dry across his happiness) with mutilated images projected on its surfaces. Confused.

Time reclaimed the sparrow and tuned its heart to a hellish rhythm. The bird died in Paul's head. Space mapped out new trajectories for an erratic gull, beyond the horizons of his eyes. Life cursed the sea and whipped it into frenzy.

"Michie, I . . . I'm a beach . . ."

Slow fright congealed her blood. She hadn't understood those words when she had first heard them, either. Now her confusion was replicated to the power of 2.

Sorry, Michie; but . . .

A ludicrous world proliferated around the cubic bubble. Some day soon, he would be equipped to deal with it. He knew that, now. Again.

With an immeasurable wrath, the damaged world got itself together. And imploded on him.

But Paul grabbed his happy by the tail and smiled.

DMZ

Down, then, from the jungle department to the basement, a barbecue pit where well-oiled flesh roasted on spits of sand. A private patch of sky, low and gravid, blue-belly flopped across the cliffs, as hot and limp as other awnings, warnings. Paul yawned. Because of his indeterminate past and freaky present, he felt ill at ease and in his stomach for a while; felt like a grain of common public sand retched up on the esoteric beach. But this (claustrophobia, paranoia, plain inverted snobbery) soon passed, leaving him feeling groovy, like the medium lengths of waves that sidled soundlessly around the geological strata and boomed back through the beach huts from radios on 247, echoing "like a damned hotel lobby, Michie!" An answering smile and a nod towards the cove mouth where shimmering air hung like glass doors between the promontories.

Glass doors, constantly opening and closing.

"*Good day Sunshine*"

Echoes of noon reverberated—

—on a rockface chalkmarked: *DZ ?*

"Careful, son . . .!" (his feet stomped ice cream among the piddock shells). A man in a light suit, a suit of light . . . Oh, no. "Eh?"

"*Paul!*"

Michie, making things all right again. She had found a ball and they threw it to each other, weaving between people who did not move much. Even the children seemed transfixed at their stations in life, apart from their eyes—homeotropic bullets exploding liquidly on impact with the running figures, their own souls yearning. Paul's shirt was a pennant of flame in one hand as he caught and aimed the ball with the other and unthinking ease, preventing the disasters threatened by Michie's inaccuracy. In this way he protected the fragile faces of middle-aged Renoir beldames, a little girl's pink popsicle, a trendy couple's tranny ("Beautiful but unappreciated, dahlin' . . ." grin and spit ". . . *don't make it bad . . .*"), and more things

than a dozen other. To do so, it was sometimes necessary to plunge through pools, soaking his jeans under a battery of disapproving eyes. What was wrong with that or them? But no matter, like when he saw a young boy eating a cold hot dog and said: "In actual for-real fact, that thing's eating *you*," only to have the kid claim the ball: "It's mine!"

So, after causing a mild stir in the aspidisastrous conservatories of the cove, they came to the western headland.

“. . . and our love become a funeral pyre . . .”

And the doors were open.

The tide was out. They followed it, sliding between the panes of haze, hand in hand past the *Private* sign. Laughing, over seaweed and rocks and mussel shells, scrambling along the hazardous, limited route out to the long stretches of the external beach.

The beach of the world, and littered.

The polluted shoreline of Paul's head.

A slow and endless breeze blew.

But if Clive Noland was off the forested slopes, watching them through his binoculars, he could not help being satisfied. Could he? He could not be expected to see Paul's frown as Michie said: "Better be back before high tide, love."

Could he?

Solar Complex: binary image

An EEG recording, taken at 12.45pm on July 15, produced delta waves of very large amplitude at low frequency: 2-3 cps. These waves are typical of the deepest level of sleep but, although in a state of collapse, the subject was fully conscious at that time.

He could see the strange, erratic gull again. Could it see him?

"Look, Michie . . ."

His jeans were drying, salty. Fade-in—

About a mile along the coast, a section where the cliffs were less steep, but just as densely wooded. The area was a mazelike nexus of outcropped rock. Interconnecting

humps and striated ridges enclosed a system of tidal pools and sandbanks, isolated in their own perspectives, as quantal and horizontally alienated as a scene in cinema-scope. Michie started telling Paul about a nearby home for mentally-handicapped children. She talked and Paul seemed happy, so she was totally unprepared for the group of people sprawling languidly in one of the enclaves.

The couple blundered into the assemblage. There were eight members, all young and mainly scruffy; teeshirts, no shirts, much hair and torn jeans, dark glasses and beer bottles, duffel-bags and raw feet. Eyes aimed through curling smoke.

Prefaced by the rocks around him, prefigured in Paul's memory (or precognized in dreams), a lean, angular youth sat cross-legged, untidy. A guitar rested on his thighs, its strings and fret bars gleaming. The boy's fingers moved across them idly. The tilt of his face half-hid his chipped, abrasive grin, threw shadows around sleepily swollen eyelids.

Balanced instability, lopsided symmetry. Ludicrous. The figure struck a chord in Paul's mind—

D-seventh, a flip of brown and bony fingers, all knuckles and nails.

—and resonated in his stomach.

"Snap," one member of the group muttered.

Another uttered something which could, with charity, have been interpreted as: "Pollux . . ."

The boy scowled.

For one hysterical moment, Paul thought that he had gatecrashed a reunion of alumni of the school Michie had mentioned. The idea's associations lingered. Because of that, and the group's obvious rootlessness, Paul came on friendly.

But, from the boy, gruffly:

"Hello again, Michie. When're you starting adoption proceedings?"

'Instinctual' behavior can be explained in terms of innate releasing mechanisms, which are fixed associations, dormant until triggered by appropriate external stimuli. Crude analogies: the artificially-induced effects of post-hypnotic suggestion, and certain techniques for treating personality disorders.

But, whereas IRMs have their Drugs, if used carefully, are a valuable aid in the treatment of psychosis, but without the active participation of a competent therapist, psychopharmacology is useless, indeed

dangerous, as it is in indiscriminate social drug-taking. Even so, neither drug nor therapist can alter a patient's genetic personality; they can only help him adjust to it. All

Michie's face was taut.

"Colin, for God's sake, don't be so . . ." Then she relaxed dejectedly. "Oh, I wish I could understand . . . Anyway, his name's Paul. He's . . ."

But Paul interrupted, suddenly volcanic, fulminating in all directions. Making like a fool. He felt lightheaded, torn between his initial empathy with the group and a fear that its members had sold out in some obscure way, in spite of their apparent freedom.

"—I'm a sort of brother, relatively speaking . . ."

"Hell!" someone said.

"Well, isn't . . .?" someone else began.

"Ssshhh!"

"Paul . . ." Michie, fidgeting.

"Watch it, sod!" Colin muttered with mounting anger.

It was tension time.

Then, abruptly serious, Paul pointed towards the gull. The bird was ploughing crazily across the planes of sand, its feet and wingtips scratching ciphers as it went. "What d'you think that sees?"

Colin frowned. "You being bloody stupid, probably."

"No. It's blind, you know. It won't live long."

"So?"

"So I'd like to know what blinded it." Paul thought of soft guns, soft acid; lies. "It saw something . . ."

His voice trailed off. He shook his head as though unaware of what he had said, and began drawing in the sand with a piece of charred driftwood from the remains of a fire near where Colin had been sitting. Michie's hand shot to her mouth.

Eyes watched him: those of two girls who giggled; of an emaciated redhead who bit his lip distractedly; of someone behind a beard who stopped picking shreds of flesh from mackerel bones to whistle through his teeth; the

glazed eyes in that fish's severed head, within the spreading lines of Paul's drawing. Colin's, grey and tidal as he growled: "What is he, Michie; stoned out of his tiny mind or something? What's the—the great white father figure up to this time?"

Before she could answer, Paul looked up, grinning. "Why not ask me? By the way, you're offending the environment—"

Eyes of smoke and oceans.

"—you're too conscious of the shape you are. Can't you feel it?"

Colin shot a bewildered glance at Michie. She shook her head and searched for words.

"The rocks, daft bastard!" Paul continued. "The rocks and the sand and the sea. *You* should know what I mean. Please . . ."

The shock-waves of remembered pain caused shifts on Colin's face. "I've felt enough. An' heard enough, so . . ."

