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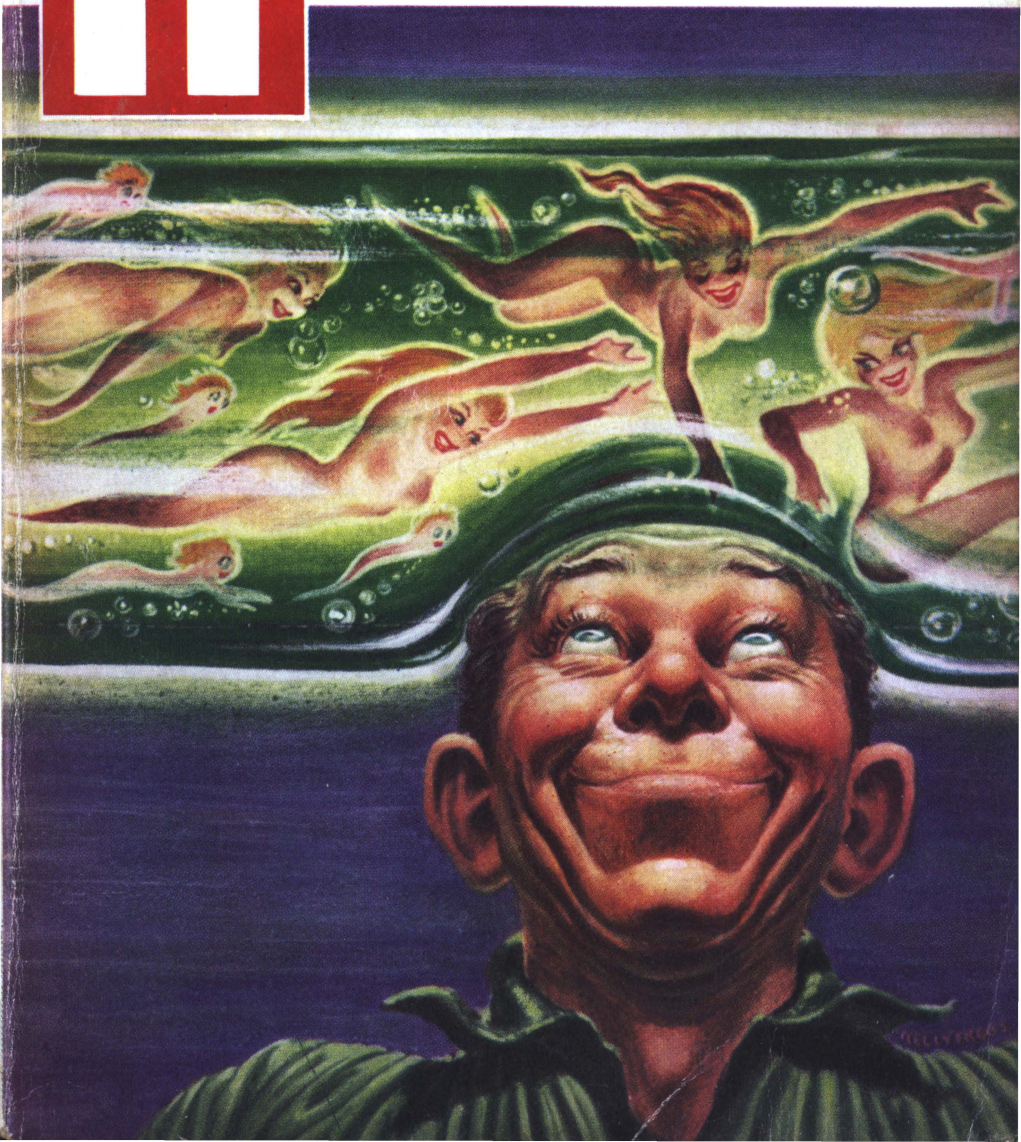
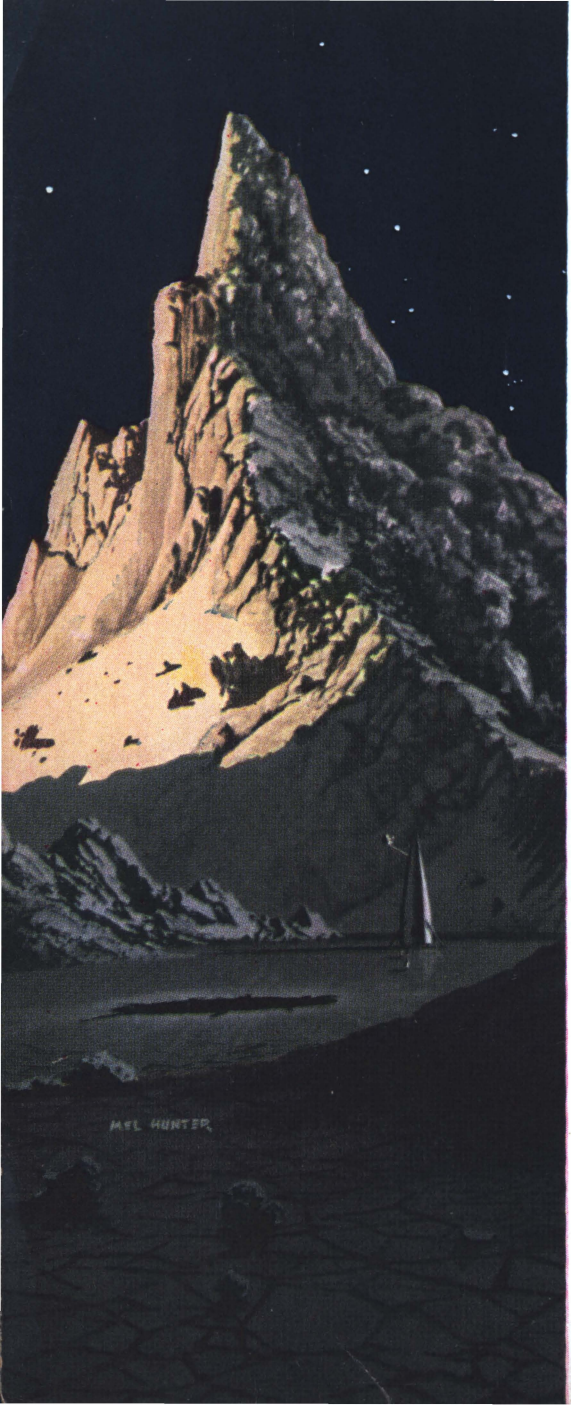
PIPE DREAM

by Fritz Leiber





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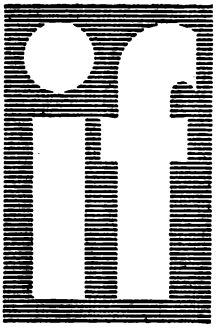

WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

FEBRUARY 1959

All Stories New and Complete

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PIPE DREAM

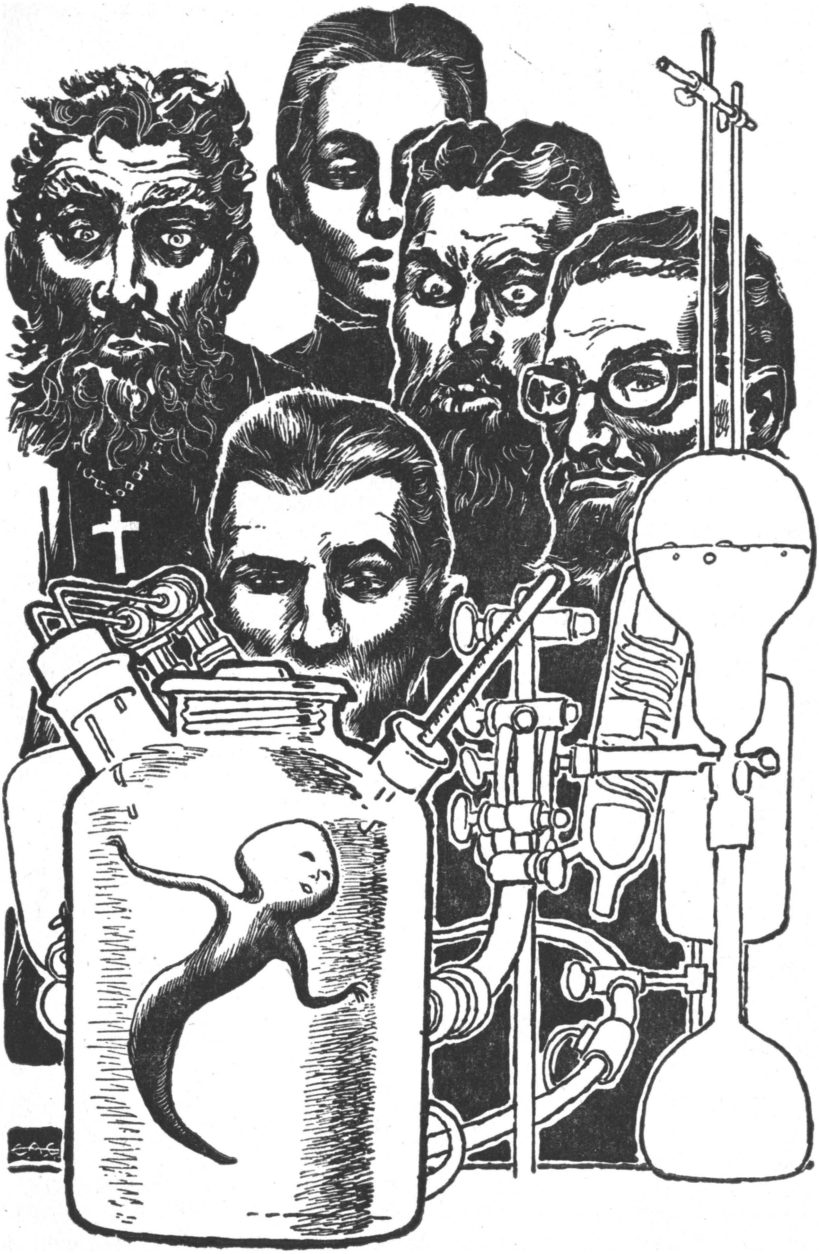
BY FRITZ LEIBER

Simon Grue found a two-inch mermaid in his bathtub. It had arms, hips, a finny tail, and (here the real trouble began) a face that reminded him irresistibly of Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich . . .

IT WASN'T until the mermaid turned up in his bathtub that Simon Grue seriously began to wonder what the Russians were doing on the roof next door.

The old house next door together with its spacious tarpapered roof, which held a sort of pent-shack, a cylindrical old water tank, and several chicken-wire enclosures, had always been a focus of curiosity in this region of Greenwich Village, especially to whoever happened to be renting Simon's studio, the north window-cum-skylight of which looked down upon it—if you were exceptionally tall or if, like Simon, you stood halfway up a stepladder and peered.

During the 1920's, old-timers told Simon, the house had been owned by a bootlegger, who had installed a costly pipe organ and used the water tank to store hooch. Later there had been a colony of shaven-headed Buddhist monks, who had strolled about the roof in their orange and yellow robes, meditating and eating raw vegetables. There had followed a *commedia dell' arte* theatrical group, a fencing salon, a school of the organ



(the bottlegger's organ was always one of the prime renting points of the house), an Arabian restaurant, several art schools and silvercraft shops of course, and an Existentialist coffee house.

The last occupants had been two bony-cheeked Swedish blondes who sunbathed interminably and had built the chicken-wire enclosures to cage a large number of sinister smoke-colored dogs—Simon decided they were breeding werewolves, and one of his most successful abstractions, "Gray Hunger", had been painted to the inspiration of an eldritch howling. The dogs and their owners had departed abruptly one night in a closed van, without any of the dogs ever having been offered for sale or either of the girls having responded with anything more than a raised eyebrow to Simon's brave greetings of "Skoal!"

The Russians had taken possession about six months ago—four brothers apparently, and one sister, who never stirred from the house but could occasionally be seen peering dreamily from a window. A white card with a boldly-inked "Stulnikov-Gurevich" had been thumbtacked to the peeling green-painted front door. Lafcadio Smits, the interior decorator, told Simon that the newcomers were clearly White Russians; he could tell it by their bushy beards. Lester Phlegius maintained that they were Red Russians passing as White, and talked alarmingly of spying, sabotage and suitcase bombs.

Simon, who had the advantages of living on the spot and having been introduced to one of the brothers—Vasily—at a neighboring art gallery, came to believe that they were both Red and White and something more—solid, complete Slavs in any case, Double Dostoevsky Russians if one may be permitted the expression. They ordered vodka, caviar, and soda crackers by the case. They argued interminably (loudly in Russian, softly in English), they went on mysterious silent errands, they gloomed about on the roof, they made melancholy music with their deep harmonious voices and several large guitars. Once Simon thought they even had the bootlegger's organ going, but there had been a bad storm at the time and he hadn't been sure.

They were not quite as tight-lipped as the Swedish girls. Gradually a curt front-sidewalk acquaintance developed and Simon came to know their names. There was Vasily, of course, who wore thick glasses, the most scholarly-looking of the lot and certainly the most bibulous—Simon came to think of Vasily as the Vodka Breather. Occasionally he could be glimpsed holding Erlenmeyer flasks, trays of culture dishes, and other pieces of biological equipment, or absent-mindedly wiping off a glass slide with his beard.

Then there was Ivan, the dourest of the four, though none of them save Vasily seemed very amiable. Simon's private names for Ivan were the Nihilist and the Bomber, since he sometimes lugged about with him a heavy globular leather case. With it and his beard—a square black one—he had more than once created a mild sensation

in the narrow streets of the Village.

Next there was Mikhail, who wore a large crucifix on a silver chain around his neck and looked like a more spiritual Rasputin. However, Simon thought of him less as the Religious than as the Whistler—for his inveterate habit of whistling into his straggly beard a strange tune that obeyed no common harmonic laws. Somehow Mikhail seemed to carry a chilly breeze around with him, a perpetual cold draught, so that Simon had to check himself in order not to clutch together his coat collar whenever he heard the approach of the eerie piping.

Finally there was Lev, beardless, shorter by several inches, and certainly the most elusive of the brothers. He always moved at a scurry, frequently dipping his head, so that it was some time before Simon assured himself that he had the Stulnikov-Gurevich face. He did, unmistakably. Lev seemed to be away on trips a good deal. On his returns he was frequently accompanied by furtive but important-looking men—a different one on each occasion. There would be much bustle at such times—among other things, the shades would be drawn. Then in a few hours Lev would be off again, and his man-about-town companion too.

And of course there was the indoors-keeping sister. Several times Simon had heard one of the brothers calling "Grushenka", so he assumed that was her name. She had the Stulnikov-Gurevich face too, though on her, almost incredibly, it was strangely attractive. She never ventured on the roof but she often sat in the pent-shack. As far as Simon could make out, she always wore some dark Victorian costume—at least it had a high neck, long sleeves, and puffed shoulders. Pale-faced in the greenish gloom, she would stare for hours out of the pent-shack's single window, though never in Simon's direction. Occasionally she would part and close her lips, but not exactly as if she were speaking, at least aloud—he thought of calling her the Bubble Blower. The effect was as odd as Mikhail's whistling but not as unpleasant. In fact, Simon found himself studying Grushenka for ridiculously long periods of time. His mild obsession began to irk him and one day he decided henceforth to stay away altogether from his north window and the stepladder. As a result he saw little of the alterations the Russians began to make on the roof at this point, though he did notice that they lugged up among other things a length of large-diameter transparent plastic piping.

SO MUCH FOR the Russians, now for the mermaid. Late one night Simon started to fill his bathtub with cold water to soak his brushes and rags—he was working with a kind of calcimine at the time, experimenting with portable murals painted on large plaster-faced wooden panels. Heavily laden, he got back to the bathroom just in time to shut off the water—and to see a tiny fish of some sort splashing around in it.

He was not unduly surprised.

Fish up to four or five inches in length were not unheard-of apparitions in the cold-water supply of the area, and this specimen looked as if it displaced no more than a teaspoon of water.

He made a lucky grab and the next moment he was holding in his firmly clenched right hand the bottom half of a slim wriggling creature hardly two inches long—and now Simon was surprised indeed.

To begin with, it was not greenish white nor any common fish color, but palely-pinkish, flesh-colored in fact. And it didn't seem so much a fish as a tadpole—at least its visible half had a slightly oversize head shaped like a bullet that has mushroomed a little, and two tiny writhing arms or appendages of some sort —and it felt as if it had rather large hips for a fish or even a tadpole. Equip a two-months human embryo with a finny tail, give it in addition a precocious feminine sexiness, and you'd get something of the same effect.

But all that was nothing. The trouble was that it had a face—a tiny face, of course, and rather goggly-ghostly like a planarian's, but a face nevertheless, a human-looking face, and also (here was the real trouble) a face that bore a grotesque but striking resemblance to that of Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich.

Simon's fingers tightened convulsively. Simultaneously the slippery creature gave a desperate wriggle. It shot into the air in a high curve and fell into the scant inch of space between the bathtub and the wall.

The next half hour was hectic in a groveling sort of way. Retrieving anything from behind Simon's ancient claw-footed bathtub was a most difficult feat. There was barely space to get an arm under it and at one point the warping of the floor boards prevented even that. Besides, there was the host of dust-shrouded objects it had previously been too much trouble to tease out —an accumulation of decades. At first Simon tried to guide himself by the faint flopping noises along the hidden base of the wall, but these soon ceased.

Being on your knees and your chest with an ear against the floor and an arm strainingly outstretched is probably not the best position to assume while weird trains of thought go hooting through your head, but sometimes it has to happen that way. First came a remembered piece of neighborhood lore that supported the possibility of a connection between the house next door and the tiny pink aquatic creature now suffering minute agonies behind the bathtub. No one knew what ancient and probably larceny-minded amateur plumber was responsible, but the old-timers assured Simon there was a link between the water supply of the Russians' house with its aerial cistern and that of the building containing Simon's studio and several smaller apartments; at any rate they maintained that there had been a time during the period when the bootlegger was storing hooch in the water tank that several neighborhood cold-water taps were dispensing a weak but nonetheless authoritative mixture of bourbon and

branch water.

So, thought Simon as he groped and strained, if the Russians were somehow responsible for this weird fishlet, there was no insuperable difficulty in understanding how it might have gotten here.

But that was the least of Simon's preoccupations. He scrabbled wildly and unsuccessfully for several minutes, then realizing he would never get anywhere in this unsystematic manner, he began to remove the accumulated debris piece by piece: dark cracked ends of soap, washrags dried out in tortured attitudes, innumerable dark-dyed cigarette stumps, several pocket magazines with bleached wrinkled pages, empty and near-empty medicine bottles and pill vials, rusty hairpins, bobby pins, safety pins, crumpled toothpaste tubes (and a couple for oil paint), a gray toothbrush, a fifty-cent piece and several pennies, the mummy of a mouse, a letter from Picasso, and last of all, from the dark corner behind the bathtub's inside claw, the limp pitiful thing he was seeking.

It was even tinier than he'd thought. He carefully washed the dust and flug off it, but it was clearly dead and its resemblance to Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich had become problematical—indeed, Simon decided that someone seeing it now for the first time would think it a freak minnow or monstrous tadpole and nothing more, though mutation or disease had obviously been at work. The illusion of a miniature mermaid still existed in the tapering tail and armlike appendages, but it was faint. He tried to remember what he knew about salamanders—almost nothing, it turned out. He thought of embryos, but his mind veered away from the subject.

He wandered back into the studio carrying the thing in his hand. He climbed the stepladder by the north window and studied the house next door. What windows he could see were dark. He got a very vague impression that the roof had changed. After he had strained his eyes for some time he fancied he could see a faint path of greenish luminescence streaming between the pent-shack and the water-tank, but it was very faint indeed and might only be his vision swimming.

He climbed down the stepladder and stood for a moment weighing the tiny dead thing in his hand. It occurred to him that one of his friends at the university could dig up a zoologist to pass on his find.

But Simon's curiosity was more artistic than scientific. In the end he twisted a bit of cellophane around the thing, placed it on the ledge of his easel and went off to bed . . . and to a series of disturbingly erotic dreams.

NEXT DAY he got up late and, after breakfasting on black coffee, gloomed around the studio for a while, picking things up and putting them down. He glanced frequently at the stepladder, but resisted the temptation to climb up and have another look next door. Sighing, he thumbtacked a sheet of paper to a drawing board and half-heartedly began blocking in a fe-

male figure. It was insipid and lifeless. Stabbing irritably at the heavy curve of the figure's hip, he broke his charcoal. "Damn!" he said, glaring around the room. Abandoning all pretense, he threw the charcoal on the floor and climbed the stepladder. He pressed his nose against the glass.

In daylight, the adjoining roof looked bare and grimy. There was a big transparent pipe running between the water tank and the shack, braced in two places by improvised-looking wooden scaffolding. Listening intently, Simon thought he could hear a motor going in the shack. The water looked sallow green. It reminded Simon of those futuristic algae farms where the stuff is supposed to be pumped through transparent pipes to expose it to sunlight. There seemed to be a transparent top on the water tank too—it was too high for Simon to see, but there was a gleam around the edge. Staring at the pipe again, Simon got the impression there were little things traveling in the water, but he couldn't make them out.

Climbing down in some excitement, Simon got the twist of cellophane from the ledge of the easel and stared at its contents. Wild thoughts were tumbling through his head as he got back up on the stepladder. Sunlight flashed on the greenish water pipe between the tank and the shack, but after the first glance he had no eyes for it. Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich had her face tragically pressed to the window of the shack. She was wearing the black dress with high neck and puffed shoulders. At that moment she looked straight at him. She lifted her hands and seemed to speak imploringly. Then she slowly sank from sight as if, it horridly occurred to Simon, into quicksand.

Simon sprang from his chair, heart beating wildly, and ran down the stairs to the street. Two or three passersby paused to study him as he alternately pounded the flaking green door of the Russians' house and leaned on the button. Also watching was the shirt-sleeved driver of a moving van, emblazoned "Stulnikov-Gurevich Enterprises," which almost filled the street in front of the house.

The door opened narrowly. A man with a square black beard frowned out of it. He topped Simon by almost a head.

"Yes?" Ivan the Bomber asked, in a deep, exasperated voice.

"I must see the lady of the house immediately," Simon cried. "Your sister, I believe. She's in danger." He surged forward.

The butt of the Bomber's right palm took him firmly in the chest and he staggered back. The Bomber said coldly, "My sister is—ha!—taking a bath."

Simon cried, "In that case she's drowning!" and surged forward again, but the Bomber's hand stopped him short. "I'll call the police!" Simon shouted, flailing his limbs. The hand at his chest suddenly stopped pushing and began to pull. Gripped by the front of his shirt, Simon felt himself being drawn rapidly inside. "Let go! Help, a kidnapping!" he shouted to the inquisitive faces outside, before the door banged shut.

"No police!" rumbled the Bomber, assisting Simon upstairs.

"Now look here," Simon protested futilely. In the two-story-high living room to his right, the pipes of an organ gleamed golden from the shadows. At the second landing, a disheveled figure met them, glasses twinkling—Vasily the Vodka Breather. He spoke querulously in Russian to Ivan, who replied shortly, then Vasily turned and the three of them crowded up the narrow third flight to the pent-shack. This housed a small noisy machine, perhaps an aerator of some sort, for bubbles were streaming into the transparent pipe where it was connected to the machine; and under the pipe, sitting with an idiot smile on a chair of red plush and gilt, was a pale black-mustached man. An empty clear-glass bottle with a red and gold label lay on the floor at his feet. The opposite side of the room was hidden by a heavy plastic shower curtain. Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich was not in view.

Ivan said something explosive, picking up the bottle and staring at it. "Vodka!" he went on. "I have told you not to mix the pipe and the vodka! Now see what you have done!"

"To me it seemed hospitable," said Vasily with an apologetic gesture. "Besides, only one bottle—"

Ducking under the pipe where it crossed the pent-shack, Ivan picked up the pale man and dumped him crosswise in the chair, with his patent-leather shoes sticking up on one side and his plump hands crossed over his chest. "Let him sleep. First we must take down all the apparatus, before the capitalistic police arrive. Now: what to do with this one?" He looked at Simon, and clenched one large and hairy fist.

"Nyet-nyet-nyet," said the Vodka Breather, and went to whisper in Ivan's ear. They both stared at Simon, who felt uncomfortable and began to back toward the door; but Ivan ducked agilely under the pipe and grasped him by the arm, pulling him effortlessly toward the roof exit. "Just come this way if you please, Mr. Gru-*ay,*" said Vasily, hurrying after. As they left the shack, he picked up a kitchen chair.

Crossing the roof, Simon made a sudden effort and wrenched himself free. They caught him again at the edge of the roof, where he had run with nothing clearly in mind, but with his mouth open to yell. Suspended in the grip of the two Russians, with Ivan's meaty palm over his mouth, Simon had a momentary glimpse of the street below. A third bearded figure, Mikhail the Religious, was staring up at them from the sunny sidewalk. The melancholy face, the deep-socketed tormented eyes, and the narrow beard tangled with the dangling crucifix combined to give the effect of a Tolstoy novel's dustjacket. As they hauled Simon away, he had the impression that a chilly breeze had sprung up and the street had darkened. In his ears was Mikhail's distant, oddly discordant whistling.

Grunting, the two brothers set Simon down on the kitchen chair and slid him across the roof until something hard but resilient

touched the top of his head. It was the plastic pipe, through which, peering upward, he could see myriads of tiny polliwog-shapes flitting back and forth.

"Do us a kindness not to make noise," said Ivan, removing his palm. "My brother Vasily will now explain." He went away.

CURIOSITY as much as shock kept Simon in his chair. Vasily, bobbing his head and smiling, sat down tailor-fashion on the roof in front of him. "First I must tell you, Mr. Gru-*ay*, that I am specialist in biological sciences. Here you see results of my most successful experiment." He withdrew a round clear-glass bottle from his pocket and unscrewed the top.

"Ah?" said Simon tentatively.

"Indeed yes. In my researches, Mr. Gru-*ay*, I discovered a chemical which will inhibit growth at any level of embryonic development, producing a viable organism at that point. The basic effect of this chemical is always toward survival at whatever level of development—one cell, a blastula, a worm, a fish, a four-legger. This research, which Lysenko scoffed at when I told him of it, I had no trouble in keeping secret, though at the time I was working as the unhappy collaborator of the godless soviets. But perhaps I am being too technical?"

"Not at all," Simon assured him.

"Good," Vasily said with simple satisfaction and gulped at his bottle. "Meanwhile my brother Mikhail was a religious brother at a monastery near Mount Athos, my Nihilist brother Ivan was in central Europe, while my third brother Lev, who is of commercial talents. had preceded us to the New World, where we always felt it would some day be our destiny to join one another.

"With the aid of brother Ivan, I and my sister Grushenka escaped from Russia. We picked up Mikhail from his monastery and proceeded here, where Lev had become a capitalist business magnate.

"My brothers, Ivan especially, were interested in my research. He had a theory that we could eventually produce hosts of men in this way, whole armies and political parties, all Nihilist and all of them Stulnikov-Gureviches. I assured him that this was impossible, that I could not play Cadmus, for free-swimming forms are one thing, we have the way to feed them in the aqueous medium; but to make fully developed mammals placental nourishment is necessary—that I cannot provide. Yet to please him I begin with (pardon me!) the egg of my sister, that was as good a beginning as any and perhaps it intrigued my vanity. Ivan dreamed his dreams of a Nihilist Stulnikov-Gurevich humanity—it was harmless, as I told myself."

Simon stared at him glassy-eyed. Something rather peculiar was beginning to happen inside his head—about an inch under the point where the cool water-filled plastic pipe pressed down on his scalp. Little ghostly images were darting—delightfully wispy little girl-things, smiling down at him impudently, then flirting away with a

quick motion of their mermaid tails.

The sky had been growing steadily darker and now there came the growl of thunder. Against the purple-gray clouds Simon could barely make out the semi-transparent shapes of the golliwogs in the pipe over his head; but the images inside his mind were growing clearer by the minute.

"Ah, we have a storm," Vasily observed as the thunder growled again. "That reminds me of Mikhail, who is much influenced by our Finnish grandmother. He had the belief as a child that he could call up the winds by whistling for them—he even learned special wind musics from her. Later he became a Christian religious—there are great struggles in him. Mikhail objected to my researches when he heard I used the egg of my sister. He said we will produce millions of souls who are not baptized. I asked him how about the water they are in, he replied this is not the same thing, these little swimmers will wriggle in hell eternally. This worried him greatly. We tried to tell him I had not used the egg of my sister, only the egg of a fish.

"But he did not believe this, because my sister changed greatly at the time. She no longer spoke. She put on my mother's bathing costume (we are a family people) and retired to the bathtub all day long. I accepted this—at least in the water she is not violent. Mikhail said, 'See, her soul is now split into many unredeemed sub-souls, one each for the little swimmers. There is a sympathy between them—a hypnotic vibration. So long as you keep them near her, in that tank on the roof, this will be. If they were gone from there, far from there, the sub-souls would reunite and Grushenka's soul would be one again.' He begged me to stop my research, to dump it in the sea, to scatter it away, but Lev and Ivan demand I keep on. Yet Mikhail warned me that works of evil end in the whirlwind. I am torn and undecided." He gulped at his vodka.

Thunder growled louder. Simon was thinking, dreamily, that if the soul of Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich were split into thousands of sub-souls, vibrating hynotically in the nearby water tank, with at least one of them escaping as far as his bathtub, then it was no wonder if Grushenka had a strange attraction for him.

"But that is not yet the worst," Vasily continued. "The hypnotic vibrations of the free-swimming ones in their multitude turn out to have a stimulating effect on any male who is near. Their sub-minds induce dreams of the piquant sort. Lev says that to make money for the work we must sell these dreams to rich men. I protest, but to no avail.

"Lev is maddened for money. Now besides selling the dreams I find he plans to sell the creatures themselves, sell them one by one, but keep enough to sell the dreams too. It is a madness."

The darkness had become that of night. The thunder continued to growl and now it seemed to Simon that it had music in it. Visions swam through his mind to its

rhythm—hordes of swimming pygmy souls, of unborn water babies, migrations of miniature mermaids. The pipe hanging between water tank and pentshack became in his imagination a giant umbilicus or a canal for a monstrous multiple birth. Sitting beneath it, helpless to move, he focused his attention with increasing pleasure on the active, supple, ever more human girl-bodies that swam across his mind. Now more mermaid than tadpole, with bright smiling lips and eyes, long Lorelei-hair trailing behind them, they darted and hovered caressingly. In their wide-cheeked oval faces, he discovered without shock, there was a transcendent resemblance to the features of Grushenka Stulnikov-Gurevich—a younger, milk-skinned maiden of the steppes, with challenging eyes and fingers that brushed against him with delightful shocks. . .

"So it is for me the great problem," Vasily's distant voice continued. "I see in my work only the pure research, the play of the mind. Lev sees money, Ivan sees dragon teeth—fodder for his political cannon—Mikhail sees unshriven souls, Grushenka sees—who knows?—madness. It is indeed one great problem."

THUNDER CAME again, crashingly this time. The door of the pent-shack opened. Framed in it stood Ivan the Bomber. "Vasily!" he roared. "Do you know what that idiot is doing now?"

As the thunder and his voice trailed off together, Simon became aware at last of the identity of the other sound, which had been growing in volume all the time.

Simultaneously Vasily struggled to his feet.

"The organ!" he cried. "Mikhail is *playing* the Whirlwind Music! We must stop him!" Pausing only for a last pull at the bottle, he charged into the pent-shack, following Ivan.

Wind was shaking the heavy pipe over Simon's head, tossing him back and forth in the chair. Looking with an effort toward the west, Simon saw the reason: a spinning black pencil of wind that was writing its way toward them in wreckage across the intervening roofs.

The chair fell under him. Stumbling across the roof, he tugged futilely at the door to the pent-shack, then threw himself flat, clawing at the tarpaper.

There was a mounting roar. The top of the water tank went spinning off like a flying saucer. Momentarily, as if it were a giant syringe, the whirlwind dipped into the tank. Simon felt himself sliding across the roof, felt his legs lifting. He fetched up against the roof's low wall and at that moment the wind let go of him and his legs touched tarpaper again.

Gaining his feet numbly, Simon staggered into the leaning pent-shack. The pale man was nowhere to be seen, the plush chair empty. The curtain at the other side of the room had fallen with its rods, revealing a bathtub more antique than Simon's. In the tub, under the window, sat Grushenka. The lightning flares showed her with

her chin level with the water, her eyes placidly staring, her mouth opening and closing.

Simon found himself putting his arms around the black-clad figure. With a straining effort he lifted her out of the tub, water sloshing all over his legs, and half carried, half slid with her down the stairs.

He fetched up panting and disheveled at the top landing, his attention riveted by the lightning-illuminated scene in the two-story-high living room below. At the far end of it a dark-robed figure crouched at the console of the mighty organ, like a giant bat at the base of the portico of a black and gold temple. In the center of the room Ivan was in the act of heaving above his head his globular leather case.

Mikhail darted a look over his shoulder and sprang to one side. The projectile crashed against the organ. Mikhail picked himself up, tearing something from his neck. Ivan lunged forward with a roar. Mikhail crashed a fist against his jaw. The Bomber went down and didn't come up. Mikhail unwrapped his crucifix from his fingers and resumed playing.

With a wild cry Simon heaved himself to his feet, stumbled over Grushenka's sodden garments, and pitched headlong down the stairs.

When he came to, the house was empty and the Stulnikov moving van was gone. At the front door he was met by a poker-faced young man who identified himself as a member of the FBI. Simon showed him the globular case Ivan had thrown at the organ. It proved to contain a bowling ball.

The young gentleman listened to his story without changing expression, thanked him warmly, and shooed him out.

The Stulnikov-Gureviches disappeared for good, though not quite without a trace. Simon found this item in the next evening's paper, the first of many he accumulated yearningly in a scrapbook during the following months:

MERMAID RAIN A HOAX, SCIENTIST DECLARES

Milford, Pa.—The "mermaid rain" reported here has been declared a fraud by an eminent European biologist. Vasily Stulnikov-Gurevich, formerly Professor of Geneties at Pire University, Latvia, passing through here on a cross-country trip, declared the miniature "mermaids" were "albino tadpoles, probably scattered about as a hoax by schoolboys."

The professor added, "I would like to know where they got them, however. There is clear evidence of mutation, due perhaps to fallout."

Dr. Stulnikov directed his party in a brief but intensive search for overlooked specimens. His charming silent sister, Grushenka Stulnikov, wearing a quaint Latvian swimming costume, explored the shallows of the Delaware.

After collecting as many specimens as possible, the professor and his assistants continued their trip in their unusual camping car. Dr. Stulnikov intends to found a biological research center "in the calm and tolerant atmosphere of the West Coast," he declared. **END**

THE WIND PEOPLE

BY MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

Inhabited only by whispering winds, Robin's World was a paradise for the wrong two people—Eve and her son . . .

IT HAD been a long layover for the *Starholm's* crew, hunting heavy elements for fuel—eight months, on an idyllic green paradise of a planet; a soft, windy, whispering world, inhabited only by trees and winds. But in the end it presented its own unique problem.

Specifically, it presented Captain Merrihew with the problem of Robin, male, father unknown, who had been born the day before, and a month prematurely, to Dr. Helen Murray.