Hurt. But Paul replied:

"Aw, c'mon! You ought to come back to our cove, Colin; at least it makes no pretenses. It excludes the uncontrived, and it's very, very private." He paused, blinking. "But it's far more crowded than you'd think . . ."

"He seems to be light-orientated, just like a damn' sand hopper! Is it some sort of psychic phototaxis? At least he's functioning fairly normally at this stage, even if one can't help comparing him with one of the lower organisms, lower organisms, lower organisms lower . . ."

"Paul, please," Michie pleaded.

But too late. Colin advanced on Paul, who was still drawing and talking rapidly: "I mean, you don't relate at all, as it is. How do *you* connect everything? Christ, how do you keep from falling apart, being what you are?"

Colin laughed.

"That's it, kid. *By* falling apart and being what I am. The largest possible indivisible unit."

"Oh. A quantal sort of existence, eh? Entropy's little genius. And what bloody use is that?"

"None at all," Colin replied. "It's nice being useless. Try it sometime."

"So tell me how."

"Just stop being such a goddamn *useful* garbage dump. Get out of the way when the shit is flying. Or at least, stop it sticking . . ."

Paul frowned, licked his lips. "You're not being much help, are you?"

"No."

"So, communicate. Relate . . ."

"Say that just one more time, Paul," Colin threatened.

"You know I shall . . ."

Michie bit her knuckles. The ground-down redhead inspected one elbow. The rest seemed stunned, or stoned. Something moved on the cliffs. The gull wheeled.

"You do realize how futile this is?" Paul added.

"It's part of the game, so stop pissing about."

"It's you that's making a balls of things, Colin; acting like a scapegoat."

"Yeah. A scapeghost for the universe, that's me. Humping me load of guilt around the wilderness. Some kinda pitiful . . ."

"Tragic. Feel suitably purged, do you?"

"More or less."

"But you're still itching for a crack at the guy who did you dirt. The high priest . . ."

Colin's eyes levelled, cold. "You mean my . . ."

"Yes. Sigmund yclept."

"That bugger . . ." A bitter smile. "Mmm. Something like that."

Paul had finished the drawing, and they both stood within its amazing boundaries, somehow transposed from the environment. Apart from their own and Michie's, everyone's eyes were blank on the sand.

"It hurts, being a surrogate," Colin muttered. "You should know."

"It hurts more when . . ."

"I'll risk it. So say it . . ."

Paul grinned obliquely. Time to put the show on the road again, open this head-scene to the public. "Say what? That it's all relati—?"

A strong, lean hand grabbed his arm, spun him around.

"Hey now, that's very uncool!"

"It's a very hot day, kid." Colin's voice was gritty, his face impressive.

Paul saw that the others were acknowledging their existence again. So he played his part.

Michie was being quietly frantic, unable to do anything much. She had Paul's shirt in her hands, twisted and creased. A girl from the group opened sensitive lips to say: "I don't, like, *resonate* to violence, but you sure as hell asked for it, kid. I mean, *really* asked."

"Didn't I, though?" Paul asked, rhetorically.

The amount of light perceived by an organism considerably controls the hormone output of the pituitary gland, which in turn controls the sexual drive level, and *that* affects the organism's receptivity of the stimuli carried by light, and so on . . .

They fought in a terrible white silence that was broken occasionally by the shrieks of the gull. All distances were equal and beyond reach in the puddles of heat. The touch of Colin's skin filled Paul with nausea; the sea slurped scum.

Hair and sweat and suffocation.

Each movement killed a memory. He was losing what he had found with Michie. He was suddenly and horribly miserable and—longing for Barbra—tall, high-faced priestess with the cooling hands. Within seconds he was on his back in the center of his scuffed, demagicked drawing, a fish head crushed beneath his left shoulder blade, one of Colin's knees on his solar plexus. His mouth was filled with sand, his eyes with light.

A curving, dipping scream—from the bird?

A voice: "You're *too* bloody gullible!"—almost sobbing.

Barbra—What did I do wrong?

Then Colin's thumbs were in his eyes, abrasive with grains of sand, but the pressure was gentle.

"Now, perhaps, you can see . . . ?"

Paul could; something in the visual thunder, in the throbbing red reticulations behind the retinal after-images of the sun. His heart faltered, then raced. The red deepened. He was drowning in the ocean of his own blood. The something, infinitely terrifying, swam just below . . .

He tried to scream—

. . . and exploded, white . . .

—as the moistened sand slid into his throat. It came out a cough. A moment later he convulsed, dislodging Colin, and threw up along one outstretched arm. Tears; incendiary detonations; white.

Someone said: "My God!"

"Damn you, Colin!" Michie snarled, frightened.

And Colin helped him up, his own eyes drained. The group was moving away, the restless audience of some inconclusive ritual, not looking back. The scrawny red-head's ribs were knifed by light as he dragged the guitar over pebbles. Strings thrummed. The beach seemed to form a diagram of death, with the boy at its focus, a substitute sacrifice. Colin followed him, walking backwards, his hands spread mutely. They might have been trying for anger or apology.

None of which Paul saw very well, anyway. He was lost somewhere between vision and perception, preoccupied with a strange figure that had appeared in the trees near the base of the shallow cliff.

It was variable and brachycephalic, its flattened head traversing the closer horizon of rock, oscillating randomly.

Paul thought of Francis Bacon, Max Ernst, and of all the figures of myth.

Janus?

The Roman sun god, that well known two-faced bastard.

The doors of his temple open, his faces shine on blood.

Its eyes fluctuated, sometimes deep and dreamy, then extending telescopically from the plane of the face; dark, ominous probes. Paul spat and wiped his nose. He felt better, now. Things seemed to be crystallizing.

Then Michie was there, trying to clean him up. Her perplexed half-grin almost lacerated him with accusations, questions. Her hands trembled.

"Gawd, y'do stink! I mean . . ."

He knew she was going to say she meant the fish's blood, oil and eye-fluid on his shoulder, and smiled savagely. That stopped her. Bits of gill and pectoral fin fell away as he trotted into the sea. He flopped into the surf, letting the waves knock him around. Spray rattled on his teeth as he turned to squint at the cliff, but the figure had disappeared. There was only Michie, looking fragile.

Eventually he stood and walked towards her, smiling.

The breeze slapped with sudden malice at his soaked jeans. The gull had found the remains of the fish and was slashing at them aimlessly. Paul felt an immense sympathy for the bird, almost amounting to envy. He wanted to watch, but Michie held his wrist, muttering something about the tide rising. So they beat it back to the cove, but only just, and Michie's face kept altering, and . . .

Much later: "Michie, look . . ."

His jeans were drying, salty. Fade-out . . .

Along the cove, a saline tundra networked with chasms and crevices; crystalline tumefactions where people have been/are/will be—Mostly white and growing slower; happy slow metabolic hypocaust (Gr. *hypo*, under, *kaio*, I BURN)—The sea defects—NOW, NOW, NOW the cliffs are mirrors, reflecting everything which / does / not / move / NOW *trapped in folding mirrors*, Multiplex (or MZ?)—Drawn large in the sand: *or MZ?*, beneath an overflowing sky of boiling milk—*White is the color of non-motion and the archetypal Barbra*—hot seminal sky—Michie holds his shirt like a banner, a final splash of sun across it, vermilion chevron, collapsing—*Her limbs of crystal, breasts of fire*—

"About lower organisms: it's interesting to note that very few of them share our horror of those proscribed relationships which we define as . . ."

Insects are droning.

Help me: I'm starving. It's 2AM and I sit in a cane chair, shaking, but the night won't feed me. I daren't go to bed because the sheets are blazing and my skin is already scorched brown, smouldering. Beneath it, bleached bones rattle. Yes, they *do*.

Incendiary.

An ormolu clock, rococo pulsar, marks the time of this white void. Still I can't see my room—*my very own room*—properly, so I open the blinds and let the light spill out. Everything outside is realized—a rationalized abstraction. I can't put my own pieces together, though.

I'm crying, me.