Merrihew found her lying abed in the laboratory shelter, pale and calm, with the child beside her.

The little shelter, constructed roughly of green planks, looked out on the clearing which the *Starholm* had used as a base of operations during the layover; a beautiful place at the bottom of a wide valley, in the curve of a broad, deep-flowing river. The crew, tired of being shipbound, had built half a dozen such huts and shacks in these eight months.

Merrihew glared down at Helen. He snorted, "This is a fine situation. You, of all the people in the whole damned crew—the ship's doctor! It's—it's—" Inarticulate with rage, he fell back on a ridiculously inadequate phrase. "It's—criminal carelessness!"

"I know." Helen Murray, too young and far too lovely for a ship's officer on a ten-year cruise, still looked weak and white, and her voice was a gentle shadow of its crisp self. "I'm afraid four years in space made me careless."

Merrihew brooded, looking down at her. Something about ship-gravity conditions, while not affecting potency, made conception impossible; no child had ever been conceived in space and none ever would. On planet layovers, the effect wore off very slowly; only after three months aground had Dr. Murray started routine administration of anticeptin to the twenty-two women of the crew, herself included. At that time she had been still unaware that she herself was already carrying a child.

Outside, the leafy forest whispered and rustled, and Merrihew knew Helen had forgotten his existence again. The day-old child was tucked up in one of her rolled coveralls at her side. To Merrihew, he looked like a skinned monkey, but Helen's eyes smoldered as her hands moved gently over the tiny round head.

He stood and listened to the winds and said at random, "These shacks will fall to pieces in another month. It doesn't matter, we'll have

taken off by then."

Dr. Chao Lin came into the shack, an angular woman of thirty-five. She said, "Company, Helen? Well, it's about time. Here, let me take Robin."

Helen said in weak protest, "You're spoiling me, Lin."

"It will do you good," Chao Lin returned. Merrihew, in a sudden surge of fury and frustration, exploded, "Damn it, Lin, you're making it all worse. He'll die when we go into overdrive, you know as well as I do!"

Helen sat up, clutching Robin protectively. "Are you proposing to drown him like a kitten?"

"Helen, I'm not proposing anything. I'm stating a fact."

"But it's not a fact. He won't die in overdrive because he won't be aboard when we go into overdrive!"

Merrihew looked at Lin helplessly, but his face softened. "Shall we—put him to sleep and bury him here?"

The woman's face turned white. "No!" she cried in passionate protest, and Lin bent to disengage her frantic grip. "Helen, you'll hurt him. Put him down. There."

Merrihew looked down at her, troubled, and said, "We can't just abandon him to die slowly, Helen—"

"Who says I'm going to abandon him?"

Merrihew asked slowly, "Are you planning to desert?" He added, after a minute, "There's a chance he'll survive. After all, his very birth was against all medical precedent. Maybe—"

"Captain—" Helen sounded desperate. "Even drugged, no child under ten has ever endured the shift into hyperspace drive. A newborn would die in seconds." She clasped Robin to her again, and said, "It's the only way—you have Lin for a doctor, Reynolds can handle my collateral duties. This planet is uninhabited, the climate is mild, we couldn't possibly starve." Her face, so gentle, was suddenly like rock. "Enter my death in the log, if you want to."

Merrihew looked from Helen to Lin, and said, "Helen, you're insane!"

She said, "Even if I'm sane now, I wouldn't be long if I had to abandon Robin." The wild note had died out of her voice, and she spoke rationally, but inflexibly. "Captain Merrihew, to get me aboard the *Starholm,* you will have to have me drugged or taken by force; I promise you I won't go any other way. And if you do that—and if Robin is left behind, or dies in overdrive—just so you will have my services as a doctor—then I solemnly swear that I will kill myself at the first opportunity."

"My God," said Merrihew, "you *are* insane!"

Helen gave a very tiny shrug. "Do you want a madwoman aboard?"

Chao Lin said quietly, "Captain, I don't see any other way. We would have had to arrange it that way if Helen had actually died in childbirth. Of two unsatisfactory solutions, we must choose the least harmful." And Merrihew knew that he had no real choice.

"I still think you're both crazy," he blustered, but it was surrender, and Helen knew it.

Ten days after the *Starholm* took off, young Colin Reynolds, technician, committed suicide by the messy procedure of slicing his jugular artery, which—in zero gravity—distributed several quarts of blood in big round globules all over his cabin. He left an incoherent note.

Merrihew put the note in the disposal and Chao Lin put the blood in the ship's blood-bank for surgery, and they hushed it up as an accident; but Merrihew had the unpleasant feeling that the layover on the green and windy planet was going to become a legend, spread in whispers by the crew. And it did, but that is another story.

ROBIN WAS two years old when he first heard the voices in the wind. He pulled at his mother's arm and crooned softly, in imitation.

"What is it, lovey?"

"Pretty." He crooned again to the distant murmuring sound.

Helen smiled vaguely and patted the round cheek. Robin, his infant imagination suddenly distracted, said, "Hungry. Robin hungry. Berries."

"Berries after you eat," Helen promised absently, and picked him up. Robin tugged at her arm.

"Mommy pretty, too!"

She laughed, a rosy and smiling young Diana. She was happy on the solitary planet; they lived quite comfortably in one of the larger shacks, and only a little frown-line between her eyes bore witness to the terror which had closed down on her in the first months, when every new day had been some new struggle—against weakness, against unfamiliar sounds, against loneliness and dread. Nights when she lay wakeful, sweating with terror while the winds rose and fell again and her imagination gave them voices, bleak days when she wandered dazedly around the shack or stared moodily at Robin. There had been moments—only fleeting, and penanced with hours of shame and regret—when she thought that even the horror of losing Robin in those first days would have been less than the horror of spending the rest of her life alone here; when she had wondered why Merrihew had not realized that she was unbalanced, and forced her to go with them . . . by now, Robin would have been only a moment's painful memory.

Still not strong, knowing she had to be strong for Robin or he would die as surely as if she had abandoned him, she had spent the first months in a somnambulistic dream. Sometimes she had walked for days at a time in that dream; she would wake to find food that she could not remember gathering. Somehow, pervasive, the dream-voices had taken over; the whispering winds had been full of voices and even hands.

She had fallen ill and lain for days sick and delirious, and had heard a voice which hardly seemed to be her own, saying that if she died the wind voices would care for Robin . . . and then the shock

and irrationality of that had startled her out of delirium, agonized and trembling, and she pulled herself upright and cried out "No!"

And the shimmer of eyes and voices had faded again into vague echoes, until there was only the stir of sunlight on the leaves, and Robin, chubby and naked, kicking in the sunlight, cooing with his hands outstretched to the rustle of leaves and shadows.

She had known, then, that she had to get well. She had never heard the wind voices again, and her crisp, scientific mind rejected the fanciful theory that if she only believed in the wind voices she would see their forms and hear their words clearly. And she rejected them so thoroughly that when she heard them speak she shut them away from her mind, and after a time heard them no longer, except in restless dreams.

By now she had accepted the isolation and the beauty of their world, and begun to make a happy life for Robin.

For lack of other occupation last summer—though the winter was mild and there was no lack of fruits and roots even then—Helen had patiently snared male and female of small animals like rabbits, and now she had a pen of them. They provided a change of diet, and after a few smelly unsuccessful experiments she had devised a way to supple their fur pelts. She made no effort at gardening, though when Robin was older she might try that. For the moment, it was enough that they were healthy and safe and protected.

. . . Robin was *listening* again. Helen bent her ear, sharpened by the silence, but heard only the rustle of wind and leaves; saw only falling brightness along a silvered tree-trunk.

Wind? When there were no branches stirring?

"Ridiculous," she said sharply, then snatched up the baby boy and squeezed him before hoisting him astride her hip. "Mommy doesn't mean *you,* Robin. Let's look for berries."

But soon she realized that his head was tipped back and that he was listening, again, to some sound she could not hear.

ON WHAT she said was Robin's fifth birthday, Helen had made a special bed for him in another room of the building. He missed the warmth of Helen's body, and the comforting sound of her breathing; for Robin, since birth, had been a wakeful child.

Yet, on the first night alone, Robin felt curiously freed. He did something he had never dared do before, for fear of waking Helen; he slipped from his bed and stood in the doorway, looking into the forest.

The forest was closer to the doorway now; Robin could fuzzily remember when the clearing had been wider. Now, slowly, beyond the garden patch which Helen kept cleared, the underbrush and saplings were growing back, and even what Robin called "the burned place" was covered with new sparse grass.

Robin was accustomed to being alone, during the day—even in his first year, Helen had had to leave him alone, securely fastened in the house, or inside a little tight-fenced yard. But he was not used to being alone at night.

Far off in the forest, he could hear the whispers of the other people. Helen said there were no other people, but Robin knew better, because he could hear their voices on the wind, like fragments of the songs Helen sang at bedtime. And sometimes he could almost see them in the shadowy spots.

Once when Helen had been sick, a long time ago, and Robin had run helplessly from the fenced yard to the inside room and back again, hungry and dirty and furious because Helen only slept on the bed with her eyes closed, rousing up now and then to whimper like he did when he fell down and skinned his knee, the winds and voices had come into the very house; Robin had hazy memories of soothing voices, of hands that touched him more softly than Helen's hands. But he could not quite remember.

Now that he could hear them so clearly, he would go and find the other people. And then if Helen was sick again, there would be someone else to play with him and look after him. He thought gleefully, *won't Helen be surprised,* and darted off across the clearing.

Helen woke, roused not by a sound but by a silence. She no longer heard Robin's soft breaths from the alcove, and after a moment she realized something else: The winds were silent.

Perhaps, she thought, a storm was coming. Some change in air pressure could cause this stillness—but Robin? She tiptoed to the alcove; as she had suspected, his bed was empty.

Where could he be? In the clearing? With a storm coming? She slid her feet into hand-made sandals and ran outside, her quivering call ringing out through the silent forest:

"Robin—oh, Robin!"

Silence. And far away a little ominous whisper. And for the first time, since that first frightening year of loneliness, she felt lost, deserted in an alien world. She ran across the clearing, looking around wildly, trying to decide which way he could have wandered. Into the forest? What if he had strayed toward the river bank? There was a place where the bank crumbled away, down toward the rapids—her throat closed convulsively, and her call was almost a shriek:

"Oh, Robin! Robin, darling! Robin!"

She ran through the paths worn by their feet, hearing snatches of rustle, winds and leaves suddenly vocal in the cold moonlight around her. It was the first time since the spaceship left them that Helen had ventured out into the night of their world. She called again, her voice cracking in panic.

"Ro-bin!"

A sudden stray gleam revealed a glint of white, and a child stood in the middle of the path. Helen gasped with relief and ran to snatch up her son—then fell back in dis-

may. It was not Robin who stood there. The child was naked, about a head shorter than Robin, and female.

There was something curious about the bare and gleaming flesh, as if she could see the child only in the full flush of the moonlight. A round, almost expressionless face was surrounded by a mass of colorless streaming hair, the exact color of the moonlight. Helen's audible gasp startled her to a stop: she shut her eyes convulsively, and when she opened them the path was black and empty and Robin was running down the track toward her.

Helen caught him up, with a strangled cry, and ran, clasping him to her breast, back down the path to their shack. Inside, she barred the door and laid Robin down in her own bed, and threw herself down shivering, too shaken to speak, too shaken to scold him, curiously afraid to question. I had a hallucination, she told herself, a hallucination, another dream, a dream. . . .

A dream, like the other Dream. She dignified it to herself as The Dream, because it was not like any other dream she had ever had. She had dreamed it first before Robin's birth, and been ashamed to speak of it to Chao Lin, fearing the common-sense skepticism of the older woman.

On their tenth night on the green planet (the *Starholm* was a dim recollection now) when Merrihew's scientists had been convinced that the little world was safe, without wild beasts or diseases or savage natives, the crew had requested permission to camp in the valley clearing beside the river. Permission granted, they had gone apart in couples almost as usual, and even those who had no enduring liaison at the moment had found a partner for the night.

It must have been that night. . . .

Colin Reynolds was two years younger than Helen, and their attachment, enduring over a few months of shiptime, was based less on mutual passion than a sort of boyish need in him, a sort of impersonal feminine solicitude in Helen. All her affairs had been like that, companionable, comfortable, but never passionate. Curiously enough, Helen was a woman capable of passion, of great depths of devotion; but no man had ever roused it and now no man ever would. Only Robin's birth had touched her deeply-pent emotions.

But that night, when Colin Reynolds was sleeping, Helen stayed restlessly awake, hearing the unquiet stirring of wind on the leaves. After a time she wandered down to the water's edge, staying a cautious distance from the shore—for the cliff crumbled dangerously—and stretched herself out to listen to the wind-voices. And after a time she fell asleep, and had The Dream, which was to return to her again and again.

Helen thought of herself as a scientist, without room for fantasies, and that was why she called it, fiercely, a dream; a dream born of some undiagnosed conflict in her. Even to herself Helen would not

recall it in full.

There had been a man, and to her it seemed that he was part of the green and windy world, and he had found her sleeping by the river. Even in her drowsy state, Helen had suspected that perhaps one of the other crew members, like herself sleepless and drawn to the shining water, had happened upon her there; such things were not impossible, manners and mores being what they were among starship crews.

But to her, half-dreaming, there had been some strangeness about him, which prevented her from seeing him too clearly even in the brilliant green moonlight. No dream and no man had ever seemed so living to her; and it was her fierce rationalization of the dream which kept her silent, months later, when she discovered (to her horror and secret despair) that she was with child. She had felt that she would lose the haze and secret delight of the dream, if she openly acknowledged that Colin had fathered her child.

But at first—in the cool green morning that followed—she had not been at all sure it was a dream. Seeing only sunlight and leaves, she had held back from speaking, not wanting ridicule; could she have asked each man of the *Starholm,* Was it you who came to me last night? Because if it was not, there are other men on this world, men who cannot be clearly seen even by moonlight—

Severely she reminded herself, Merrihew's men had pronounced the world uninhabited, and uninhabited it must be. Five years later, hugging her sleeping son close, Helen remembered the dream, examined the content of her fantasy, and once again, shivering, repeated, "I had a hallucination. It was only a dream. A dream, because I was alone. . ."

WHEN ROBIN was fourteen years old, Helen told him the story of his birth, and of the ship.

He was a tall, silent boy, strong and hardy but not talkative; he heard the story almost in silence, and looked at Helen for a long time in silence, afterward. He finally said in a whisper, "You could have died—you gave up a lot for me, Helen, didn't you?" He knelt and took her face in his hands. She smiled, and drew a little away from him.

"Why are you looking at me like that, Robin?"

The boy could not put instant words to his thoughts; emotions were not in his vocabulary. Helen had taught him everything she knew, but she had always concealed her feelings from her son. He asked at last, "Why didn't my father stay with you?"

"I don't suppose it entered his head," Helen said. "He was needed on the ship. Losing me was bad enough."

Robin said passionately, "I'd have stayed!"

The woman found herself laughing. "Well—you did stay, Robin."

He asked, "Am I like my father?"

Helen looked gravely at her son,

trying to see the half-forgotten features of young Reynolds in the boy's face. No, Robin did not look like Colin Reynolds, nor like Helen herself. She picked up his hand in hers; despite his robust health, Robin never tanned; his skin was pearly pale, so that in the green sunlight it blended into the forest almost invisibly. His hand lay in Helen's palm like a shadow. She said at last, "No, nothing like him. But under this sun, that's to be expected."

Robin said confidently, "I'm like the *other* people."

"The ones on the ship? They—"

"No," Robin interrupted, "you always said, when I was older you'd tell me about the other people. I mean the other people *here*. The ones in the woods. The ones you can't see."

Helen stared at the boy in blank disbelief. "What do you mean? There are no other people, just us." Then she recalled that every imaginative child invents playmates. *Alone,* she thought, *Robin's always alone, no other children, no wonder he's a little—strange.* She said, quietly, "You dreamed it, Robin."

The boy only stared at her, in bleak, blank alienation. "You mean," he said, "you can't *hear* them either?" He got up and walked out of the hut. Helen called, but he didn't turn back. She ran after him, catching at his arm, stopping him almost by force. She whispered, "Robin, Robin, tell me what you mean! There isn't anyone here. Once or twice I thought I had seen—something, by moonlight, only it was a dream. Please, Robin—please—"

"If it's only a dream, why are you frightened?" Robin asked, through a curious constriction in his throat. "If they've never hurt you—"

No, they had never hurt her. Even if, in her long-ago dream, one of them had come to her—*and the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair*—a scrap of memory from a vanished life on another world sang in Helen's thoughts. She looked up at the pale, impatient face of her son, and swallowed hard.

Her voice was husky when she spoke.

"Did I ever tell you about rationalization—when you want something to be true so much that you can make it sound right to yourself?"

"Couldn't that also happen to something you wanted *not* to be true?" Robin retorted with a mutinous curl of his mouth.

Helen would not let go his arm. She begged, "Robin— no, you'll only waste your life and break your heart looking for something that doesn't exist—"

The boy looked down into her shaken face, and suddenly a new emotion welled up in him and he dropped to his knees beside her and buried his face against her breast. He whispered, "Helen, I'll never leave you, I'll never do anything you don't want me to do, I don't want anyone but you—"

And for the first time in many years, Helen broke into wild and uncontrollable crying, without knowing why she wept.

Robin did not speak again of his quest in the forest. For many months he was quiet and subdued, staying near the clearing, hovering near Helen for days at a time, then disappearing into the forest at dusk. He heard the winds numbly, deaf to their promise and their call.

Helen too was quiet and withdrawn, feeling Robin's alienation through his submissive mood. She found herself speaking to him sharply for being always under foot; yet, on the rare days when he vanished into the forest and did not return until after sunset, she felt a restless unease that set her wandering the paths herself, not following him, but simply uneasy unless she knew he was within call.

Once, in the shadows just before sunset, she thought she saw a man moving through the trees, and for an instant, as he turned toward her, she saw that he was naked. She had seen him only for a second or two, and after he had slipped between the shadows again, common sense told her it was Robin. She was vaguely shocked and annoyed; she firmly intended to speak to him, perhaps to scold him for running about naked and slipping away like that; then, in a sort of remote embarrassment, she forebore to mention it. But after that, she kept out of the forest.

Robin had been vaguely aware of her surveillance and knew when it ceased. But he did not give up his own pointless rambles, although even to himself he no longer spoke of searching, or of any dreamlike inhabitants of the woods. At times it still seemed that some shadow concealed a half-seen form, and the distant murmur grew into a voice that mocked him; a white arm, the shadow of a face, until he lifted his head and stared straight at it.

One evening toward twilight he saw a sudden shimmer in the trees, and he stood, fixedly, as the stray glint resolved itself first into a white face with shadowy eyes, then into a translucent flicker of bare arms, and then into the form of a woman, arrested for an instant with her hand on the bole of a tree. In the shadowy spot, filled only with the last ray of a cloudy sunset, she was very clear; not cloudy or unreal, but so distinct that he could see even a small smudge or bramble-scratch on her shoulder, and a fallen leaf tangled in her colorless hair. Robin, paralyzed, watched her pause, and turn, and smile, and then she melted into the shadows.

He stood with his heart pounding for a second after she had gone; then whirled, bursting with the excitement of his discovery, and ran down the path toward home. Suddenly he stopped short, the world tilting and reeling, and fell on his face in a bed of dry leaves.

He was still ignorant of the nature of the emotion in him. He felt only intolerable misery and the conviction that he must never, never speak to Helen of what he had seen or felt.

HE LAY there, his burning face pressed into the leaves, unaware of the rising wind, the little flurry of blown leaves, the growing

darkness and distant thunder. At last an icy spatter of rain aroused him, and cold, numbed, he made his way slowly homeward. Over his head the boughs creaked woodenly, and Robin, under the driving whips of the rain, felt their tumult only echoed his own voiceless agony.

He was drenched by the time he pushed the door of the shack open, and stumbled blindly toward the fire, only hoping that Helen would be sleeping. But she started up from beside the hearth they had built together last summer.

"Robin?"

Deathly weary, the boy snapped, "Who *else* would it be?"

Helen didn't answer. She came to him, a small swift-moving figure in the firelight, and drew him into the warmth. She said, almost humbly, "I was afraid—the storm—Robin, you're all wet, come to the fire and dry out."

Robin yielded, his twitching nerves partly soothed by her voice. *How tiny Helen is,* he thought, *and I can remember that she used to carry me around on one arm. Now she hardly comes to my shoulder.* She brought him food and he ate wolfishly, listening to the steady pouring rain, uncomfortable under Helen's watching eyes. Before his own eyes there was the clear memory of the woman in the wood, and so vivid was Robin's imagination, heightened by loneliness and undiluted by any random impressions, that it seemed to him Helen must see her too. And when she came to stand beside him, the picture grew so keen in his thoughts that he actually pulled himself free of her.

The next day dawned gray and still, beaten with long needles of rain. They stayed indoors by the smoldering fire; Robin, half sick and feverish from his drenching, sprawled by the hearth too indolent to move, watching Helen's comings and goings about the room; not realizing why the sight of her slight, quick form against the gray light filled him with such pain and melancholy.

The storm lasted four days. Helen exhausted her household tasks and sat restlessly thumbing through the few books she knew by heart—they had allowed her to remove all her personal possessions, all the things she had chosen on a forgotten and faraway Earth for a ten-year star-cruise. For the first time in years, Helen was thinking again of the life, the civilization she had thrown away, for Robin who had been a pink scrap in the circle of her arm and now lay sullen on the hearth, not speaking, aimlessly whittling a stick with the knife (found discarded in a heap of rubbish from the *Starholm*) which was his dearest possession. Helen felt slow horror closing in on her. *What world, what heritage did I give him, in my madness? This world has driven us both insane. Robin and I are both a little mad, by Earth's standards. And when I die, and I will die first, what then?* At that moment Helen would have given her life to believe in his old dream of strange people in the wood.

She flung her book restlessly away, and Robin, as if waiting for

that signal, sat upright and said almost eagerly, "Helen—"

Grateful that he had broken the silence of days, she gave him an encouraging smile.

"I've been reading your books," he began, diffidently, "and I read about the sun you came from. It's different from this one. Suppose—suppose, if there were actually a kind of people here, and something in this light, or in your eyes, made them invisible to you?"

Helen said, "Have you been seeing them again?"

He flinched at her ironical tone, and she asked, somewhat more gently, "It's a theory, Robin, but it wouldn't explain, then, why *you* see them."

"Maybe I'm—more used to this light," he said gropingly. "—And anyway, you said you thought you'd seen them and thought it was only a dream."

Halfway between exasperation and a deep pity, Helen found herself arguing, "If these other people of yours really exist, why haven't they made themselves known in sixteen years?"

The eagerness with which he answered was almost frightening. "I think they only come out at night, they're what your book calls a primitive civilization—" He spoke the words he had read, but never heard, with an odd hesitation. "They're not really a civilization at all, I think, they're like—part of the woods."

"A forest people," Helen mused, impressed in spite of herself, "and nocturnal. It's always moonlight or dusky when you see them—"

"Then you *do* believe me—oh, Helen," Robin cried, and suddenly found himself pouring out the story of what he had seen, in incoherent words, concluding "—and by daylight I can hear them, but I can't see them—Helen, Helen, you have to believe it now, you'll have to let me try to find them and learn to talk to them—"

Helen listened with a sinking heart. She knew they should not discuss it now, when five days of enforced housebound proximity had set their nerves and tempers on edge, but some unknown tension hurled her sharp words at Robin. "You saw a woman, and I—a man. These things are only dreams. Do I have to explain more to you?"

Robin flung his knife sullenly aside. "You're so blind, so stubborn—"

"I think you are feverish again." Helen rose to go.

He said wrathfully, "You treat me like a child!"

"Because you act like one, with your fairy tales of women in the wind. . ."

Suddenly Robin's agony overflowed and he caught at her, holding her around the knees, clinging to her as he had not done since he was a small child, his words stumbling and rushing over one another.

"Helen, Helen darling, don't be angry with me," he begged, and caught her in a blind embrace that pulled her off her feet. She had never guessed how strong he was; but he seemed very like a little boy, and she hugged him quickly as he began to cover her face with childish kisses.

"Don't cry, Robin, my baby, it's all right," she murmured, kneeling close to him. Gradually the wildness of his passionate crying abated; she touched his forehead with her cheek to see if it were heated with fever, and he reached up and held her there. Helen let him lie against her shoulder, feeling that perhaps after the violence of his outburst he would fall asleep, and she was half asleep herself when a sudden shock of realization darted through her; quickly she tried to free herself from Robin's entangling arms.

"Robin, let me go."

He clung to her, not understanding. "Don't let go of me, Helen. Darling, stay here beside me," he begged, and pressed a kiss into her throat.

Helen, her blood icing over, realized that unless she freed herself very quickly now, she would be fighting against a strong, aroused young man not clearly aware of what he was doing. She took refuge in the sharp maternal note of ten years ago, almost vanished in the closer, more equal companionship of the time between:

"No, Robin. Stop it, at once, do you hear?"

Automatically he let her go, and she rolled quickly away, out of his reach, and got to her feet. Robin, too intelligent to be unaware of her anger and too naive to know its cause, suddenly dropped his head and wept, wholly unstrung. "Why are you angry?" he blurted out. "I was only loving you."

And at the phrase of the five-year-old child, Helen felt her throat would burst with its ache. She managed to choke out, "I'm not angry, Robin—we'll talk about this later, I promise—" and then, her own control vanishing, turned and fled precipitately into the pouring rain.

She plunged through the familiar woods for a long time, in a daze of unthinking misery. She did not even fully realize that she was sobbing and muttering aloud, "No, no, no, no—"

She must have wandered for several hours. The rain had stopped and the darkness was lifting before she began to grow calmer and to think more clearly.

She had been blind, not to foresee this day when Robin was a child; only if her child had been a daughter could it have been avoided. Or—she was shocked at the hysterical sound of her own laughter—if Colin had stayed and they had raised a family like Adam and Eve!

But what now? Robin was sixteen; she was not yet forty. Helen caught at vanishing memories of society; taboos so deeply rooted that for Helen they were instinctual and impregnable. Yet for Robin nothing existed except this little patch of forest and Helen herself—the only person in his world, more specifically at the moment the only woman in his world. *So much,* she thought bitterly, *for instinct. But have I the right to begin this all over again? Worse; have I the right to deny its existence and when I die, leave Robin alone?*

She had stumbled and paused for breath, realizing that she had wandered in circles and that she was

at a familiar point on the river bank which she had avoided for sixteen years. On the heels of this realization she became aware that for only the second time in memory, the winds were wholly stilled.

HER EYES, swollen with crying, ached as she tried to pierce the gloom of the mist, lilac-tinted with the approaching sunrise, which hung around the water. Through the dispersing mist she made out, dimly, the form of a man.

He was tall, and his pale skin shone with misty white colors. Helen sat frozen, her mouth open, and for the space of several seconds he looked down at her without moving. His eyes, dark splashes in the pale face, had an air of infinite sadness and compassion, and she thought his lips moved in speech, but she heard only a thin familiar rustle of wind.

Behind him, mere flickers, she seemed to make out the ghosts of other faces, tips of fingers of invisible hands, eyes, the outline of a woman's breast, the curve of a child's foot. For a minute, in Helen's weary numbed state, all her defenses went down and she thought: *Then I'm not mad and it wasn't a dream and Robin isn't Reynolds' son at all. His father was this—one of these—and they've been watching me and Robin, Robin has seen them, he doesn't know he's one of them, but they know. They know and I've kept Robin from them all these sixteen years.*

The man took two steps toward her, the translucent body shifting to a dozen colors before her blurred eyes. His face had a curious familiarity—*familiarity*—and in a sudden spasm of terror Helen thought, "I'm going mad, it's Robin, *it's Robin*—"

His hand was actually outstretched to touch her when her scream cut icy lashes through the forest, stirring wild echoes in the wind-voices, and she whirled and ran blindly toward the treacherous, crumbling bank. Behind her came steps, a voice, a cry—Robin, the strange dryad-man, she could not guess. The horror of incest, the son the father the lover suddenly melting into one, overwhelmed her reeling brain and she fled insanely to the brink. She felt a masculine hand actually gripping her shoulder, she might have been pulled back even then, but she twisted free blindly, shrieking, "No, Robin, no, no—" and flung herself down the steep bank, to slip and hurl downward and whirl around in the raging current to spinning oblivion and death . . .

Many years later, Merrihew, grown old in the Space Service, falsified a log entry to send his ship for a little while into the orbit of the tiny green planet he had named Robin's World. The old buildings had fallen into rotted timbers, and Merrihew quartered the little world for two months from pole to pole but found nothing. Nothing but shadows and whispers and the unending voices of the wind. Finally, he lifted his ship and went away.

END

In the cities, 350 billions swarmed like termites in a hill; but Jeremiah Winthrop still called himself a man. . . .

THE GOOD WORK

BY

THEODORE L. THOMAS

TALL AND rawboned was Jeremiah Winthrop. Narrow of shoulder and shallow of chest he was, but no matter. There was a dignity to the man that showed itself in every movement. Here was one who still called himself a man, one whose traditions sprang from the rocky New England soil that had nourished his forebears. The mold that produces such a man is not easily bent or broken, not even in a world of three hundred and fifty billion people, not even in a world where the rocky New England soil lies buried and forgotten beneath the foundations of monstrous buildings.

Jeremiah Winthrop rode the spiral escalator up, up to the two-part cubicle he called home on the one hundred and forty-eighth floor. He stood swaying slightly as the escalator wound its serpentine way upwards. Others rode with him, tight people, tense people, pushed

together, staring straight as they rode the spiral escalator up. And now and then at a turn or a bend a man would elbow his way out. He'd leave the upflowing river of people and step onto a landing as his floor came by. But the escalator was still crowded as it passed the one hundred and forty-eighth floor and Winthrop stepped off. He was not one of the lucky ones who lived high near the roof where it was at least possible to think about the air and the light and the sun.

Winthrop boarded a moving belt that carried him over to his own corridor. He walked down the corridor for ten minutes. It was easy walking, for there were far fewer people now. Finally he came to his own door. He inserted his thumb in the thumbhole, slid the door open and walked in. A tousle-headed youngster sat on the floor playing with a plastic box. The boy looked up as Winthrop entered.

"Daddy!" he shouted. He flung himself to his feet, dashed across the room and grabbed his father around the legs.

"Hello, Davy," said Winthrop, ruffling the curly brown hair. "How's the little man?"

"Fine, Daddy. And Mommy says we can go up on the roof in another month. Will you come with us? This time? You never go with us, Daddy. Will you come up with us in a month from now?"

Winthrop looked over the boy's head at his wife, Ann. The smile faded from his face. He said, "A month? I thought it was our turn again in a week. What happened?"

Ann shook her head and pressed the back of a hand against her forehead. "I don't know. They have had to re-schedule everybody. Another eighteen hundred babies born in the building this week. They all have to get a little sun. I don't know."

Winthrop pushed Davy gently to one side and held the boy to him as he walked over to Ann. He put a hand in the small of her back and held her against his chest. She rested her head against the upper part of his arm and leaned against him.

Ann lifted her head, stood on her toes and kissed Winthrop. She pulled away and led him over to a chair, Davy still hanging on to his leg. "You must be tired," she said. "Ten hours you've been out. Were you able to . . . Did you—"

"No," said Winthrop. "Nothing. Not so much as a soybean." He looked at his wife and smiled. "I guess the time has come for us to eat that potato. We've been saving it for a month."

Ann's eyes wrinkled as she looked down at him. "Oh. I—I gave it to the Brookses. They haven't had anything in weeks." The words began to pour out. "We have done so well, really, in the last few weeks that I felt sorry for them. We had those cabbage leaves and three potatoes and even that piece of fish four months ago. I couldn't help myself. I gave—I gave our potato to them. They were so sick of Standard Fare they were beginning to get depressed, really depressed. I—"

Winthrop reached up and put an arm around her hips and said,

"Don't think about it, darling." He was silent for a moment, and then he continued, "I think I'll go down and see if John Barlow has some work for me. Let's have a quick dinner of Standard Fare and then I'll go." He got up and walked over to the sink and began washing Davy's hands, talking, joshing, teasing a little as he did so.

Ann took three glasses from the tiny cabinet. She went to the synthetic milk faucet and filled the glasses and then put them on the table. She went to the bread slot and removed six slices of bread. One after the other she dropped the six slices of brown bread through the toaster. She picked up a knife and scooped big gobs of rich yellow synthetic butter out of the butter slot and spread it on the toast. She made a pile of the toast on a plate and then cut the pile in half. "All right," she called. And she put the toast on the table and sat down.

Winthrop helped Davy into a chair and then sat down himself. He bent his head and spoke a brief blessing. And they all ate. They ate Standard Fare, as countless billions of other people did that night, and every night, from birth to death, Standard Fare.

When the meal was done Winthrop got up and kissed Ann and Davy goodbye. He rode down the spiral escalator, down to the ground floor, and below. Great throngs of people rode with him, crowded in on each other. He rode down to the fifteenth sub-level and changed to a belt. He rode past the crowded TV theaters, the amusement halls. He stepped off and went down a narrow side alley where some of the shops were. Immediately the crowds fell off. A little way down the alley Winthrop turned into the door of a tiny store. It was empty except for John Barlow, the owner.

"Nice to see you," said Barlow, springing up and taking Winthrop's hand. "I was just thinking about you. In fact, I was going to come up and see you in the next day or two. Come in and sit down."

Barlow sat in the chair, Winthrop on the small counter. The two men filled the store completely. "That sounds good, John. Do you have some work for me?"

Barlow looked long at Winthrop, and slowly shook his head. "No, Jeremiah. No. I don't even have work for myself any more." He hesitated a moment and went on quietly, "I'm going out of business, Jeremiah. I can't make it work. I don't take in enough money to keep my stock up. People don't need money, what with free movies and clothes and food and everything else. No one buys food. They all live on Standard Fare and they don't seem to care any more. So now I'll have to join them, unless I can find other work."

"I'm very sorry, John. I feel I helped drive you out of business. I never gave you money for what I took."

Barlow shook his head. "No, Jeremiah. You always worked for everything. Other people are not as willing to work as you are; they all want something for nothing. Who else would be vaccinated and take the immunization shots so he could go all the way across the city for me the

way you do?"

They sat quietly. Winthrop said, "Where is it all going to end, John? What's going to happen to everybody?"

"I don't know. Some people work; there must be jobs somewhere. I suppose they get them through the Ministry of Government Employment, and you know what people say about that. Government workers won't even talk about it; everybody says they're ashamed of it. I don't know what's going to happen. Except—I'm through. I'm going to take my stock home with me tonight, and that ends it."

Winthrop looked at the box that contained all of Barlow's stock. The box measured about one foot on a side.

"Jeremiah, I want you to have something." Barlow reached down to the bottom of the box and brought out an object that he held toward Winthrop.

Winthrop looked at it and gasped. "An egg. A real hen's egg. I recognize it from the pictures." Winthrop looked up. "But I can't take it, John. I can't."

"I want you to have it, Jeremiah. I want you and Ann and Davy to have it. Now don't argue. I'll wrap it up and you take it right home."