The moon is white, but it's only a cold mirror for the

Sun and won't feed me. But the Sun doesn't feed me, either. It . . . It . . . Oh, I'm crying, because all this—this house, everything—is just a fantasy, like another one I sometimes call memory. A fantasy of squalor where a squint through a circle of garbage can hardly lift another limping summer to the battlements, the skies weep grit and winter roars through on shitty gray motorbikes (MZ?). *Whose* memory is that? Meanwhile, Barbra's studio is desolate, like me.

Who is Colin?

I know the shape of the pain his knee made in my stomach, the color of his thumbs, what he smells like. The sound of his hair, the taste of his sweat. I know him by his smoke—so I light a cigarette, which makes me cough; more tears—but I don't know *him*. I wish I knew Colin. I drop my acrid ash in lovely Barbra's groovy black-flecked brown iron-bearing stoneware glazed ashtray and think maybe of Michie's thighs meanwhile.

That smoke I inhaled: incense? "*No, Mr. Noland. Nothing.*"

Can I drive a car?

So I don't smoke the cigarette; I put my fingers either side of the brand name and the game is to try to keep them there and bear the pain and count backwards from a hundred slowly while the tobacco burns and burns the words away and try to make it through to zero without speeding up the count but it burns unevenly so it takes three words and goes out at twenty-five leaving bubbling skin and the one word CUT . . .

There are several interesting sets of figures which significantly correlate suicides and psychiatric hospital admissions with the occurrence of magnetic storms.

TEENAGE LIGHTNING

Severe geomagnetic storms are caused by cones of corpuscular radiation ejected from intense solar flares at a low velocity (around 1500 km/sec). In turn, magnetic storms have a considerable effect upon meteorology. They can generate freak periods of thunderstorms. They can generate freaks, period.

I remember that because of the day we had thunderstorms. That was one hell of a breakdown in Noland's phenomenal weather, and a bit of a hiatus for me, too. Hiatus all, tra-la.

Mmm . . .

Anyway, that was the day the clock hands stood still at 11:45 while I stared till my eyes watered. Then we blinked—it *was* only a blink, remember?—to clear the tears away, but when Paul opened his eyes the hands had jumped to 12:29.

Then he went across to the studio, getting soaked, just to watch Barbra painting impasto abstracts with pop connotations / The image factory echoed to thundrous heartbeats / Angles were perplexed by lightning flash-shadows / "The light's atrocious, really . . ." /// The studio was a concrete and steel framework, like the exposed ribcage of a dead animal, its intervals filled by huge glass panes on three sides, fitted with blinds and shutters to organize the light / Paul's own ribs ached, as though hammered / Along the east side was a raised area, a maze of sculpture and pottery, with plantlife straight from Max Ernst's fetid forests, lacking only the annular Sun which might be anything / Two steps up and Paul walked along the windows, studio terminal east, wipe-out on violet-white as electric reflexes dribbled down the coastal time-slopes and across the pain-grey seascape; Ocean X in drizzle-mist; splattered sand / The clouds spat at the distant headland, ultra-violent flickerings on the windows / Huge glass pains with electric reflections of Paul's fused limbs /// Image of the time-surfer stranded in a hall of bones on a slow-white coast of quartz and salt as the amniotic sea defects to other worlds, other mother figures, leaving parched and arid beds / Infertile / Sick-beds: white: beds of pain / Amnesiac mists occlude everything / But

"I'm going through a crisis of imagery, Paul," said Barbra, starting all that sort of earnest discussion bit again, occasionally using phrases snatched from other times and other mouths—like Clive Noland's—other voices, other wombs / Like / "Don't confuse stale mass-media images with the ones *created out of them* by talented artists" / "Or any random external phenomena with the results of

creative, *interpretive* vision" / "Valid new personal imagery is a cumulative, subconscious thing, an apparently illogical arrangement of second-hand percepts," / *Fine* / "The difficulty lies in consciously translating the imagery in universally meaningful terms . . ."

And that, thought Paul, is where the cock-up comes—where lovely Barbra, like the rest of us, falls sucker for Ol' Man Reality / For her sake he was frenzied without motion, crying without sound / Instant voltage bleached the flowers achromatic as Barbra daubed acrylic and concluded / "But the external world is a constant, in a referential sense, no matter how it alters. A rose is a rose is . . ."

"—a spark-plug is a raindrop is a corncob."

"You see? A nice subconscious arrangement."

"No. I mean it really might be. Or . . ."

. . . *by any other name?* Barbra's ears heard classic symptoms. She sighed, a little conciliatory expression.

"Okay, darling. But I could explain the chain of association that made you choose those three . . ."

*Yeah. DNA. Delusive Neural Associations
Dominant Noland Archetype
Definitely Not Acceptable*

A nanosecond of lightning firestorm imprinted textures on the paranoiac wall of Barbra's paintings, tinted blueprint of withdrawal thunderpulse / Pain tingled in key trigger areas / Googolplex

"Did you ever want a son?" he asked.

Barbra put down a vermilion-charged brush, her green eyes sparking / Red-Green—opponent process of visual pigments and disturbing imagery, like diagonal agony / *The fovea centralis, the area of most sensitive visual receptivity, contains cones only, is free of rods, and is located close to the blind-spot* where the nerve fibres leave the retina / But the green eyes were now behaving like oscilloscopes, registering various tensions—like electric personalities, animal magnetism, currents flowing, sparky fingers . . . / *Barbra (or Michie) and myself: switched on: a true Thermocouple* / Because you might be my mother . . .

Barbra's mouth snapped. "I . . . Why do you ask????"
/ ????

Paul frowned at her over the top of a canvas, his body replaced by the painting's form—derived from the skeleton of an Archelon, a Cretaceous marine turtle / He thought: *It's pathos time, ho! ho!* / "Because I'm sick. Aren't I, Barbra?"

"Believe me, Paul, Clive knows what he's doing. Honestly . . ." Trying to be quietly reassuring, Barbra mentioned Big Daddy Clive / Paul thought: *What about "Michelle, my daughter"?* And the permutations of all three, who constantly seem to be apart, but never are? That bewildered us more than somewhat. We were confused by the way they spoke each other's words to the son and brother they may or may not have had. So I obviously had to choose my own part, and get criticized for the way I played it. But I felt really dislocated when I heard Barbra ask: "Is anything constant, (Paul)? Subjectively, I mean; a link between the phases?"

Yes. But what's all this 'phase' bit? Unless they mean 'face'. F/A/C/E. Or the motion-color thing? White is light and ultimate speed. Black is no-light and, therefore, no-motion. But neither are colors as such. One is a compound of colors, the other a total lack of them. But, when you remove your referents, the arcs close and polarities become non-differentiated—they ever were a plaguey myth. Black *is* white, ultimate speed *is* ultimate immobility. The ultimate becomes the initial on the completed circle, which is the archetypal symbol for everything—and for nothing. The circle negates time and space. Any point upon it is every other point as well, and what's the point? Nothing. And nowhere is where it's at, or where it would be if it were. Hah. Cogito ergo sum total = 0

And she asks for Constants, yet!

Yes. The Constant is a black tomb and a white womb.

Just a glimpse of truth. I'll lose it; I know I shall. It's fading now . . . Damn! But I'll see it all, soon, and then . . . I must remember this, though: *Death is birth is everything is white is the state of the Constant Barbra.*

And this: *The Sun dissembles*. The facts of consciousness are lies, fed by all the consciously-perceptible frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum, most prominently by the visible red wavelength. Red has an illogical appeal for women, a slivly weapon in the emoto-sell armament. Red is the most potent sign stimulus for many of the instinctual behavior patterns of lower animals. Red is the most effective supraliminal stimulus for the perception of, and emotional reaction to, messages of subliminal intensities. Red violates the lovely Constant Barbra and is the color of Clive Bloody Noland. Red is a Rorschach blot, which is . . . ?

Eliminate the red, then; the r/e/d. Cut / it / up. Kick the habit. Use the red fix to destroy itself, like

Like what? Damn it, what *do* I mean? Something about your identity, Barbra. Is Michelle the key to the code? Or your paintings? No. What, then? Col . . . Colin? The connection between the chromosphere and the chromosomes. Yes, we're in the red, aren't we? Connection: corpuscular radiation. *If I put my thumbs in my eyes . . .*

Solar Complex. Did you know that their recordings are pressed in red plastic and released on the Quantum label? The discs are distributed like erythrocytes in the communal bloodstream—or some other analogy. Anyway, they're elements in a genetic kriegspiel, Barbra, and more effective than your paintings, which are *not* the keys to the coded sun game. You *can* lie in the sun without being raped. The pure sun. I'm distilling it for you in my head.