Barlow turned and lifted a small box down from a niche. He lined the box with synthetic cotton and gently nestled the egg in the center. After covering the egg with another layer of cotton, he closed the box and wrapped it and tied it with a broad white ribbon under which he slipped a little card of cooking instructions. Then he handed the box to Winthrop. "Take it home, Jeremiah. I'll be up to see you sometime soon. Go on now." And he urged Winthrop off the counter and out the door.

Winthrop went, holding the box in both hands. As he worked his way through the crowds, he held the box to his stomach, turning his shoulders to meet the press of people. He was still holding it with both hands half an hour later when he entered his home.

ANN LOOKED up, surprised. "Jeremiah, I didn't expect you home so soon." Her eyes fixed on the package. "What is it? What have you got?"

Winthrop walked to the table, put the package on it, and carefully began to open it without saying a word. Ann and Davy stood close to him; Davy climbed on a chair to see better. When Winthrop lifted off the top layer of cotton, Ann's eyes widened and she clasped her hands together and stared, silently.

"What is it, Daddy?"

"It's an egg, son. A hen's egg."

"Is it something to eat?"

"Yes, son. It is." Winthrop looked at his wife and said, "Shall we eat it now?"

Ann nodded, quickly read the cooking instructions, and set about preparing scrambled egg. Winthrop got out the cooking pan, wiped off the dust, and set it down near her. She smiled at him and put a large chunk of butter in it and placed the pan on the heater. When the butter bubbled, she poured the beaten egg

into the pan; it hissed as it struck the hot butter. She began to stir the egg as it cooked. Winthrop picked Davy up so he could see into the pan as the egg thickened. In a moment it was done.

Ann lifted three small dishes from a cupboard, placed them on the table, and carefully scraped the egg onto the plates. Buttered toast and milk came next, then they sat down to eat. Winthrop said a grace.

They ate in silence.

Davy looked up after his egg was gone and said, "I don't like it very much. I like it some, but not very much."

Winthrop reached over and ruffled his hair, saying to Ann, "It would have been better if we'd had some salt, I guess. But it was good anyway. I've often wondered what an egg tasted like."

He looked down at the empty plates and stared at them. Then he said quickly, "Davy, it's your bedtime. You hop on in now."

Davy's face grew long, but then Winthrop looked at him, and he climbed off his chair and went over and pulled his father down and kissed him on the cheek. "Good night, Daddy."

"Good night, son."

Ann took Davy by the hand and led him into the bedroom. Winthrop listened to the chatter and then to the prayers. He sat and listened as he stared at the three egg-stained plates on the table. The plates pushed into his mind, occupied it, filled it, until there was nothing else. And at that moment the integrity of Jeremiah Winthrop broke.

He was still staring at the plates when Ann came out and sat down beside him. She too looked at her husband, looked, and looked again, closer. There were tears in his eyes.

She leaned toward him and put a hand on his shoulder. "What is it, Jeremiah?" she asked quietly.

He turned full toward her, started to speak, but could not. He pointed to the dirty plates and then cleared his throat. "Ann, that's the last of it. It's getting worse all the time. There's no work for a man. What are we going to do? Is Davy going to live the rest of his life satisfied with Standard Fare? Can we watch him grow up not knowing what it feels like to work? Ann . . ." He stopped and sat quietly for a moment. "I've got to go to the Ministry of Government Employment."

She said, "Jeremiah, are you sure? We've always been able to manage on our own. We've never needed help from the government."

"Ann—" He stood up and began pacing across the room. "How can we sit and watch this happen to our boy? We can't take him out in all those people very often. We can't take him to the roof. Ann, he's a good boy. We can't let him live like this."

"But how will you feel? You have to make your own way. You've always believed that."

Winthrop's stooped figure bent even more. He stopped pacing and stood with his hands hanging at his sides, his chin on his chest. "I know," he said quietly. "I know. Help me, Ann. What should we do?"

She flew across the room to him and they clung together. After a moment she said, "All right, Jeremiah. I knew this would come some day. We will go down tomorrow to the Ministry of Government Employment and see if they have any work for you. Maybe they have, and maybe it won't be so bad. Maybe it's good work after all. We'll see."

THE FAMILY was up early the next morning, up and eating Standard Fare. After breakfast they began to get ready to go out. Ann went over all the clothes, sponging spots off the slick fabric. Jeremiah Winthrop paced back and forth with slow measured steps, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent.

Ann took a little cord harness from the cabinet and slipped it over Davy's head. She pulled the cords taut and tied them around him. She passed a light piece of cord around her waist and tied the other end of it to Davy's harness. She tied a second piece of cord to the other side of the harness. Then she said to Winthrop, "Jeremiah, we're ready."

Winthrop stepped over to Davy's side. He passed the second piece of cord around his waist and tied it fast. "I'm ready," he said.

They went out the door and it was not bad at first. Riding down the spiral escalator it began to get crowded; people pressed shoulder to shoulder. Davy clutched a parent's hand in each of his own. When they arrived at the belts below ground-level, the press grew greater. Ann and Winthrop used their legs to make room for Davy to stand on the moving belt. The upper portions of their bodies pushed out against the packed mass of humanity. They held their arms bent at the elbows to form a bridge around Davy's head, stooping a little to do so. Silently they pushed back against the surge of people.

They changed belts by walking in a kind of lockstep and again formed a trembling bridge with their arms around Davy on the next belt. Twice more they changed belts and in two hours they arrived at the building next to their own. It was easier, going up the spiral escalator.

They came out into a huge room filled with people. Holding tight to Davy's leash, they worked their way through the crowds, seeking a registration desk. In half an hour they found one.

The line of people was only a few hundred yards long in front of that particular desk. Jeremiah and Ann joined the line at the end, smiling at each other. In four short hours they found themselves at the desk.

Winthrop gave his name and number to the man and explained why he wanted an interview with one of the ministers. The man swiftly filled out a set of papers, assigned Winthrop a line number and a chair number, and pointed the direction to take.

Jeremiah, Ann, and Davy slowly passed through the crowds in the room, this time seeking their line. They finally found it and Winthrop gave his papers to the man in charge. Again they were fortunate. The line to which Winthrop was as-

signed did not even reach out into the room; the end of it had progressed into the long corridor that led to the minister's office.

Winthrop settled into his moving chair while Ann and Davy bustled around him and made him comfortable. Then they said goodbye.

"Ann, be careful going home. Go very slowly. Don't be afraid to scream out if Davy begins to get crushed."

"Don't worry, dear. We'll be all right." Ann smiled at him, but her eyes were too bright.

Winthrop saw it and stood up from his chair. "I'll take you home and then come back."

"No." She gently pushed him back into the chair. "We'll lose another day, and Davy and I will be all right. Now you just stay here. Goodbye, dear." She leaned over and kissed him.

Winthrop said, "All right, but don't visit me, Ann. I'll be home as soon as this is over, and it's too hard on you to make the trip alone."

She smiled and nodded. Winthrop kissed Davy and ruffled his hair. Then Ann tied both ends of Davy's leash around her waist, and she and Davy walked off. Both of them turned to wave frequently until the crowd swallowed them up.

The days passed slowly for Winthrop. The corridor seemed to stretch on interminably as he slowly moved down it in his chair. Every few hundred yards there was the inevitable milk faucet and the bread and butter slots, and every few feet there was the inevitable TV screen alive with people talking, singing, laughing, shouting, or playing. Winthrop turned each one off as he came abreast of it, if his neighbors did not object. None of the people in the line were talkative, and that suited Winthrop. Mostly he sat thinking over his forthcoming interview. Two minutes to explain why he should be given work was not very long. But the Ministers of Government Employment were busy men.

Toward the end of the second week Winthrop had a surprise visit from Ann. She threw her arms around him and explained that Helen Barlow had come to see her and had sent Ann off to visit. And it was while Ann was there that Winthrop moved up to a position from which he could see the door of the minister's office. When Ann left, she went with the comforting knowledge that it would be only a few days more.

The time came when Winthrop was at the door. Then, suddenly, he was in the anteroom, and before he could fully realize it he was standing in a very small room before the minister.

Winthrop identified himself and said, "I have a boy of four, a fine boy, and a fine wife too. I want to work the way a man should to give them something besides Standard Fare. Here is what I have worked at in the last five years." And Winthrop listed the things he had done.

The minister listened. He had white hair and a lined face whose skin seemed to be pulled too tight. When Winthrop had finished, the minister looked steadily into his face for a moment; Winthrop could al-

most feel the probing of the level blue eyes. Then the minister turned to a device that loomed over him to one side and punched a complex series of buttons. There was a whirring noise behind the wall of the tiny room, and then a small packet of cards appeared at the slot in the bottom of the device. The minister picked them out and glanced at them, and an odd expression of sadness swept across his face. It was gone in an instant, and then he looked up and said, "Yes, Mr. Winthrop. We have a job for you, and the full six hours a day, too. You will be on the maintenance crew of your building. Your job is explained here—" he passed over a card—"and it consists of tightening the nuts on the expansion joints in the framework of the building. It is very important to do it right, so read the card carefully." Winthrop nodded eagerly.

The minister handed over another card and said, "Here is a description of the daily reports you must turn in." Another card. "Here is how you and your chief decide your working schedule, and you must adhere to it; it is very important. The chief of your tightening crew will go over it with you. Here is your requisition for the special wrench you will need. Here is your pay schedule; you can decide if you want to be paid in money or produce. And one very important thing." The minister leaned forward to emphasize his remarks. "You are not allowed to talk about your job with anyone, not even with your best friends. Is that clear?"

Winthrop nodded. "Yes, sir."

"The reason is that we do not want people fighting over jobs. Not many who come in here really want to work, but there are a few. We have to pick good men for this work; those buildings must be kept in good condition. Others less fortunate than you might not understand that you are just the man we need. So no talking about your work—no talk of any kind—on pain of dismissal." The minister sat back. "Well, I guess that is about all. Report for work in the morning. Good luck." And he held out his hand.

Winthrop shook it and said, "Thank you, sir. I'll work hard for you. I didn't know you needed men for this work or I would have been here sooner. I had always heard that . . . Well, thank you." And Winthrop turned to go. Out of the corner of his eye as he turned, he thought he saw again that ephemeral expression of sadness, but when he looked the minister full in the face it was gone. Winthrop went out the side door. The entire interview had taken one and three quarter minutes.

WINTHROP left early the next morning so as not to be late for work. As it turned out, he was unable to get off a belt at the proper landing—too many people in the way—and it took him fifteen minutes to retrace his steps. He arrived exactly on time.

The chief of the tightening crew was a big, bluff man with a red face. He took Winthrop in tow and showed him how they worked. The crew chief had a vast knowledge of

the crawl spaces in the interior of the building. He showed Winthrop the blueprints from which the tightening crew worked, and explained that by coördinating their work with all the other tightening crews they made one complete round of the building every eight years. By then it was time to do it again; the nuts worked loose from the constant expansion and contraction. It was quite a job keeping track of the area that the tightening crew covered; it was a large crew. But each member turned in daily reports, and there was a large clerical staff to keep the records straight. In fact, there were more men keeping records than there were doing the actual tightening work. The chief pointed out that Winthrop was to be one of the elite, one of those whose work justified the existence of the huge staff. The tone of the chief's voice made it clear that there was a kind of quiet pride among the men who did the actual work. The chief issued Winthrop his wrench and showed him where to start.

The day passed swiftly. The tightening of the nuts was not so bad, although Winthrop's arm grew sore after a while. The difficult part was gaining access to the nuts in the first place. Winthrop had to use all his agility to wriggle through confined places. Yet it was good to be working again, good to feel the sweat start from his brow from hard work instead of from the press of people.

In a week Winthrop was no longer dog-tired when he got home at night. There was much laughter in the Winthrop household, much reading and playing games and telling stories. They even watched the TV screen now and then; somehow it no longer seemed so fruitless. The monotony of Standard Fare was broken; the head of the house was working steadily. It was now possible to plan ahead for a variety of meals, and that made it easier to wait when there was nothing to eat but Standard Fare.

Winthrop developed skill and speed at locating and tightening the nuts. He soon covered in a day a larger area than any other man, and the chief told him that he was his best man. Winthrop came to share the pride and sense of responsibility that all the other tighteners felt. They were a select group, and they knew it; all the others looked up to them.

It was after dinner one night that Winthrop sat back, hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his shirt, and watched Ann and Davy finish the half-dozen peas. They looked at him and smiled, and his heart warmed. "You know," he said, "I think I'll visit John Barlow for a few minutes. I haven't seen him since he gave up his store. Do you mind, dear?"

Ann shook her head. "No, you run along. I'll play with Davy for a while and then put him to bed. Don't stay too long."

Barlow answered Winthrop's knock. "Well, Jeremiah. Come in, man, come in."

Winthrop walked in and the two men stood looking at each other. Winthrop was surprised at how well Barlow looked, and he said so.

Barlow laughed. "Yes, the last time we met I was pretty far down in the dumps, I guess. But I'm working, Jeremiah. I'm actually working. Important work, too!"

His enthusiasm was infectious and Winthrop found himself laughing. "I'm glad for you, John. And I know how you feel, because I'm working too."

Barlow stepped forward and wrung his hand. "That's fine, man, fine! Government, I guess, just like mine. It isn't so bad, is it? Not nearly as bad as we thought. Good steady important work makes a man feel like it's worth living."

Helen Barlow came out of the other room. "Why, Jeremiah. I didn't know you were here. How nice to see you."

"Yes, and he's working," said Barlow.

"Oh, I'm so happy for you, Jeremiah. Congratulations. And that reminds me, John." She turned to her husband. "You have to get ready to go to work. You know how long it takes to get there even though it's in the building."

"Right. I'll get ready. Jeremiah, I'm sorry that I have to go, but why don't you stay?"

"No, John. I just stopped in to say hello. You come up and see us real soon."

"I certainly will."

There was an exchange of goodbyes, and Winthrop left.

Barlow went into the other room and came out immediately with his wrench. He waved it playfully at his wife. "Got to go," he said. "The loosening crew won't wait." And he blew a kiss at his wife and went off to work. **END**

THE MAN WHO

THE CAR he'd stolen was a beautifully groomed thing: all polished lacquer and chrome, with almost brand-new dual tread white-wall tires on the nickeled wire wheels. But the transmission was bad, the brake drums scraped, and there was a short circuit in the wiring somewhere, so that he had to keep over sixty miles per hour or the generator would not charge at all. He would have stolen another one if he could, but he had got onto the turnpike before he realized just how unreliable this one was. If he changed cars at a restaurant, it would be reported and the police would stop him when he tried to leave the turnpike.

No, he was trapped with what he

BY ALGIS BUDRYS

He had been waiting all his life for the aliens to turn up—and now that they were here, he knew exactly what to do.

TASTED ASHES

had. Hunched over the wheel of his roaring cage, the yellowish headlights reflecting white from the lane markers, Redfern swept his eyes systematically over the instruments: ammeter, fuel gauge, oil pressure, water temperature, speedometer, odometer. He thought of himself as doing it systematically, every ten minutes, like a professionally trained driver. Actually, he was dividing his attention almost equally between the road and the odometer. A hundred and ten miles covered, seventy miles to go, ninety minutes before the ship was due to take off, with or without him, average speed required: 46.62, approx.; round off to allow for stopping the car at the exit toll booth, for covering two miles of back roads, for leaving the car and running an unknown distance across a weed-grown field to the ship's airlock—they would take off on schedule with him six inches from the slamming airlock door; they would not stay themselves a microsecond to accommodate him—say fifty miles per hour, average. Then allow continually around immense trailer trucks in the slow lane. His mind raced to keep up with the changing figures on the odometer. He wished he weren't feeling a slight miss in the engine whenever he eased up on the accelerator. He cursed the car's owner for his false-front prodigality with wax and whitewalls.

for speedometer error. Say fifty-five miles per hour, indicated, average. Allow for odometer error. Say sixty miles per hour, indicated, average. Allow for unforeseen delays. Sixty-five miles per hour.

Redfern's foot trembled on the accelerator pedal. His thigh ached from hours of unremitting pressure. His car flashed by signboards, wove

He looked at his watch again. Four in the morning. He turned the radio on, ignoring his fear that something else might happen to the car's wiring.

"—And that's the news," the announcer's professionally relaxed

voice said. "After a word about United Airlines, we'll hear, first, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana,* followed by—"

His watch was slow.

Five minutes? Fifteen minutes? How long did the news take?

He held the watch to his ear. It was an expensive one, wafer thin, beautifully crafted, left over from his younger days—he could barely hear it running. Was it running at all?

Redfern was a leathery man, his yellowish-white hair brushed back from angular temples, a scruffy Guards moustache over his nearly invisible lips. His suits were made for him by a London tailor, from measurements taken in 1925; they were gored and belted in the backs of the jackets. Outdoors, he wore a Burberry and carried a briefcase. People who saw him on the street in Washington always took him for someone with diplomatic connections. But since Redfern was always seen afoot, these connections perforce had to be minor. Was he an assistant attache of sorts, perhaps? At his age? Looking at Redfern, people would wonder about it.

People. But the man who'd sat easily on the edge of Redfern's lumpy bed in the wallpapered hotel room—that man, now . . .

That man had coal-black hair, broad, flat cheekbones above a sharply narrowing chin, oval, maroon-pupiled eyes and cyanotic lips. He smiled easily and agreeably across the room.

Redfern sat in the one chair, sipping at the water tumbler half-full of gin. The bottle his visitor had brought up was standing on the bureau. His visitor, who had given the name of Charlie Spence, was not drinking.

"You don't look like a Charlie," Redfern said abruptly over the tumbler's rim. "You look as cold as ice."

Spence laughed, his small mouth stretching as far as it could. "Maybe I'm made of it," he said. "But then, you're nothing but a lump of coal. Carbon." He brushed his fingertips together.

"But then," Redfern mocked sharply, "*I* don't pretend to be gregarious."

"Oh, I don't pretend—don't pretend at all. I *am* gregarious. I love the company of people. I've been moving about among them for several years, now."

"All right," Redfern said sharply, "we've already settled that. Let's let it be. I don't care where you come from—I don't really care what you're made of. It may surprise you, but I've thought for some time that if people were coming to this world from other places, they'd be bound to get in touch with me sooner or later."

"Why on Earth should we try to get in touch with you?" Spence asked, nonplused.

"Because if you people have been coming here for years, then you're not here openly. You've got purposes of your own. People with purposes of their own generally come to me."

Charlie Spence began to chuckle. "I like you," he laughed. "I really do. You're a rare type."

"Yes," said Redfern, "and now

let's get down to business." He gestured toward the bureau top. "Pour me some more of that." Alcohol affected him swiftly but not deeply. Once it had stripped him of the ordinary inhibitions, he could go on drinking for some time before his intellect lost its edge. Since he always took two aspirins and went straight to bed at that point, it was not a serious sort of weakness. But without his inhibitions he was a very unpleasant man.

"IT'S A SIMPLE business," Charlie Spence was saying a little later. "The ambassador will land at National Airport and be met by the usual sort of reception committee. Red carpet, band, dignitaries, and so forth. But the red carpet will be a little shabby, the band won't be first-rate, and the reception committee will not be quite as high-ranking as it might be. After all, the ambassador's country is definitely on the other side of the fence."

"Yes," Redfern drawled. "The protocol of prejudice."

"Oh, no, no, nothing deliberate," Spence said, with a hand raised. "Diplomats pride themselves on equal courtesy to all. But the employee in charge of caring for the carpets simply won't do his best. The band won't play with any great enthusiasm. And any of your officials who happen to be ill, with colds or similar afflictions, will honestly decide their health precludes the effort of attending. This is simply human nature, and any snub will be completely unintended."

"I heard you the first time. What's all this to do with me?"

"Well, now," Charlie Spence explained, "the ambassador's not from a particularly large nation in their bloc. It seems doubtful they'd bother to send along any of their own security police. The only guards present will likely be American Secret Service personnel, extending courtesy protection."

"Yes."

"So. In the first place, the ambassador is really a small fish. In the second place, no American, even a trained professional sworn to his duty, is apt to be quite as devoted to the ambassador's life as he would be to that of, say, any American congressman. Those two factors represent a potential assassin's margin of safety."

"And what're you meddling in our politics for?" Redfern growled.

"*Your* politics? Redfern, my dear fellow, it may or may not be your planet, but it's most assuredly our solar system."

The neck of the bottle tinked against the lip of Redfern's glass. "And I'm your assassin?"

"You are."

"What makes you think I'll do it?" Redfern cocked his head and looked narrowly at Spence.

"A compulsive need to meddle in human history."

"Oh?"

Charlie Spence laughed. "You were cashiered from your country's foreign service in nineteen hundred and thirty-two. But you've never stopped mixing into international situations. Gun running, courier work, a little export-import, a little

field work for foreign development corporations . . . and, now and then, a few more serious escapades. Don't tell me you don't enjoy it, Redfern. It's a very hard life, all told. No one would stay in it as long as you have if it didn't satisfy his need for power."

Redfern pinched his lips together even more tightly, in the fleeting reflex with which he always acknowledged the truth. "I wasn't cashiered," he said. "I resigned without prejudice."

"Oh, yes; yes, you did. Being unpleasant to one's superiors doesn't disgrace a man—it merely makes him unemployable. Except for special purposes that don't require a pukka sahib. And here I am, as you said, with a special purpose. Ten thousand dollars, on completion, Redfern, and the satisfaction of having started World War III."

Redfern's eyes glittered. "All over one little ambassador?" he asked carefully.

"Over one little ambassador. In life, he's not considered worth the trouble of protecting him. And no one but a rather stout and liverish woman in the Balkans will mourn him in death. But when he dies, his side will suddenly discover a great and genuine moral indignation. Why? Because they will be truly shocked at such a thing happening in America."

"World War III," Redfern said ruminatively.

"Exactly. You'll shake the ambassador's hand. An hour later, when he's already safe inside his embassy refreshing himself after his trip, he'll fall into a sudden coma. The embassy will close its doors, issue a misleading statement, and call its doctor."

"Yes."

"Very well. The embassy staff has taken routine steps, and waits for the ambassador to recover. But, just to allow for all eventualities, the unofficial courier service is already transmitting a notification to the government at home. The doctor examines the patient and discovers an inflamed puncture on his right hand. Another message goes home. The ambassador dies, and tests indicate poison. Obviously, it was hoped the puncture would go unnoticed and the cause of death, which resembles cerebral occlusion, would be mistaken. But the tiny needle must not have been quite sterilized, by accident, and the clever doctor has penetrated the scheme—and another message goes home, before the American State Department even suspects anything serious."

"Hmm. I'll simply shake his hand?"

Charlie Spence reached into his pocket. "Wearing this." He held out a crumpled something, the size of a handkerchief. Redfern took it and unfolded it. "A mask," Spence said. "Drawn over your head, it will mold new features for you. It'll be devilish uncomfortable, but you won't have to wear it long."

"It'll make me look like someone entitled to be on the field?"

Spence grinned the grin of a Renaissance Florentine. "Better than that. It will give you the composite features of six people entitled to be on the field. You will look like

none of them, but you will look superficially familiar to anyone who knows any of them. The subsequent questioning of witnesses will yield amusing results, I think."

"Very clever. Good technique. Confuse and obscure. But then, you've practiced it a long time." Redfern pushed himself abruptly out of the chair and went into the adjoining bathroom, keeping the door open. "Excuse me," he said perfunctorily.

"Lord, you're a type!" Charlie Spence said. "Will you do it?"

"What?" Redfern said from the bathroom.

"Will you do it?" Spence repeated, raising his voice.

Redfern came out, picking up the gin bottle, and sat back down in the chair. He tipped the bottle over the glass. "Maybe."

"I've told you too much for you to back out now," Spence said with a frown.

"Rubbish!" Redfern spat. "Don't try to bully me. You don't care what any of the natives tell each other about you. There are dozens of people living off their tales about you. It's to your advantage to hire native helpers wherever you can—if they're caught, who cares what wild tales they tell? You'd be insane to risk losing one of your own people." He looked sharply into Charlie Spence's eyes. "I don't suppose you fancy the thought of a dissecting table."

Charlie Spence licked his lips with a flicker of his tongue. "Don't be too sure of yourself," he said after a moment, in a more careful tone of voice.

Redfern snorted. "If I acted only on what I was sure of, I'd still be an embassy clerk."

"And you wouldn't like that, I suppose?" Charlie Spence, recovered, was looking around the room. "Sometimes? At night, when you can't sleep?"

"I want an out," Redfern said brusquely. "I won't do it without accident insurance."

"Oh?" Charlie Spence's eyebrows quivered.

"If I'm caught at the field, I'm caught and that's it. I'll protect you."

"Professionalism. I like that. Go on—what if you get away from the field?"

"If I get away, but there's trouble, I want a rendezvous with one of your ships."

"Oh, ho!" Charlie Spence said. "You do, do you?"

"I'll cover my tracks, if you think it's important, but I want a rendezvous. I want to be off this planet if there's trouble. Change that—I want to be off it in any case, and if there's no trouble, I can always be brought back."

"Oh, ho!" Charlie Spence repeated with a grin. "Yes, I'd think you *would* want to watch the next war from some safe place." It was easy to see he'd been expecting Redfern to lead up to this all along.

"Have it your way," Redfern said ungraciously.

Charlie Spence was laughing silently, his eyes a-slit. "All right, Redfern," he said indulgently. He reached into his card case, took out a photograph of a dumpy blonde woman and a string-haired man

on the porch of a middle western farmhouse, and carefully split it with his thumbnails. Out of the center, he took a bit of tissue paper, and stuck the front and back of the photograph together again. Replacing the card case in his pocket, he handed the slip of paper to Redfern.

"Dip it in your drink," he said.

He watched while Redfern complied, but kept his eyes away from the short handwritten directions the alcohol brought up. "Don't repeat the location aloud. I don't know it, and don't want to. Memorize it and destroy it. And I tell you now, Redfern, if the ambassador doesn't die, there'll be no ship." He smiled. "For that matter, you have no guarantee there'll be any ship at all."

Redfern growled. "I know."

"Lord, what meager hopes you live on, Redfern!"

"You're through here now, aren't you?" Redfern said.

"Yes . . ." Charlie Spence said with pursed lips.

"Then get out." He took the palm hypodermic Charlie Spence handed him in its green pasteboard box, and closed the hotel room door behind his visitor.

THIRTY-FIVE miles to go. His watch now read 4:30. It hadn't stopped, but was merely slow. If he'd thought to have it cleaned by a jeweler, last year or even the year before that, it would be accurate now. As it was, he had less than an hour, and he would be off the turnpike fairly soon, onto roads that were paved but had been laid out in the days of horse-drawn wagons.

He tried another station on the radio, but that was playing popular music. A third was conducting some sort of discussion program about water fluoridation. And that was all. The rest of the dial yielded only hisses or garbled snatches from Minneapolis or Cincinnati. His ammeter showed a steady discharge as long as the radio was on, no matter how fast he drove. He turned it off and steered the car, his face like a graven image. He was seething with anger, but none of it showed. As an adolescent, he had made the mistake of equating self-possession with maturity, and had studiously practiced the mannerism, with the inevitable result that he had only learned to hide his feelings from himself. He was the prisoner of his practice now, to the extent that he often had to search deep to find what emotion might be driving him at any particular time. Often he found it only in retrospect, when it was too late.

That lunch with Dick Farleagh this afternoon . . .

It had been difficult even to reach him; a call to the embassy—"*Who* shall I tell Mr. Farleagh is calling? Mr. Redfern?" and then the barely muffled aside, a whispered "Oh, dear." Then the pause, and finally, with a sigh: "Mr. Farleagh will speak to you now, Mr. Redfern," as though the secretary thought a bad mistake was being made.

"Dickie," Redfern said heavily.

"What is it, Ralph?" Farleagh's voice was too neutral. Obviously, he had taken the call only out of curiosity, because he had not heard

directly from Redfern in nearly fifteen years. But he must already be regretting it—probably he didn't like being called Dickie, now that his junior clerk days were well behind him. Redfern ought to have thought of that, but he was in a hurry, and hurry, like liquor, always took away his social graces.

"I have to speak to you."

"Yes?"

Redfern waited. Only after a moment did he understand that Farleagh had no intention of meeting him in person.

"I can't do it over the telephone."

"I see." Now the voice was crisp, as Farleagh decided he could meet the situation with routine procedure. "I'll ask my secretary to make an appointment. She'll call you. Can you leave a number?"

"No, no, no!" Redfern was shouting into the telephone. "I won't be fobbed off like that!" His words and actions were registering on his consciousness in only the haziest way. He had no idea he was shouting. "This is too important for your blasted conventionalities! I won't put up with it! I have to see you." His voice was wheedling, now, though he did not realize that, either. "Today. No later than lunch."

Farleagh said with quiet shock, "There's no need to rave at me. Now, take hold of yourself, Ralph, and perhaps we can talk this out sensibly."

"Will you come or won't you?" Redfern demanded. "I'll be at the Grosvenor bar in an hour. I'm warning you you'll regret it if you don't come."

There was a long pause, during which there was a sudden buzz in the phone, and the sound of Redfern's coin being collected. In a moment, the operator would be asking for another dime.

"Are you there?" Farleagh asked with maddening detachment. "See here, Redfern—" now the tenor of his thinking was unmistakeable in his voice, even before he continued —"if it's a matter of a few dollars or so, I can manage it, I suppose. I'll mail you a check. You needn't bother to return it."

"Deposit ten cents for the next three minutes, please," the operator said at that moment.

"I don't want your blasted money!" Redfern cried. "I have to see you. Will you be there?"

"I—" Farleagh had begun when the operator cut them off.

Redfern stared in bafflement at the telephone. Then he thrust it back on its cradle and walked briskly out of the booth.

He waited in the Grosvenor bar for an hour and a half, rationing his drinks out of a sense that he ought to keep his head. He was not a stupid man. He knew that he always got into quarrels whenever he'd been drinking.

He rationed his drinks, but after the first one he did so out of a spiteful feeling that he ought to, to please that stuffed shirt Farleagh. He already knew that if Farleagh appeared at all, their meeting would not do the slightest good. Hunched over his drink, glowering at the door, he now only wanted to be able to say, afterwards, that he

had made the utmost effort to do the right thing.

Farleagh came, at last, looking a great deal beefier than he had when he and Redfern were in public school together. His handshake was perfunctory—his maddeningly level gray eyes catalogued the changes in Redfern's face with obvious disapproval—and he practically shepherded Redfern to the farthest and darkest table. Obviously, he did not relish being seen in a public place with a man of Redfern's character. Redfern drawled: "You've gone to fat."

Farleagh's eyes remained steady. "And you to lean. What is it you want, Redfern?"

"If it isn't money?" Redfern's mouth curled. He turned and signaled to a waiter. "What will you have, Dickie?"

"None for me, thank you," Farleagh said in an impassive drone. "I'm pressed for time."

"Are you? You've no idea, do you, that I might be on a close schedule myself." Redfern glanced at his watch. The ambassador's plane was due at National Airport in two hours, and there was a great deal still to be done. "You've kept me waiting." He waved the waiter away in sudden irritation, without ordering. "Now, you listen to me," he told Farleagh. "I'm going to be at a definite place and time tonight. Here." He flicked the balled bit of tissue paper across the table into Farleagh's lap.

Farleagh picked it out and transferred it to a side pocket. He would have been a very bad diplomat if he had ignored it. But it was plain he was merely providing for an extremely remote possibility. "Redfern," he said, "if you're attempting to involve my government in some scheme of yours, that will be the end. You'll have gone too far."

"*Our* government, Dickie," Redfern almost snarled. "I still carry my passport."

"Precisely," Farleagh said. "I'm sure the American authorities would deport you, at our request. If you stand trial at home, you'll not get off easily."

"There's nothing in my past record that breaks the law at home."

"There's a great deal about you that breaks laws more popular than those in books."

"Damn you, Farleagh," Redfern said in a voice he did not know was high and almost tearful, "you'd better be there tonight."

"Why?"

"Because if you aren't, and I do get involved in something, it'll be found out soon enough that you could have been there. I warn you now, Farleagh, if I go down, it won't be easily. Perhaps it won't matter to *you* if *your* career's smashed. I tell you now, there's a great deal more involved in this than your career."

Farleagh was still not taking his eyes away from Redfern's face, nor moderating the set of his mouth. He gave the appearance, sitting there in his expensive suit, with his graying black hair combed down sleekly, of enormous patience nearly at an end.

"Very well then!" Redfern exclaimed. "I don't care if you believe

me or not." He thrust his chair back. "But if someone gets ill who shouldn't, today, you'd better believe me!" He stalked away, his Burberry flapping from his arm, his briefcase banging into the backs of chairs, his face an unhealthy red.

HE DROVE vengefully, in a rage that included the car and the radio, his watch, Farleagh, Charlie Spence and the world.

Five o'clock, by his watch. He turned into the exit ramp with a squealing from the tires, and one part of his mind was hoping there would be a blowout, just to prove something to the car's owner. He touched the brakes almost reluctantly, and at the same time cursed their criminal softness. He fumbled on the seat beside him for the toll ticket, and searched in his nearly empty wallet. He had had to spend a good deal of money today—more than he'd expected, for the drug and the explosive. It had never been his intention to steal a car, but rental had been out of the question. He knew, and damned the fact, that another man might have gotten better prices with his suppliers. But what sort of logic was there in making up to criminals; slapping their backs and buying them drinks, talking to them on an equal basis, when he could not even see the need to do that sort of thing in his dealings with respectable people?

He slapped the ticket and his two remaining dollar bills into the toll attendant's palm, and accelerated again without bothering even to look toward the man. He had seen no sign of drawn-up police cars anywhere around the toll plaza. That was the important thing, the only important thing at the moment.

Now that he was off the turnpike, he forgot he had been so afraid of being stopped for automobile theft. It had been another in a succession of thin-edged risks which could be shown to extend back to the beginning of his independent life. He forgot it as he had forgotten his fears concerning all the others—as he had forgotten that he had been afraid something would go wrong at the airport this afternoon, or that he would be caught as he hung about in Washington for hours afterward, until he was sure the embassy was acting as if something were wrong behind its doors.

As he drove now, forcing his car around the twisting mountain corners, he had other things to be afraid of.

Farleagh might not be there—might have been stubborn, or unaccountably stupid, or simply too slow, in spite of the margin Redfern had allowed him. He looked at his watch again as he turned off onto a dirt track leading almost straight up the hill. Five-twenty by his watch. He had perhaps five minutes.

He took one deep breath—one, and no more, just as he had done at the airport gate this afternoon, and as he had done on other occasions in his life—and drove the car into a tangle of shrubbery just past a mortared-stone culvert that was

his position marker. He shut off the ignition and sat as if stupefied by the engine's silence. Almost instantly, the headlights were no more than a sickly orange glow upon the leaves pressed against the car's grille. He shut them off, picked up his briefcase, and abandoned the car. Burberry flapping around his thighs, he trotted across the road and plunged down a slight decline into a stand of tamaracks. It was dark except for the remaining light of a low half-moon seeping through the overcast.

He moved with practiced efficiency through the trees, keeping his direction by paralleling the brook that had trickled through the culvert, until he emerged without warning into an open and long-neglected field, choked with proliferating brush, entirely surrounded by evergreens, with the spaceship, tall as an oil refinery's cracking tower, standing in its center.

The airlock door in the side of it was open. Redfern began to force his way through the brush, toward the extended ladder which connected the airlock with the ground. There was a single light in the lock chamber. No other lights were visible—the ship was a complex silhouette of struts and vanes, given the reality of depth only by that open door, and what that door might lead to, Redfern could not really guess.