Help me, *please*, Barbra. I think your son is going nova.

ZERO HEIGHT OF THE PHOTOSPHERE

The sun shone again, for the first time, every day.

The solar proton-proton process: a hydrogen nucleus joins with another and produces a nucleus of deuterium and an electron which, in turn, combines with yet another nucleus of hydrogen. This produces a nucleus of helium-3, together with a y-ray. Two helium-3 nuclei then unite to give helium-4 and two more hydrogen nuclei. And so on, Ra. Okay?

Cut-up I/M/A/G/E

Paul woke up this morning, and so forth. Most of his room was still a blank, but that was fine. He knew that everything would soon be okay when he saw the words in the typewriter. Three words. At no time did he bother to wonder who had written them, or when. This: *the appearance of the words was simultaneous with his perception of them.*

I've read books, seen films, watched television, listened to the radio, heard music, looked at paintings, listened at doors, been places, been taught, been talked to, been talked at . . . All bits. F/r/a/g/m/e/n/t/s. The media confuse me, so I

Confuse the media

"There certainly seems to be a resurgence of sun-worship, partic ency to reverse the anthropomorphic nomenclature of geographical WONDERFUL!!! "*Clive, he thinks he lives in an ersatz universe a s camera sense; the only action in the whole eight bloody hours surfing cult, for instance . . .*" WHAT? *God only knows / NOW, NOW), Sell (Cell), Hair (Heir), Sun (Son), Sole (Soul), Genes (Jean*

Studies of optical phenomena - eg: The Ames Room, the Ponzo Illusion, the Hering Illusion, the Muller-Lyer Figure, MacKay's Ray Figure, rotating trapezoids, various 'impossible objects'; indicate that the processes of the

shifts in person from first to third, the changes in tense, the absolute conviction of his own sanity in a lunatic world, together with a few recurrent fixities amidst a welter of inconsistency, are typical of the

Through silver towards night. The wind brings fragments of horizons and the congealing sun. Somewhere, words are burning. A gull circles overhead, trapped within its own perspectives and other forms of lonely. I see symbols on the clouds, stunned at sunset: Coca-Cola, solar chevrons, the eyes of Aztec cats. Badges: Omaha and Pensacola, Key West and Kokomo. Antique ensigns and the hypnagogic visions of insane mariners, bull's-eyes in

the orbits of Bobby Kennedy Jr. Eyes of smoke and oceans: mute eyes assassinated on the main intersection: gunsmoked mutilation of the xeroxed faces of archaic youth—lizards of the psychozoic.

This is a memory/premonition fantasy of the reality of boiling in the glade up Michie's leafy ravine, like a fish between her thighs "is an extension of your poor, lovely mother's gullibility" (unspoken); inverted wedge of mackerel sky—In my bed or on the grass, in the sea or sky—"Swallow this, Paul"—NOW NOW NOWNOWNOW-NOW "I love you and I don't care about" *the memory-specific codes* of conduct *lightning around* dominant and recessive jeans or POLYGENES, FACTORS WITH MULTIPLE ACTIONS in warm hands and *white walls grow breasts that weep soft acid for die traumenden knaben*, whose grimy naked bodies move in the hot pink glow of blazing areolae—SUCKERS!!!—Pulsating superstars and dreaming boys falling upwards to the skylights up—TIGHT ON A MULTI-X AND -Y PSYCHROMOSOMATIC TRIP AT SPEED that has developed beyond happy slow activity of a solar or sexual nature in Michie's cloud, you cuckoo—STARS SHINE THRU GLASS BONES and knives fall and boys fall from the fiery scape—all tenimmensities defenestrated now—and are imrailed on iron palings, disemballed, their life puddling on the consecrate—Night palls in imitation—Flags burn—Superstars and Stripes across a bleeding back on which a midnight sun writes melanin mnemonics: White is right, red is dead, womb is tomb, doom blooms by metastasis like cancer on the banks of the river Anaemia—Iatrogenic or ideopathic, this disease has developed beyond happy slow actino-therapy in the Idiot Colony—I've burned my last shirt on the killing floor of summer—Acidyllic fishes walk and glow—The neon fix of lizards' eyes fixated Coca-Colons spinning through the universe: a universe of sweat between a boy and girl: an acid-headlong slide down the microslope of shining skins—Medallions like splintered suns hang heavy albatrocities on uptight necks and boys distill adolescence in dark corners while girls' mouths chew ashes, spit with sunkissed lips, spit acid and split—As she swims in the aqueous humour, Michie's laughter is like water falling, falling through silver in a sucking vaccum—The Sun is seminal, spawning replicas upon her lips and in

her womb, where another second splits and, somewhere else, the passage of a tachyon transfixes galaxies—Unidentified Radio-Source, Gemini—He: the vast indifference of the vas deferens? She: the fallacy of the Fallopians?—*“Oh God it hurts!”*—But it’s just a boy with chipped teeth biting flesh or glowing silver fish held tightly between ravenous thighs—IT’S WRONG, PAUL, WRONG, D’YOU HEAR? WRONG! I SHALL HIT YOU, PAUL. DO YOU WANT ME *“to do this to you, Michie”*—Hysterical breast-walls contact diseased squeezings of acid for grimies—*“Swallow this, Paul”*—EAT, DAMN YOU, EAT!!!—But her lips move and phenotypes are distorted by “a perfect environment for forced-growth and in-breeding” (Who said that?) “I want to feel . . .” *who’s pushing it?*—The Sun disassembles, lies; surging in her mouth—Very soon, another MZ split-image will scream across the amniotic firmament—All curves are exponential in this series—My bed defects to Nowhereland in eruptive pain but the sheets are too tight like me to move through summer or ravished thighs—Faded jeans of palest blue bell-bottom fanflaring heat on naked feet, uptight thighs and lips; factors with multiple fading actions in warm hands that unzip their codes, and everyone’s semantically confused—*knives cut chevrons in the flesh*—THE FISH BITES—The breasts on the wall scream: “YOU STUPID LITTLE IDIOT!”—The universe is a super-saturation of replicas—This is the climax of schemes—This is a DNA-Disaster image—This is an heat-death image—This is a serial-image of my confusion—All insignia collapse through silver like scruffy prolapsed angels through the floors of heaven; superstars to neutrons (each nipple weighs ten million tons); the Gravity Drag is a drag and it’s all down to wet-dreaming MZ boys’ emissions . . .

“. . . of pulsars. God, it’s fantastic—approximately one thousand million million megawatts!” *Barely enough to stop a second splitting in the womb . . .*

Paul saw Colin frequently during this period. Once, as he sat by his window at 3 AM, unable to sleep, the lopsided figure appeared by the studio, tilting a silent grin at the moon.

And the Sun had pissed off, incontinent.

"He thinks his mother and father are dead. Or, at least . . ."

that the projection is of an Oedipal nature, but, at the moment, the symptomatic aggression is specifically directed at *objects* rather than people, although it is significant that shmat *blat*
SPLAT !!! AR PLEX
OLA COM L LEX SOLA
COM X SO R OMP L
X SOLAR O EX SOL
COMPL L SOLAR COM-
PLEX *** COMP OOOO-
OOOOOOHHHH!!! thinks
you're a bird watcher. *nd*
Michie are so beautiful
to NEW WEST COAST
SUPERGROUP, SO t's al-
ways *now*. They're so y
about time Michelle—
doesn't kissing!—remind
you of . . . ?" yes and that

grin of his, and Sometimes, when I'm really shocked by an idea or whatever, I can distinctly remember other times when the same thing seemed perfectly normal. The fact that I can now recall the difference is good—it means that things are coming together in my mind. If I'm not aware of contrasts and connections, they still *exist*, but I can't do anything about them, can I? But, as soon as I know about them, they can be used to destroy themselves. What I want is non-differentiation and non-association. All right, No-land; there *are* phases. But there damn' soon won't be.