As he struggled up to the ladder, he was arming the satchel charge in his briefcase.

There was still no sign of life from inside the ship. But as he climbed the ladder, hoisting himself awkwardly with his one free hand, the ladder began to retract with the sound of metal sliding into metal, and other mechanical sounds resonated out of the hull, like generators coming up to speed, and relays in a sequence of switching operations. He looked up and saw the airlock door quiver and begin to turn on its massive hinges.

With a strained motion of his arm, he threw the charge overarm into the airlock, and let go the ladder. He heard the briefcase thump to the deck in the lock chamber, while he himself was falling ten or twelve feet back to the ground. When the explosion came, he was sprawled on the ground, rearing up on his out-thrust arms, and he stared in fascination at the flame-shot billow of orange smoke gouting through the still half-open lock.

He rolled, off to one side, as the outer door rebounded from the hull. He was afraid it might fall on him, but then he saw it was still hanging, like a broken gate.

The starting-noises inside the ship came to a complete stop. He had done what he had hoped to do —breached the hull, and activated the safety cut-offs in the controls. The ship was caught, earthbound, possibly not for very long, but perhaps for long enough.

The brush crackled and plucked at his passage. He could not bring himself to look away from the ship, and he blundered through the undergrowth with his arms behind him, feeling his way. The light in the airlock chamber was off now, but something was still burning in there, with a dull smoldering red

flicker.

A hand placed itself flat between his shoulderblades. "All right, easy now, sir," a voice said.

He turned convulsively, his face contorted as if by pain, and made out a tall, huskily built young man in a narrow-brimmed hat, who was holding a short-barreled revolver in his other hand. The brush was parting all around him—there were many men here—and suddenly a portable floodlight shot up a beam to strike the airlock.

"We were just about ready to send a man aboard when you crippled them, sir," the young man said with his trained politeness.

"Is Farleagh here?" Redfern demanded.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Farleagh's back among the trees, with the chief."

A man had stepped up to the base of the ship, where the ladder had rested. Like Redfern's young man, he wore a civilian suit as if it had been made by a uniform manufacturer. "Aboard the ship!" he shouted up through cupped hands. "Can you hear me? Do you speak English? This is the Secret Service."

There was a grating sound up in the lock chamber, as someone forced open the balky inner door. Then a man stumbled up to the edge and looked down, his white coveralls smudged and a strained look on his face. He squinted at the Secret Service man.

"Jesus Christ, yes, I speak English," he said in outrage. "Who threw that bomb? This is a goddamn Air Force project, and there's gonna be all kinds of hell."

"Oh, no, you don't!" Redfern shouted, mortally afraid things could still go wrong. "It won't wash—not with me to testify against you."

The Secret Service man at the base of the ship turned his head in Redfern's direction long enough to show his exasperation. Then he pointed his pistol up at the man in the lock. "Jump down, you."

There was the sound of someone heavy coming toward them through the brush. After a moment, Farleagh said: "There you are."

"Hullo, Dickie." Redfern grinned at Farleagh in the spottily reflected light. "Now you know."

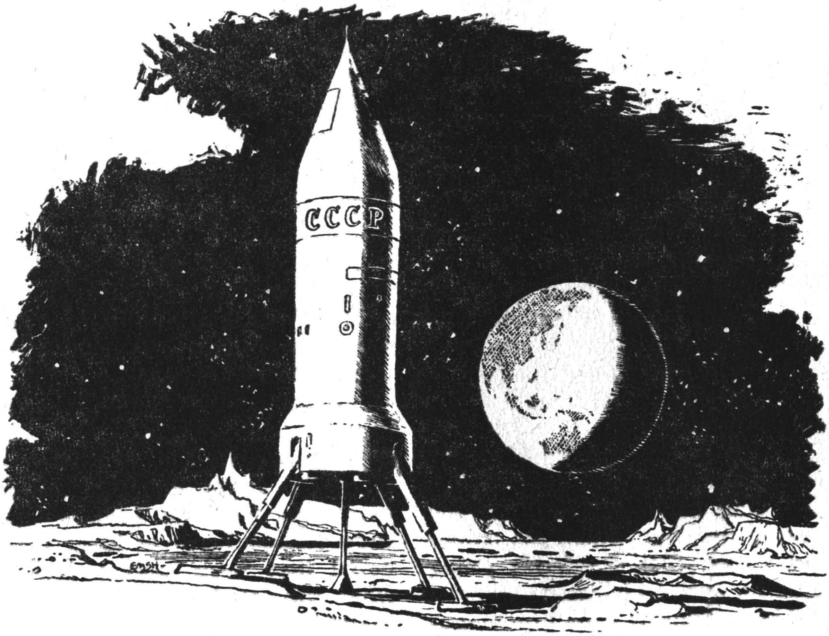
"Know what?" Farleagh asked heavily.

Redfern shifted his feet nervously. "Why I got myself cashiered years ago. You see I knew they were coming here—at least, I believed they were—and I decided what sort of human being they would be most likely to contact."

Rage crossed Farleagh's face at last, and shocked Redfern. "Stop it, Redfern," he said savagely. "For once in your life, admit you're the sort of man you are."

After that, no one seemed to look at him. An improvised ladder was brought up, and Secret Service men went into the ship and came down again escorting sullen, blue-lipped men. The clearing became full of activity as the prisoners were handcuffed together, machines and records brought down out of the ship; and Redfern watched it all, just as he had been watching all his life, from the outside. **END**

Love and Moondogs



BY RICHARD McKENNA

"The true dog, madame, was originally the golden jackal, Canis aureus . . . *He must love and be loved, or he dies."*

THE HEADLINE on the newspapers stacked in front of the drugstore read "RUSS DOG REACHES MOON ALIVE." A man in a leather jacket stopped to scan it.

Across the street, frost lay crisp on the courthouse lawn, and the white and tan spotted hound put up his forepaws on the kitchen stool as if to warm them. The four women were too busy hauling down

the flag to notice.

Martha Stonery in the persian lamb coat paid out the halyard. Monica Flint in the reddish muskrat and Paula Hart in the brown fox caught the flag and folded it, careful not to let it touch the wet cement. A postman and the man in the leather jacket stopped on the sidewalk to watch.

Martha, plump face grim under pinchnose spectacles, fastened one halyard snap to a metal ring taped and wired to the dog's right hind leg.

"Hoist away, girls."

Monica, Paula and Abigail Silax in nutria hauled in unison while Martha held the flag. The hound scrabbled with his forepaws and barked frantically. As he went struggle-twisting upward he began to howl in a bell-like voice. The women grunted with effort. People were coming across the lawn and pale faces moved behind the courthouse windows.

"Two block," Martha said. "Vast hauling and belay."

She pulled the kitchen stool nearer the flagpole and climbed on it to face the small crowd across the shelf of her bosom. Cars were stopping, people streaming in from all sides. Martha patted her piled gray hair and made her thin lips into a parrot beak.

"Fellow Americans!" she cried above the howling. "Our leaders are cowards and it is time for the people to act before the Russians come and murder us all in our beds! We, the United Dames of the Dog, hereby protest the Russian crime of putting a trusting, loving dog on the moon to starve and freeze and smother and die of loneliness! This dog above our heads cries out to the world against the Russian breach of faith between dog and man. He will stay there until the Russians bring their dog home safely or make amends for their crime!"

"Like hell!" said the man in the leather jacket, moving in.

"Martha!" Abigail shrieked. "He's taking it down!"

Monica pulled at his wrists. Paula slapped and scratched at his face. "You brute! You coward!" they shrilled.

Martha jumped off the stool and kicked him. He backed away, bent and holding himself.

"Look, ladies," he gasped, "for God's sake—"

"Here now, here now, this is county property," said a fat man in shirtsleeves with pink sleeve garters, pushing through the crowd. "What's all this? Take that dog down, somebody!"

"Never!" Martha snapped. She put her back against the halyard cleat, unfolded the flag and draped it around herself. A loose strand of gray hair fell across her face.

"If you're so big and brave, go bring down the Russian dog," she told the fat man coldly.

"Now *listen,* lady," the fat man said. The *Clarion* press photographer was sprinting across the lawn.

GEORGE STONERY was tall, thin, stooped and anxious in a gray business suit.

"I came as soon as I could," he told Sheriff Breen across the scarred, paper-littered wooden desk. "I was away checking one of our warehouses."

"You can make bail for her in two minutes, right across the hall," the sheriff said, scratching his jowl. "She wouldn't make it for herself, said we had to lock her in our sputnik."

"Where is she now?"

"In the sputnik."

The desk phone rang and the sheriff growled into it, "Hell you say. State forty-three just past Roy Farm? Right. I s'pose you already heard what we had on the lawn here this morning?"

The phone gave forth an excited gobbling. The sheriff's red eyebrows rose in disbelief and his heavy jaw dropped in dismay. He put down the phone.

"That was city," he told Stonery. "Complaint about a dog hanging by one leg from a tree just outside city limits. But it's going on all over town too—dogs hanging on trees, out of windows, off clotheslines—every squad car is out. Your old lady sure started something!"

"What did she *do?*" Stonery asked in anguish.

The sheriff told him. "Kicked a big fat deputy where it hurts, too. Maybe we ought to hold her after all. She says she's president of the United Dogs of something."

"United Dames of the Dog," the thin man corrected. "They hold meetings and things. She started it when the Russians put up their second sputnik."

"Well, I hope none of them dames lives out in the county," the sheriff said, rising. "You fix up bail, Mr. Stonery. I got to send out a deputy."

Walking past the flagpole with her husband, Martha Stonery wore an exalted look.

"All over America dogs will cry out in protest against the Russian crime," she said. "I have kindled a flame, George, that will sweep away the Kremlin. I, a weak woman. . . ."

She insisted on driving herself home in her new station wagon.

Sirening police cars passed Stonery three times as he drove home in the evening. Outside the tan stucco ranch-style house on Euclid Avenue, cars blocked the driveway and a crowd milled on the lawn. Stonery parked under the oak tree at the curb and got out.

Martha stood in the living room by the picture window and harangued the crowd through a screened side panel. Centered in the window her spaniel Fiffalo writhed, hanging by a hind leg from the massive gilt floor lamp and yipping piteously. Martha had on her suit of gray Harris tweed and her diamond brooch.

". . . moral pressure the Russians simply *cannot* resist," Stonery heard her shouting as he joined the crowd. "The men talk, but the United Dames of the Dog are not afraid to act. Putting a dear little dog on the moon to die of heartbreak!"

Several young men near the window scribbled on white pads.

"How many members do you

have, Mrs. Stonery?" one asked.

"The U.D.D. is bigger than you think, young man. Bigger than the Russians think, for all their spies and traitors!"

Stonery sidled in and tried the front door.

"She locked it," one of the reporters told him. "The cops went back for a warrant. Say! You're Stonery!"

"Yes," the thin man said, flushing. A press camera flashed and he put up his hands too late to shield his face.

"Give us a statement, Mr. Stonery, before the cops come back," the reporters clamored.

Stonery backed off, waving his hands. "Please, please," he said.

"She cracked?" a reporter asked. "When did you first notice?"

"Please," Stonery said. "Yes, she's upset. Her oldest son went into the state penitentiary in California last week. She's very upset about it."

"He kill somebody?" the same reporter asked.

"No, oh no . . . just armed robbery . . . please don't print that, boys."

"Here come the cops back!" someone shouted.

Two policemen crossed the lawn, one waving a paper. "Here is our warrant of forcible entry, Mrs. Stonery," he called out. He began reading it aloud.

"The U.D.D. will not shrink from any extremes of police brutality," Martha cried sharply. Fiffalo struggled and yelped louder.

The second policeman smashed the lock with a ten-pound sledge. The reporters swept Stonery into the house with them. One policeman untied Fiffalo and held him in his arms. He strained his head back and away from the spaniel's whimpering kisses. Martha glared selflessly while flash bulbs popped.

Stonery pulled gently at the other policeman's sleeve.

"May I come along, officer?" he asked. "I'm her husband. I'll have to arrange bail."

"Not taking her," the policeman said. "No room left in the pokey. Since two o'clock we been arresting the dogs."

THE BELLBOY put down the silver bucket of ice cubes, pocketed the quarter and went out. The skinny secretary put a bottle of whisky beside it and turned to that fat adjutant sprawled shoeless on the bed.

"Looks like Governor Bob'll be a while yet, Sam," the secretary said. "Shall we drink without him?"

"Hell yes, I need one, Dave," the adjutant said in his frog voice, wiggling his toes. "Bob must be having himself a time with that Stonery dame." He chuckled and slapped his belly.

The secretary tore wrappers off two tumblers and clinked ice into them. His rabbit face with its spectacles framed in clear plastic expressed a rabbity concern.

"It ain't for laughs, Sam," he said. "It's like the dancing mania of the Middle Ages, ever hear of it?"

"No. D'they string up dogs by a

hind leg too?"

"No, only danced. But it was catching, like this is. My God, Sam, it's all over the state now, U.D.D. women running in packs at night, singing, hanging up every dog they can catch. Sam, it *scares* me."

He splashed whisky into the two glasses. The adjutant belched, sat up in a creaking of bed springs, and scratched his heavy jaw.

"You're thinking they might start hanging up us poor sons of bitches, ain't you?" he asked. "Hell, call out the Guard. Clamp on a curfew." He reached for a glass.

"Yes, and the Russians'll fake pictures of your boys sticking old women with bayonets," the secretary said. "Governor Bob couldn't get reelected as dogcatcher, even."

The adjutant drained his glass, lipping back the ice, and whistled his breath out through pouting lips.

"Good! Needed that," he grunted. "Dave, Bob's got that Stonery dame by the short hairs, he'll swing her into line. Just that about her boy in the state pen out in California is enough. Brown would do Bob a favor and spring him. Or the papers here would splash it. Either way."

"I know, I know," the secretary said, sipping at his drink. "We'll see, when Bob gets here. Meanwhile, as of yesterday we had thirty-three thousand seven hundred twenty-six dogs in protective custody and God knows how many more under house arrest. Sixteen thousand bucks a day it's costing us—"

He broke off as a knock sounded on the door. He hastily tore the wrapper off another glass and splashed it full of ice and bourbon. The adjutant padded to the door and opened it. The governor, a stout, florid man in a gray sports coat, came in and sat stiffly on the edge of the bed. The secretary handed him the drink and he gulped half of it before speaking.

"No smoke, boys," he said finally. "She give it to me just like she does to the papers. We got to go to the moon, or make the Russians do it, and bring that poor, dear, sweet, trusting, cuddly little dog back to Earth again."

"How about her kid out on the coast?" the adjutant asked.

"She spit in my eye, Sam. Said she was just as brave to be a martyr as the dogs they string up. Why, she even told me about another boy of hers, living in sin with a black woman down in Cuba, and dared me to give that to the papers too."

"She sounds tough as she looks."

"She's tougher," the governor groaned. "Like blue granite. I felt like I was back in the third grade." He handed his empty glass to the secretary.

"What did you finally do?" the secretary asked.

"What the hell *could* I do? I want that U.D.D. vote, it must be a whopper. I wagged my tail and barked for her and said I had an idea."

"And now I got to think up the idea," the secretary said, still holding the empty glass.

"No, I thought it up on my way back," the governor said. "I'm going to fly to Washington this afternoon."

"Not the army, for God's sake," pleaded the adjutant.

"No, I'm going to dump it on the Russian embassy. Damn their black hearts, they started this. Hurry up with that drink!"

"Watch out you don't lose your donkey for sure and all," the adjutant said. "Them Russians are smart cookies."

"They'll have to be," the governor said, reaching for the fresh drink. "They sure . . . as . . . *hell* . . . will have to be!"

ALL THE folding chairs were taken. Extra women stood in the aisles and along the side of the hall. Martha Stonery bulged over the rostrum in blue knitted wool and a pearl necklace. Seated around a half-circle of chairs behind her, pack leaders and committee chairwomen smoothed at their skirts. Monica Flint in dove gray sat at the organ.

Martha pounded with her gavel so hard that her pearls rattled.

"Everyone will please stand while we sing our hymn," she said into the resultant hush. She nodded to Monica, who began to play.

"I did not raise my dog to ride a sputnik, I will not let him wander to the moon. . . ." The song was a shrill thundering.

Martha beamed across her bosom as the crowd settled itself again.

"I have a most thrilling announcement to make before we adjourn, girls," she said, "but first we will have committee reports. Paula Hart, will you begin?" She yielded the rostrum.

All the reports were favorable. The U.D.D. was getting four times as many column-inches in the state press as the Russian moonship. It was on TV and radio. A *Life* team was coming.

Changes were recommended. Vigilante packs were not to carry hat pins any more. Two policemen had lost eyes and the police were being ugly about it. A bar of soap in a man's sock was to be substituted. More practice on the clove hitch was needed. Too often, in their excitement, the pack ladies were only putting two half hitches around the leg and the dog could struggle out of it.

Martha came back to the rostrum to read the honor roll of those whom dogs had bitten or policemen had insulted. Each heroine came forward amid cheers and clapping to receive a certificate exchangeable for the Bleeding Heart medal as soon as the honors committee could agree on a design and have a supply made up. Martha shook the hands, some of them bandaged, and wept a few tears.

"And now, fellow U.D.D. members," she said, "I will tell you my surprise. Tomorrow morning I have an appointment with someone coming from Washington!"

A sighing murmur swept through the hall.

"No, not *Eisenhower,*" Martha said scornfully. "A man from the Russian embassy, a Mr. Cherkassov."

Applause crashed shrilly. Women wept and hugged each other.

"They want to make peace," Martha shouted ringingly into the

tumult. "We've won, girls! Sally out tonight and don't come in until the last dog is hung! We'll show them what it means to challenge the massed U.D.D.-ers of America!"