Polynesian adolescents, for instance, just don't have that trouble. *nd that there is evidence which suggests a fantasy-extension of his* fight to the death among the dreaded Amorphopalms of Castor IV. Blo ypewriter as an instrument of communication in a *receptive* sense as ul about the binoculars, though. Perhaps we ought to take them awa ul about the binoculars, though. Perhaps we ought to take them awa ul about the binoculars, though. *Perhaps we ought to take them awa*

So Paul made a point of borrowing a pair the next time he and Michelle went to the beach. He nearly pissed himself laughing as he watched Noland talking quietly and earnestly to his daughter. But he got the binoculars.

At the place where Paul had fought with Colin—Michelle had not wanted to return—were two children, a boy and a girl. The boy was about ten years old, dark and slender, with a dreamy, self-obsessed expression. He was trying to balance a stick—it looked like the one Paul had drawn with—on his right index finger, without moving to compensate for its instability. Slurringly, he repeated one word:

“Now. Now, now, now, nownownow . . .”

“David’s autistic,” Michelle whispered. She continued, trying to explain the breakdown between the senses and perception, between perception and correlation. She succeeded in expressing her own confusion. Paul nodded distantly.

The girl was watching David with eyes that were both vacuous and all-possessing, a huge smile on her face. Her arms moved in a spasmodic parody of applause. Lank hair jiggled.

“The girl, Sharon, is—”

“—is mongoloid,” Paul interrupted. “Is placid, gentle; has a loving nature. Will probably never progress beyond a mental age of about five, but is a perfect companion for other mentally-handicapped children. Was probably born of a mother over optimal child-bearing age. And that disastrous head is probably full of ocean . . .” His fingers stroked the binoculars.

I saw Michelle glance at Paul’s face. It was as blank as his voice. It’s like that when you try to erase another page of someone else’s lousy text from your head. I know. Michie looked scared.

At that moment the autistic kid had what’s known as a behavioral breakdown, or somesuch. These ‘tempers’ are horrifying, completely without inhibition. Davy screamed and wet himself, chewed on the stick, then dropped to the sand and started throwing things at the girl. Sharon’s expression changed, but slowly, so that the growing concern overlapped her dying grin. The result was unsettling. Pebbles shifted, the morning tilted in its gimbals.

As the girl approached, Davy kicked her shins and spat on her. Saliva and bits of soggy wood pulp trickled down her dress, but she just held out her hands . . . Michelle turned away and said something, but Paul still watched fixedly. And I watched *him*, until Dr. Slade appeared. Of

course, she'd been nearby all the time, like myself—but Paul and Michie hadn't known that, either.

Dr. Slade is a small, gentle woman of about forty, quick and silver-blue. Beautiful. She's always on the beach with her children. I used to play with the kids and I'd think I was happy and Dr. Slade would laugh . . . Then she started calling me her 'little gamin'—and I didn't mind. No.

Last summer.

She gave me food . . .

Anyway, the rock maze had kept us all hidden, apart from the pair at its focus.

Just before Dr. Slade scudded into sight, Paul had started scrambling over the rocks towards the screaming kid (who was clobbering seven bells out of Sharon by this time), a stunned expression on his amazing face, leaving poor Michie with one futile hand full of air. He didn't stop when he saw the doctor. They almost collided, him and her. Almost. But instantly, without trying, they did their own very special thing, got it all together out of fresh air. Something in their angles and volumes, the intervals between them, dancing. A conjunction of amazing grace, Paul and Leda . . .

(A flap of dirty feathers—he saw a dying gull; she saw memories of a swan.)

Dr. Slade gave him a glance—cursory but astonished: "Why, it's . . . !" before grabbing Davy's shinny shoulders to drag him off Sharon. That much I stayed for, and no more. They would talk, for sure, and I didn't want to listen. I'd only get mad, get to feeling disinherited, or something. Again.

Cry, probably. Sniff.

So I just took another peep at Michie's sad and lovely face, then made off down the beach, still hidden by the rocks, to where I'd dumped my—ha!—belongings. All the way I could hear Dr. Slade's voice, it's normally gentle tones transmuted into harshness as she shouted:

"THAT'S WRONG, DAVID, WRONG! YOU KNOW IT'S WRONG, DAVID. THAT'S BAD, DAVID, VERY BAD. VERY, VERY BAD, DAVID, DO YOU HEAR? NOW STOP IT, OR I'LL HIT YOU! I'LL HIT YOU,

DO YOU HEAR? DO YOU WANT ME TO HIT YOU?
THEN STOP BEING BAD, YOU STUPID LITTLE
IDIOT! STOP! DO YOU HEAR? STOP!!!”

—and so on, unless I imagined it. It was probably breaking her heart. A bit more.

Leda . . .

That bloody gull had followed me. It had followed me all summer—or I had just happened to be where it was going. *Was* it blind? I didn't know; I was trying to ignore it. But it was staggering through the air like a junky. Derelict.

Meanwhile, I took off my shirt—my last wearable one—showed it to a pool, then draped it across rocks to dry. Very unsatisfactory, but as much as I could be bothered with. The morning was clear and beautiful with the sort of air it's easy to move through, but I felt lazy and tired, head and stomach aching. My only pair of jeans was still reasonably clean, though, so I just splashed my face and arms in the pool and flopped onto the sand. The water soon dried and I felt something like a Siberian salt miner. Yeah, miserable.

My belongings? A battered guitar (which wasn't really mine) and a tatty canvas sack, insubstantial under my head. Whatever it contained didn't include food, anyway. I was on a sort of passive hunger kick. I didn't particularly want to starve, but I had no real urge to get food, either, and had just about reached the stage where I wasn't sure *how* to, anymore. Like I said; passive. Pathetic.

All of this just a few minutes ago, in the past tense. As for the future . . . There were bits of it there.

And there I was, brown and hairy, getting browner, my skin starting to turn pebbles into pyramids. Hyperwhatsit—a symptom of nervous diseases and hysteria, take your pick. Fingers like ploughs through my hair; sweat formed heavy globes of fire on my chest. I was horribly certain that I'd soon be hallucinating. Still, I'd done that often enough before, for one reason or another.

Had Dr. Slade been hoping I'd go away?

I wondered, half-heartedly and not really. She knew about Paul; I was sure of that. She sees everything from the cliffs. It's hard to hide from her, even when you're

trying. I know. But she wouldn't really be daft enough to think that anything could be avoided . . . or to think I *would* leave. Just like the gull, me.

Perhaps the bird had its reasons, too; and its hang-ups. A makeshift albatross? Paul would know things like that.

Paul . . . Eternally inevitable you, always just about to arrive.

This summer, last summer, this forever beach. A no-man's land between what I'd fled from and that to which I'd escaped (and found just as intolerable). Limbo. What better place than a beach? But last summer was better than this. Much. I hadn't known why I was here, then. My limbo had been truly decisionless.

I found a stub of pencil in my pocket. The ultimate weapon—or a chewed-up symbol. Or something.

Down memory lane, then—since Paul has been good enough to unblock the entrance—but briefly.

Decisions were part of what I ran from, I think. Purposes and motives, too; everyone had them, it seemed, except me. But most of all, the sense of being dispossessed—of being a pubescent hulk from which *I*—my thinking, emoting self—was being squeezed, like pus from an abscess. Worse than that, the sense of being replaced. Someone else was injected. That awkward body (not much, but all I'd had) was then the shape of *someone else*, strange and alien. But no one seemed to care. In fact, everyone seemed pleased with the change. After the injection, they put ointment on the spots and they healed.

Or like this: they'd replaced me with images—which doesn't say much for the strength of my personality. I—I, this clod of consciousness—felt like a ripple of ideation on everybody's ocean of receding nightmares, carried out beyond the horizon. I ever was a transient thing . . .

So I turned tail and ran—which is a hell of a jump from the metaphors, and that's how it felt, too, in the few moments when I felt anything. Amazed by my own substantiality, unequipped to deal with the facts of it—pain, hunger, tiredness, etc.

So I ducked under.

From then on I knew little about what I was doing, except that it felt like I was being fed intravenously, kept

fitfully warm by special currents of air and what-all, everything provided by some indifferent sort of charity. Even that was too much, though.

So I tried to duck out completely. Duck or chicken.

Should have died, but didn't. It was an almost complete paring down to a state of *nowness*, forgetting things the minute they'd passed, consciously anticipating nothing. But on another level—it was weird. Like I'd dread a thunderstorm happening, or winter, hurting myself, being without food or a place to sleep, although I couldn't remember what these things were or, therefore, why their occurrence should be feared. A constant, uncontrollable dread, more ambient than air it seemed. Not that it made any difference to the way I acted; just another grimy little drop-out with a bad case of profound indifference. I didn't know or care how I was managing to survive.

Even now, when I can remember what I was corporeally and truly doing, it's astonishing. But I do know. I survived *because of* my indifference, sweet irony. It was always interpreted as a death-wish. Had it been less profound, it would have been dismissed with a few tut-tuts. As it was, people seemed to think I was about to go play with the traffic—or at least, that I wouldn't bother to get out of the way if traffic happened along. The former a false assumption, the later true, but for the wrong reasons. Anyway, people are squeamish, and I was a peripatetic accident they didn't want to happen in their locality. So I was helped, given just enough to keep me moving and my benefactors where they were, undisturbed—or glowing even, slightly saintly. Or I'm a cynic.

Howcome I didn't get snared by all those forces, good and bad, overt and insidious, that seek to replant uprooted souls? Because that was the one accident *I* now dreaded enough to actively avoid. To split an infinitive. Animal cunning, pristine innocence? Heh. Shitting-fear, is all, and spitting-hate, the kinds that know no bounds, no can't-be-dones. I did, and could have been long jump, high jump, sprint, middle distance, cross country, marathon, hide-and-seek and red herring champion of the world—planted in the right place.

The fear burned and began to melt my icy little mind. It sloped around inside my head.

Low tide, and turning.

Drifting then, with amorphous groups of marginal people, dragging my ass around (well, there *was* that fairy artist who—but no matter). Shivering in wet grass, gothic horses humping through the night. Cities and suburbs, other people's windows. Desolate countryside, the wind in wires, empty candy wrappings. Motorways and half-finished buildings, scaffolding, enormous people with skins like leather. Doing something which caused convulsive pains in my back, put cramps in my hands and blood in my eyes. Being in an ambulance with sunstroke and malnutrition, someone saying: "Is this the kid who . . . ?" Someone else: "So young to be . . ." Escaping. Making hopelessly inept love to a girl whose name I didn't know, getting two teeth broken (the two events were connected, but not in my head). Stealing food, being given food, working for food, not being tolerated anywhere for long. Drugs—which could hardly have made my state much worse. And things.

And last summer, here, without knowing why. All along this damned beach, being talked to by a girl called Michelle who couldn't believe that I didn't know her, or that I didn't understand half the things she said. Michelle saying: "I won't tell anyone, if that's what you want. But you'll have to be careful who sees . . ."

Yeah, last summer was better. Especially when I found those strange, quantified kids to whom my own incomplete state was a matter of indifference. They didn't want to do anything to me. Neo-happiness, that was. There was Sharon, all slack limbs and bright cotton, a million miles and years from sex or jealousy, kissing the dark and naked little Davy. They were the first truly beautiful things I'd seen.

Davy: his vast and fractured intelligence, apocryphal and terrifying; his fractional eyes—where's his head at?

Then Dr. Slade appeared, Beauty manifest. Despite her shortness, she towered several infinities above my head. So to speak. Something happened across that bright, quick face. I didn't know it then, but she was making a snap decision—genuinely; it was hers alone to make and suffer by, and she did. I *was*, she *did*—by doing nothing except look after me as best she could without anyone finding out. She knew who I was, all right, in one sense. But, in another . . .

I was her little gamin, hardly different from all her other charges, and we all played, or talked in monosyllables, on a stretch of beach that sometimes seemed to dislocate itself from the universe. A little world for us alone.

But, at other times, other feet would stir our sand. I learned to be careful. With Michelle it was all right—although Dr. Slade was never quite sure, never quite happy with her around—but anyone else was to be regarded as positively dangerous. Then there were days I had to stay away altogether, and Dr. Slade would never explain why. Great drab lumps of misery, those days were. I'd find somewhere quiet and hide—caves when it rained. I remember hours spent sitting motionless, hardly listening to the little transistor radio she'd brought for me. That was when parts of my skin started getting hyper-touchy.

Never went near that private cove (to give Michie credit, she never tried to drag me there) or the Whitecliff Home, where Dr. Slade lived and worked. That would have been dangerous, she said, what with the staff and—and I nodded dumbly, just wanting to be near her. She started coming down to the beach whenever she could, mornings and evenings too, and we talked. She talked, mainly.

She used my real name, and it seemed strange to both of us. Then, sideways, a gem in her eye: "Apollo, son of Jupiter . . ." And I nodded again, grinning, eager to be anything she said. But, for once, she hadn't said what she meant. Jupiter sired many sons, and I was most of them over the next few weeks. I thought it was a game, not understanding the references or her own identity problems.

Well, I understand now. I know she never quite got around to saying the name she'd intended to use—which is just as well. It isn't mine.

Apollo; twin-brother of Diana (virgin goddess of the moon and hunting), god of song, music and—prophecy. Which ain't so damn' funny.

Because there came an evening when Dr. Slade said: "We're all orphans of one sort or another, m'dear; and that's a fairly basic sort of kinship." She smiled at her cliché. "And 'family' is a very relative concept." Grimaced at the pun. But she meant them, every word.

Then, obliquely: "Don't waste those eyes on seeing the surfaces of history . . . We can all do that. We should

be learning from Davy and Sharon and the rest, instead of . . . But *you* should know. There are better things to see with eyes like yours—things that have no form until you do . . .”

There was smoke, and it was autumn. I gave the radio back to her.

And went, as she intended.

More wandering, doing purposeless things in meaningless places; another rootless winter. I looked at people who wouldn't look at me. I strayed through spring and saw nothing—then came back and saw Paul. With Michie. And saw myself, my life condensed and trapped within a split second in that poxy cove.

I'd been in the district for a week or two, vaguely attached to a group of the hapless aimless, sleeping on the beach, spending money I'd somehow earned or stolen. We came back here together, summer and myself, accidentally on unconscious purpose.

I had a sort of friend in the group—surprising enough in itself—an American emigré of the abstruse, introvert variety, known only as Red. A word for Red: autophagous. His self-consuming frailty terrified me, and not without reason. Ironically, he'd lumbered me with a guitar, because “Living life is art enough, man!”—his most fervent, most pitiful statement—and I was learning to play with surprising ease. I knew I'd learned before.

A breakthrough. I could say the tide was rising again, that my ripple was a growing wave. But it wasn't like that, really. I was just trickling back, like an unimportant memory.

For a while I kept away from Dr. Slade—I didn't want to see her again until I could see her properly—and spent most of my time near the private beach, as nervous as a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs. It was weird, like approaching a dimensionless void through an entrance in something as familiar as your living room wall; but I made it. I got in.

Right in.

As I say, Paul's fractured face was an axe through the tangle, the key to a rusty gate, or whatever; opening me up and dropping me in. I'm not claiming any sudden rush

of recollections, but they weren't hiding anymore. They were there to be thought of at my leisure. What I did remember straight off: who Michie was, who I was, where I'd come from, why I'd left, and that those things were also the reasons why I had forgotten them—naturally. Quite enough at once—it's a hell of a shock, having your mind unblown. I know I grinned, but inside me was a mess when Michie spoke and I answered: "Yeah. As ever. Who's the kid, Michie? Another bloody stray?"

Gee . . . I should be so secure.

What she said then about me being revolting was true. I couldn't help it, now that I was remembering again—or *now that I'd stopped avoiding acknowledgement of memory*, as my father would have said. But it wasn't so simple, because I also stopped hating Paul the moment that we met—for the first time?—and started remembering what was going to happen.

Apollo, son of Jupiter, twin-brother of Diana, and god of prophecy . . . Kind of appropriate, in some ways. Trouble is, once you have a memory and start retaining facts, you find plenty of analogies just appropriate enough to set you off looking for perfect parallels, wasting your life. To know facts isn't the same as to know the truth (ain't that a fact?) and with analogies, too, the least apparent may be the most pertinent.

Apollo and Diana weren't the only twins fathered by Jupiter. There were stranger ones in stranger circumstances . . . as Dr. Slade had never quite said, but always meant. And I wasn't the one she was looking for. I'd never been lost. Nothing mortal ever is.

And twins with different fathers . . . ?

Oh yes, I remember well, now. I remember how that particular bit of mythology ends—and what is *actually* going to happen, and . . .

Jupiter's sister, Juno, was also his wife. Also: it seems that Jupe spent most of eternity going around bedding every female thing in sight—Mnemosyne, Danae, Themis, Alcmena, Semele, Ceres, Leda . . .

Paul, the cuckoo son of a psychogod, ever present, always lost—which doesn't give one bit of comfort to us sparrows.

Yes, and I remember Tantalus.

So what of Michie in all this? Well, she'll be what she is, what people make of her, and what she chooses to be. Multivalent. I think that's part of what Dr. Slade meant about being orphans. We get adopted, but we also do some adopting of our own, and there's a worldful of images and substitutes to choose from. A phony headscape; the surfaces of history. History is shit. All you need are senses, a brain to perceive with, and a memory, and you're hooked. You can spend a lifetime symbolizing without seeing what things really are or where they're at, scratching at the murky, obscuring patina of lapsed time, never getting a glimpse of the pure, self-sufficient meaninglessness. And that *isn't* empty nihilism; *isn't* hopeless and desperate like this life-sentence tailing off in a string of full stops, periods, incomplete conclusions . . . Like I'm doing now.

Senses, a brain, and memory. Memory was what I'd lost. I had to find it again to see what I'd had when I hadn't. So what now? Well . . .

Oh, Leda . . .

I'm scared.

Sorry, Dr. Slade—and Paul. I'll try not to project any more poxy images in your direction.

To get back:

That gull came with Paul. I first saw it as I left the cove that first, inevitable evening. First—replicated constantly by the bird. It was hardly ever out of my sight after that. Hah. The images I tried to project onto that avian enigma I can't begin to tell—except one, in which I wondered what *it* saw, looking at me. Then Paul asks the same thing and tells me it's blind, just when I'm beginning to let it be. Funny bugger.

And still I stayed away from Dr. Slade, and she from me. She must have known what I was doing (?), going over our conversations of last summer, re-writing my part of the script so that I'd be properly ready to meet her again. Idiot. And, I confess, growing shit-scared of being replaced again. Same idiocy.

Then came that ritual scuffle with Paul, when the roles were interchangeable; his words in my mouth and vice versa would have been no difference. So I stopped raking

last summer's ashes and split with the group there and then, Paul's pain still lingering in my hands. Red, the life-is-art-enough guy, was making off with the guitar, which I repossessed hastily—perhaps rudely. I felt a sudden, fearful need. What was I afraid of; what he'd do with it, or what *I* would do without it? Dunno. But then I said goodbye to Red, with some respect.

Perhaps he's right. *Was* right.

Red just smiled and went.

All of this on the bit of beach that had been my world last year, on one of those days I'd been warned to stay away. *Last year she fed me . . .* The thought persisted. How much had I aged in a year?

That night I went up and stood outside Dr. Slade's place and read the plaque on the gate. *The Whitecliff Home for Mentally Subnormal Children*, Dr. Slade's name, and others—including Clive P. Noland (a dozen assorted letters to conjure with, and a dozen more attached) as consultant father figure, dropping in and dropping on.

I stood for two hours, calling silently. Then scooted off when someone moved at a window.

Ah, me.

Next day, storms. Shallow caves and deep, disturbing dreams. My gull exhausted on the seething pebbles. I awoke, thinking of Red: images of America. Someone (who?) sang: ". . . on you I see the glory . . ." But I hadn't got a radio. Then a guy from the group happened along and told me they'd taken Red to hospital.

Next day or week, sun. People wandering on the long beaches. The same guy appeared in the distance, calling: "Red is . . ." The wind snatched the last word, but I knew it anyway. I shrugged and turned, not even wanting to know the how and why of it. The words didn't matter. The doctors would have no way of describing the processes of Red's lifelong death, trapped in the white sarcophagus of his own identity. I only moved at night, now; going to the Home, gazing. No Dr. Slade. Other homes . . . I didn't cry.

Next day—any day—the same, but no food left.

And the next day was today.

Out of memory lane—a bit battered and scratched, and longer in it than I'd thought.

So there I was, on the beach, making like a very sensitive pebble. Dr. Slade had finished shouting at little Davy, who would be balancing his stick again. Sharon would be smiling. Michie would be on the sidelines, confused . . .

'Bye, kids; sorry, Michie . . .

—while that lovely woman of silver and blue—*For the last time: Leda*—talked to Paul—

. . . Hello.

PAR TRANSIT

There was silence along the sand, and the for-real tide was low and turning. The way the waves flopped distilled silence. I could not see or hear the gull. Others, yes, but they hardly seemed real at all.

I lay and thought: *It's all ritual, like wearing each other's face. And like the formalized dialogue we're about to . . .*

Words came:

"Poor—lovely—stupid—deluded—!"

I buried the bitter, unsummoned things in the sand and cried a bit, thinking about my stepmother.

A little later, I was riffling through dozens of books. Pavlov, Malinowski, Piaget, Freud, Skinner, and more. Eysenck, Hering and Jung. Nietzsche and Ouspenski. Newton, Einstein, Eddington and Shapley; Aeschylus, Euripides and Plutarch; Darwin, Malthus and Galton. And so on. Pepys and McLuhan; Homer and Burroughs; Keats and Kafka; Black and White; Ham and Eggs . . . They were all there in my head, newly remembered (me, hardly fourteen when I gave up reading) and never understood.

Another thing I remembered: I'd had an almost perfect eidetic memory. God, that's funny. No wonder I never understood a bloody thing; but I could really take it in . . . I'll die laughing.

One more book, too—a battered notepad I must have carried around all the time. It was still empty, till I started writing this. But words don't matter.

Going on noon, and hot. There was something new and terrifying in the sensation of sun on my hyped-up skin. Things whined and thrummed, like guitars playing themselves. Two or three very marginal people loitered on the beach. "Piss off," I muttered. And they did.

Then I heard Michie's voice. She and Paul were only thirty yards away, walking slowly into view, hand in hand. I cursed, thinking they'd see my shirt on the rock that I was behind.

Too late to reach for it now.

Michie: "I told you . . . Dr. Slade's Home, just back there. She does wonderful work, Paul, really. I know her methods are—"

"I know," Paul said, scowling at the binoculars he held. "But I meant where—*originally*? The mongols and autistics, the blind deaf-mutes. All the lonely—*lucky*—people . . ."

Michie stared at him with an uneasy mixture of pity and revulsion, but Paul just snapped his fingers, swore softly and trotted off along the beach. He began searching the cliffs through the binoculars.

"*Oh—Colin!*"

Michie saw me as she started to give chase. She stopped, confused.

"Collie . . ."—an old nickname, from times of affection, faithful doggy me. Like 'Sunshine' and 'Chuckles' and others. Apollo, Perseus, Vulcan . . . No real difference.

"What—what're you writing?"

I grinned.

"Me memoirs, love. Hang on a minute."

Well, I was still a couple of minutes in the past, thinking that bit about my shirt: *Too late to reach for it now.*

Apt. I grinned again.

Michie fidgeted.

I pretended to write.

"Colin, Paul's looking for—"

"Yes," I said, then made her wait. I glanced along the beach at Paul, although I didn't need to. Michie stood helplessly. And I'm making her wait now, two long and very necessary minutes, while I finish this with a decisionless string of

". . . Yes, and he'll find him, too, no matter how carefully he's hidden himself He—none of you knows Paul at all, do you? You don't bloody well know what you've been doing! Well, it's too late now."

What Colin has just said is true. Time and space are

condensing rapidly, approaching the state of Here-Now. Something is waiting to be said. Michie says it:

"Look!"

There is a smear of blood across the dry, salty teeshirt that Colin has left on the rock. Behind the rock, Michie finds the gull, dead. She picks up the tattered grey body.

"It hardly weighs anything. Colin, didn't you . . ."

"No."

"It hurt itself badly."

"Yeah. Enough to kill it."

"Oh, Colin, you know what I mean. There's blood all over it."

Colin pushes wild hair from his forehead.

"Do *you* know what *I* mean, Michie?"

She replaces the dead gull on the sand, then puts one hand on Colin's bony shoulder. His brown skin is hot and moist.

"No, I don't. I don't understand anything. I don't understand what Dr. Slade told me to tell you . . ."

"What was that?"

"She said that things have changed, but it makes no difference."

"Oh. I know. But thanks for telling me, Michie."

"She said you'd see . . ."

Colin laughs. "Yeah. But you, love?"

As if coming to a panicked decision, she clenches her hands and says: "No! About *you*, Colin. You'll have to come back and stay—or go away for good." She holds him. Her arms are extended, but there is something absurdly sexual in the movements of her hands on his ribs, waist and hips.

Colin's eyes are grey areas of vacuum reflecting the irony of her statement, his huge, chipped teeth the grave-stones of her emotions.

"I have a choice?"

He turns and starts hurling pebbles towards the rising sea. He is anxious to have a conclusion now. To precipitate it, he throws the pebbles more viciously, blinking through a mass of feverish hallucinations as the sun burns his skin.

"The same old schtick, isn't it?"

Two hundred yards along the beach, Paul stands and listens.

"I *am* giving you a fair warning, Sunny," Michie

pleads. "I—I'm going to tell Dad about you tonight. I'm sorry, but . . ."

Paul hears Colin's impressive imitation of bitter laughter quite plainly, followed by the girl's bewildered cry: "I have to! Don't you see?"

"Oh yes, I'm beginning to," he chuckles, glancing back at Colin—who has now turned to face him, a pebble in his hand, three words in his mouth—before refocusing the binoculars on the brachycephalic figure up the slow-white cliffs. The figure's evil head glows upwards through vermilion, pulsing, expanding, generating its terminal illusions.

There is a final proliferation along all beaches.

Paul laughs too, a savage little expression of contempt as he elevates the binoculars fractionally. With ridiculous ease, he and Colin begin eliminating the ultimate, original phony.

AUTO-DA-FE

Words were burning, mouths chewed ashes:

and the house echoed around
its own whiteness, its sur-
faces crumbling like incin-
erated bones, hot and acrid

NOW

n different disciplines; eg: Quantum, Output, Fix, Emis-
sion, Bit ve you got the key? I—AAAAARRRRRGGH!!!!"
he screamed, as the *in the absorption lines. X-rays at
about 5A wavelength have, desp* NEW CONCEPT IN
DEPTH / MUSIC / RHYTHMIC / CYCLIC /
PERIODICITY OF a Modal Personality, one must expect
the emergence of a new sickne *old him to piss off!*
Honestly, darling, his sheer lack of interes

OH, GOSH!

STOP!!!

I'm here to tell you that IT'S FRUNGSHTUCK (8½)
"Coli been found in the terminal. Will anyone define a sol

A SOLARIUM?

Yes: A plastic model of a Boeing 747; a Harvard pennant; photographs of Michelle, nuclear explosions, a chameleon, Paul on a beach, and one of the Sun taken on the hydrogen line; a patched-up surfboard; a much-abused guitar; teeshirts with various emblems; twelve reproductions of Fauvist, Surrealist, Pop and Minimal paintings; one original—a yellow abstract entitled *Kon-Tiki*; an ammonite in a glass case; many books; sheets of solar data tacked to the wall; one street sign—NO RIGHT TURN; three pairs of shorts; one Old Glory, a large cut-out of a naked girl pasted across the stripes, the stars filled with collage images of America; a dartboard; many records and a record player, a vermilion copy of *Happy Slow* still on the turntable; photographs of the Dead End Kids, Shirley Temple, William Bonney, Bob Dylan, Max Ernst, Françoise Hardy, The Beatles, The Who, The Monkees, The Rolling Stones, Simon and Garfunkel, Solar Complex—one of whose members looks remarkably like; a self-portrait of Colin by Paul; a drawing of a girl called Pat Joenes; one large Yang-yin; various apocryphal diagrams; an IBM golf-ball typewriter containing a sheet of paper on which is written an absurd inventory of a room's contents, which ends with a silly parallel being drawn between the machine's spherical type-head and the Sun, dissembling, spawning myths and lies, and so on . . .

—and the words: and so on . . .

That's all. All these things and more, burning, like the words.

The collapsing structure seemed empty, anyway—100% Clive Noland, 0% Barbra. So Paul eliminated the No-Land house, returning all its elements to the grotesque figure with one blink of his eyes. The landscape was almost totally white and petrified now, assassinating its own perspectives, echoing its own silence. But the figure was bloated and bulging, overloaded with its own recycled output, all the shit so cheerfully shovelled back by Paul. To each his own thing, his own back . . . Paul grinned and quoted Burroughs.

Lovely.

Soon, only Barbra's studio remained, stark, distorted, skeletal. Paul stood frowning. His tears burned like the words and everything. Then he left the figure—a raging,

diseased red thing—floating high above the calcinated residuum, and entered the building.

The figure leered and began to spill its red into the white again. Into the white. Sickly pink. A bit of a cock-up, this, because . . .

—the door closed behind him and he was lost in darkness. At first he struggled to find the handle, or the switches for the blinds, but discovered neither. Of course he didn't; the studio had altered, not having any referents, except . . .

It was warm and dark—someone was mucking about. Paul began to forget what he had been doing. He began to sweat and forget.

The someone, the referent, turned out to be Michie. Apparently. There she was, naked, warmly soft against his chest and hips. Her hands unfastened his shirt, slid around his waist, played around with his jeans. Her breath was warm on his lips, her tongue soft . . . She fiddled about . . .

Everything was warm and dark and soft and warm and . . .

—hard! Her teeth on his lower lip, her nails across his skin; hard the light that appeared as something—a stone—crashed to the floor near his feet. A great, flapping tear had split the curtain of blackness, letting in floods of white. There was a sound like a long, slow filling of lungs. Paul looked around, snarling.

Some bloody referent! It wasn't Michie at all! It was . . . It was . . .

Oh, shit to it, anyway. It was turning to crystal, losing its coherence, disintegrating into the white.

Into the white.

The ersatz studio was collapsing around him softly, flabbily, a punctured pneumatic environment. Paul ran to the fracture, brushing aside the tangle of expressionist dribbles that had replaced the blind-slats, and looked out.

Colin stood in a bleached limbo, another rock in his hand. His skin was shockingly dark and isolated, forming a minimal symbol. The static frenzy of his face was an exact translation of Paul's state of mind—at last. Paul smiled.

Above and behind Colin, the brachycephalic horror

hovered, an expression of evil triumph dissolving from its face. Paul fixated it, forced it to rise simply by lifting his eyes. The head expanded again, violently red and blazing, all the red in the world. Paul hesitated, fighting the acid of his tears. He shouted:

“NOW . . . !”

A little act of faith.

Colin threw his stone and everything was stoned.

The inhalation ceased and reversed itself in a protracted scream as the studio-illusion vanished. All color exploded from the figure. The slow-white approached perfection, spreading beyond the horizons of infinity and zero.

Like a huge, all-revealing lens, the shape of the figure's head lingered momentarily. Calmly now, Paul focused it on a predetermined point, located at meridian.

A photothermal explosion.

White. A heat-flash imprinted across the sensitized wastes of eternity, the consummation of Paul's first phase attack and Colin's last words:

“My father's dead!”

Michelle was stunned by the viciousness in his voice, and by another sound. A scream—who was screaming? Her eyes followed the pebble's trajectory along the beach towards Paul. The latter was motionless, and the first thing the girl noticed was that two people—oh, yes, her mother and father—were converging on the boy. Then she saw *why*, and her own scream began. She, too, started running. All three were much too late, however, and realized that they had rehearsed these actions countless times through the sludgy residue of their own nightmares. They could only watch as Paul held the binoculars vertically. They could only scream as the twin images of the Sun burned away his retinas.

‘Self-Destroying Image Complex’

Much later, alone on the beach, Michelle found the notebook, with its few and meaningless ciphers. She remembered Colin and the things he had said, but her brother had disappeared. She never saw him again.

—Brian Vickers



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