The state police cordon kept the 2200 block of Euclid Avenue free of reporters and idle gapers. The state car drove up at 10:00 A.M. and parked under the oak tree. Mr. Cherkassov and the two TASS men got out.

Mr. Cherkassov was stocky and crop-haired in a blue suit. His broad, high-cheekboned face, with snub nose and an inward tilt about the eyes, managed to seem both alert and impassive. Carrying a pigskin briefcase, he led the way to the Stonery front door.

He stepped on the doormat and pressed the bell. The doormat whirred and writhed under his feet and he stepped back hastily. Martha Stonery, regal in maroon silk, four-inch cameo and piled gray hair, opened the door.

"Don't be afraid of the doormat, Mr. Cherkassov—you *are* Mr. Cherkassov, aren't you?" she asked sweetly.

He nodded, looking from her to the doormat.

"Your weight presses something and the little brushes spin around and clean your shoes," she explained. "I expect you don't have things like that in Russia. But *do,* please, come in and sit down."

The three men stepped carefully across the mat on entering. In the oak-paneled living room, Paula Hart waited in black wool and pearls with Monica Flint, who wore white jade and green jersey. Martha and Mr. Cherkassov made introductions back and forth and the men bowed stiffly. Then Martha sat down flanked by her aides on the gray sofa facing the picture window. The men sat in single chairs and rubbed their polished black shoes uneasily against the deep-pile gray rug.

"Madame Stonery, I have come to justify moondog," Mr. Cherkassov said. His voice was deep and controlled.

"Two wrongs don't make a right, Mr.Cherkassov," Martha said, raising her head. "You needn't bring up Hiroshima. We already know about those thousands of little black and white spaniels. Besides, I saw a *Life* picture where you sewed a little dog's head to the side of a big dog's neck."

Mr. Cherkassov looked at his stubby fingers and hid them under his briefcase. Paula and Monica nodded accusingly and one TASS man made a note.

"We do not believe it is a wrong when a greater value prevails over a lesser," Mr. Cherkassov said. "Moondog sends us information that will hasten the time of safe space-travel for humans."

"And who might *you* be, to say which value is greatest? Space travel is moonshine, just *moonshine!*"

"I do not understand your word, madame. If you mean impossible, I must point out that moondog has already crossed space."

Martha clasped her hands in her lap. "That's what I mean, grown

men and such *silliness,* and the poor little dog has to pay."

Mr. Cherkassov spoke earnestly. "Forgive me if my ignorance of your language causes me to misunderstand, madame. We believe because man now has the ability to cross space he therefore has a *duty* to all life on Earth to help it reach other planets. Earth is overcrowded with men, not to speak of the wild life that soon must all die. We believe that around other suns we will find Earth-like planets where we can plough and harvest and build homes. I cannot agree that it is silly."

Martha flung her head back.

"Well, it *is* silly. Who'll go? All the men who do things will run away to them and then where will we be? Oh no, Mr. Cherkassov, that gets you nowhere!"

"Your pardon, madame," a TASS man interrupted. "What kind of men will run away?"

"The sour-faced men who fix pipes and TV and make A-bombs and electricity and things."

"Oh," said Mr. Cherkassov. He drummed on his briefcase. Then, "Perhaps only Russians will go, madame. You could pass a law. I must confess to you, we might have sent a man to the moon, but we feared the propaganda use your country might make of it."

Martha made her parrot mouth. "You should have sent a *man!*" She chomped the last word off short. Paula and Monica nodded vigorously.

Mr. Cherkassov stroked his briefcase. "Moondog's mistress wished greatly to go. One might say moondog saved her mistress' life. Is not that a value to you?"

Martha stared. "Did you dare think of sending a poor weak *woman* to the . . . to the *moon?*"

"Russian women are coarse and strong," Mr. Cherkassov said soothingly. "A large number of them, among the scientists, did volunteer."

MARTHA SAT bolt upright and made her parrot beak again. Her fat cheeks flushed under the powder.

"No!" she snapped. "I see where you're trying to lead me and I won't go! You should have sent the hussy! It is *immoral* to sacrifice a loving little dog just for a careless whim."

Her two aides gazed admiringly at their chieftainess. "Think of it, just for a whim!" Paula echoed.

Mr. Cherkassov's fingers traced an aimless, intricate pattern on the briefcase and he crossed his ankles.

"All dogs are not loving in the same way, madame. Tell me, how do you know when a dog loves you?"

"You just know," Martha said. "Take my little Fiffalo—and I just know he's so miserable now away from me in that dreadful concentration camp and it's all your fault, really, Mr. Cherkassov—when I pet Fiffalo he jumps in my lap and kisses me and just *wiggles* all over. That's real love!"

"Ah . . . I perhaps understand. What does he do when you speak sharply to him?"

"He lies on his back with his paws waving and looks so sad and pitiful and defenseless that my heart melts

and I feel good all over. You just *know* that's love, when it happens to you."

Monica dabbed at a tear. Both TASS men scribbled.

"I think I may see a way to resolve our differences," Mr. Cherkassov said. He put his feet side by side and leaned slightly forward, gripping the briefcase on his knees.

"What do you know of the history of the dog?" he asked.

"Well, he's always been man's best friend and the savage Indians used to eat him and . . . and. . . ."

"The true dog, madame, was domesticated about twenty thousand years ago. He was originally the golden jackal, *Canis aureus,* which still exists in a wild state. Selective breeding for submissiveness and obedience over that long time has resulted in the retention through maturity of many traits normal only to puppyhood. The modern pureline golden jackal dog no longer develops a secret life of his own, with emotional self-sufficiency. He must love and be loved, or he dies."

Monica sniffed. "What a beautiful name," Paula murmured. Martha nodded warily.

"But, madame, there is also a kind of false dog. Certain Siberian tribes slow to reach civilized status also domesticated the northern wolf. *Canis lupus.* This was many thousands of years later, of course, and in the false dog the effect of long breeding is not so evident. He is loving as a puppy, but when he matures he is aloof and reserves his loyalty to one master. He is intensely loyal and will die for his master, but even to him he will display little outward affection. Perhaps a wag of the tail or a head laid on the knee, not too often. No others except quite young children may pet him at all. To all but his master he displays a kind of tolerant indifference unless he is molested, and then he defends himself."

"What a horrible creature, not a dog at all!" Martha exclaimed.

"Not culturally, you are quite correct, madame," Mr. Cherkassov agreed, shifting his hold on the briefcase and leaning further forward, "but unfortunately he is a dog biologically. Some wolf blood has crept into most of the jackal-derived breeds, you know. It betrays itself in high cheekbones and slanting eyes and in the *personality* of the breed. The chow, for instance, has considerable wolf blood."

"Chows!" Martha beaked her lips again. "I despise them! No better than cats!" Paula nodded emphatic agreement.

"But your little Fiffalo, as you describe him, is probably of pure *Canis aureus* descent and very highly bred."

"I'm sure he is. Blood will tell. Monica, haven't I always said blood will tell?"

Monica nodded, her eyes shining. Mr. Cherkassov shifted his position slightly, nearer to the chair edge.

"Now moondog, Madame Stonery, is of the *lajka* breed and has even more wolf blood than the chow. If you brought her back to Earth she would just walk away from you with cold indifference."

"Not *really?*"

"Madame, you know the wolf

traits only as you find them tempered with the loving jackal traits in such dogs as the chow. But a *Russian* dog! If you were to hand moondog a piece of meat, do you know what she would do?"

"No. Tell me."

Mr. Cherkassov leaned forward, his slanting gray eyes opening wide, and dropped his voice almost to a whisper. "Madame, she would *bite* your hand!"

"Then she doesn't deserve to be rescued!" Martha said sharply.

Mr. Cherkassov straightened up and began stroking his briefcase. "In one sense she is not even a dog," he suggested.

"No, she's an old wolf-thing. Like a cat. Dogs are *loving!*"

"Perhaps not morally worthy of your campaign?"

"No, of *course* not. Mr. Cherkassov, you have given me a new thought . . . I hadn't realized. . . ."

Mr. Cherkassov waited attentively, his fingers tracing another pattern. Paula and Monica looked at Martha and held their breaths.

". . . hadn't realized how that subversive wolf blood has been creeping into our loving dogs all this long time. Why . . . why it's miscegenation! It's *bestiality!* Confess it, Mr. Cherkassov—that's one way you Russians have been infiltrating us, now isn't it?"

Mr. Cherkassov raised his sandy eyebrows, and a frosty twinkle shone in his tilted eyes.

"You must realize that I could hardly admit to such a thing, even if it were true, Madame Stonery," he said judiciously.

"It *is* true! Go back to your Kremlin, Mr. Cherkassov, and shoot every wolf in Russia to the moon. I'm sure the U.D.D. won't mind!"

Mr. Cherkassov and the TASS men stood up and bowed. Martha rose and sailed ahead of them to the door. Hand on knob, she turned to face them.

"Our meeting will be historic, Mr. Cherkassov," she said. "I have forced you to betray your country's plot to undermine our loving dogs. You may expect from the U.D.D. instant and massive retaliation! An aroused America will move at once, to set up miscegenation and segregation barriers against your despicable wolf blood!"

Paula and Monica stood up, each with her hands clasped under her flushed and excited face. Mr. Cherkassov bowed again. Martha opened the door.

"Goodbye, Mr. Cherkassov," she said. "You will, no doubt, be liquidated in a few days."

Mr. Cherkassov stepped carefully across the doormat. **END**

All that philosophers have sought,
Science discovered, genius wrought.

—James Montgomery

The Last Days of L.A.

Murder on a small scale may be illegal and unpleasant, but mass murder can be the most exhilarating thing in the world!

BY GEORGE H. SMITH

YOU ARE HAVING the same recurring dream, the dream that has haunted the whole world since that day in 1945. The dream of the sudden flash in the night, the rising mushroom cloud and then annihilation. You are living the nightmare again but this time it's true, you know it's true. You can't be dreaming. The bombs are actually falling and huge fireballs are sweeping upward while seas of flame spread at supersonic speeds to engulf the city. You feel the blast, the searing heat, you feel your flesh melting away. You try to scream but the sound dies in your throat as your lungs shrivel. Horror makes you try again and somehow you do scream and wake yourself up.

Once more, this one more time, it is only a dream. You lie there panting, too weak from terror to move out of the puddle of your own sweat. You lie there and think and your thoughts aren't very pretty. It's a week day and you ought to be down at the office turning out advertising copy by the ton but instead you lie there and think even though you don't like what you're thinking. It's got to be soon. It can't be much longer now, not the way things are going.

You finally crawl out of bed around noon and ease your way into the kitchen. You realize that you have a hangover and since you can't

remember what you did the night before you suppose you must have been drunk. By the time you finish one of the two quarts of beer you find in the refrigerator you know that isn't what you need, so you put on some clothes and wander out to a bar.

After a few quick drinks you walk somewhat unsteadily out into the street again and head toward the place you always think of as The Bar. A wino edges up to you and asks for money to buy a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

You give him a dollar but make him promise not to spend it on anything so foolish as food. "Liquor, brother, is the salvation of the race," you tell him. "Believe and be saved!"

"Amen!" he says and hurries off.

You make the mistake of stopping to read the headlines on the

corner so you know you're not drunk enough yet. U. S. REJECTS NEW RUSS NOTE. MOON GUNS CAN DESTROY CITIES: KAGANOVITCH. BURMA LEADER KILLED IN FRESH UPRISING.

Just before you get to The Bar you pass an alleyway and as you glance into the darkness, you see a huge rat standing there staring at you with arrogant red eyes. After a moment he walks away, unhurried and cocky. An icy chill runs down your spine. The rats will survive. The rats always survive. Maybe *they* are the Master Race. Something else tugs at your memory, something you read somewhere. Oh yes, it was a statement by an oceanographer. He said that even if the H-bomb should annihilate every living thing on the surface of the earth, the sea creatures would be able to carry on. The rats and the fish will carry on and build a better world.

Your friends are sitting in their usual places when you get to The Bar. John Jones-Very who has the reddest, bushiest and longest beard and also the record for staying drunk the longest, is doing the talking. Listening are Dale Bushman who paints huge canvases which he never finishes, Ian, an out-of-work musician whose last name you don't know, Pat O'Malley the actor and, of course, Anna.

Anna is small and thin with deeply tanned skin drawn tightly over high cheekbones. She wears a plain dress and no makeup and her hair is done up in a bun on the nape of her neck. The poetry she writes is a kind of elegant pornography. She is the only one in the group who makes any money and that is because her book FLAME ROSE has been banned all across the country. You like her very much, probably because she is the most irritatingly ugly woman you have ever met.

A howling bank of jets hurls across the sky screaming for human blood and you shiver as you squeeze in at the table. You are convinced that the elementals of hell are loose above and the world is in its last stages. All the children born this year will probably have twenty-one teeth and Anti-Christ will walk the land.

"Why worry about the next war?" Dale Bushman asks. "It won't last forever."

"No," John says. "No war ever has . . . yet."

"Do you think it's coming?" you ask.

"If you read the papers, you'd take to the hills right now," Pat O'Malley says, finishing his bowl of chili and reaching for his drink.

"Ah, the hills," Ian says. "But what good? The H-bomb is bad enough but they'll use the C-bomb, the cobalt bomb, and this is the final weapon."

"Just the same," you say. "I think we ought to take to the hills." Why not hide yourself way back of nowhere? Hide so deep in the woods and mountains that you won't even know when it happens. You could wrap the silence around you and pull the earth over you. You could bury yourself so deep that . . . but of course you won't. You have a job and, like everyone else, at least a

thousand other reasons for staying on until the end.

"But really," you say, "a man should be able to survive a time of terror by disengaging himself as completely as possible from the rest of the human race. If he were to reduce his needs to a minimum . . . a little bread, a few vegetables, a blanket or two, a warm cave and . . ."

"A blonde or two," Pat says.

Bushman adds, "A cellar of good Scotch."

"And books, lots of books," Jones-Very puts in.

"No blondes, no Scotch, no books," you tell them, banging your mug on the table so hard their glasses jump. "Minimum needs . . . minimum needs!"

"How about plumbing?" Anna demands. "I won't go without plumbing."

"We're facing the end of the world," says John, "and you worry about plumbing!"

"I'm sorry, but if plumbing isn't going to survive, I'd just as soon not either," Anna says. "I just can't see myself squatting in the bushes."

"What difference does it make?" Ian asks. "Everybody dies anyway. From the moment you're born, you start dying."

"Yes, but—"

"So why bother? Everybody dies. Why prolong it more than you have to? Everybody dies."

"Worlds may or may not blow up," O'Malley says, "but it seems to me it's the little indignities of modern life that hurt the most. The constant repetition of the advertising slogans that insult your intelligence, and the women with the pearly teeth and perfect permanent waves, without body odor or souls."

"I have body odor," Anna says.

"But no soul," Ian says. "No soul at all."

"You're just mad because I wouldn't sleep with you last night."

"No soul," Ian says.

The jukebox offers Tin Pan Alley's solution to the whole thing:

OH BABY, OH MY BABY O
MY BABY IS MY BABY O
MY BABY IS MY BABY O
MY BABY LOVES ME O
SHE DOES, SHE DOES, SHE DOES O

"Our trouble is too much history," John says. "A period without history is a happy one and we've had too much history."

"No soul—too much history," Ian hiccups. "Not enough sex—everybody dies."

"Everybody is going to die damn fast, unless something happens," you say.

"No soul—so sad," Ian mumbles. No soul and no sex . . . everybody dies, nothing happens."

"So what?" Anna demands. "What is life anyway? Why try to be like everyone else in this beautiful but messy Brave New World of 1970? Why run searching for a messiah when all the messiahs died a thousand years ago?"

This starts you thinking about religion. You've never thought much about it before but a man can change, maybe even accept the old myths as real until they actually begin to seem real. Instead of dwel-

ling on your body being burned to a cinder in an atomic holocaust you could think of your slightly singed soul being wafted to paradise on a mushroom cloud while U-235 atoms sing a heavenly chorus to speed you on your way.

The others don't even notice when you get up and walk out to look for a church.

CHURCHES AREN'T hard to find in Los Angeles on any day of the week or at any hour of the day. They're behind the blank fronts of painted-over store windows. They're located in big old nineteenth-century houses along Adams; they spring up under tents in vacant lots and in large expensive temples and bank-like buildings in the downtown area.

You pass by several likely-looking churches because they are in neighborhoods that have alleyways, and you still remember that rat, that red-eyed rat.

Then as you walk through downtown crowds, you remember something else. Some dentist once said that the teeth of the people in the A-bombed Japanese cities hadn't been affected by radiation. This is very funny, it makes you laugh. You picture a world of blistered corpses, none of whose teeth have been affected. You laugh out loud and people turn to look at you.

A woman points you out to a policeman and he looks your way. You want to keep on laughing but now you don't dare to. So you just keep on walking, trying to keep the laughter from bubbling out of you.

"Hey, bud," the policeman calls to you, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing—nothing at all, officer," you tell him, and dive into the next church you pass.

This one is called the Church of the New Cosmology. Inside, a round-faced little man is talking to a few listless people.

"A geologist will never know the rocks until he has seen the Rock of Ages. The botanist will never know plants until he has beheld the Lily of the Valley, the cosmologist will never know the universe until he has listened to the Word of God!

"Let us consider for a moment the sun. What do we know about the sun, my friends? What do the so-called scientists know about it? What do they tell us about our heavenly light? They say it's a giant ball of fire millions of miles across and ninety-one million miles away. Now why, I ask you, would that be so? The Bible says that God made the sun to light the world. Now have you ever known the Lord to do anything silly or foolish? Of course you haven't! Then why do they ask us to believe that He would put the sun, which is supposed to light the world, ninety-one million miles away from it? An engineer who did something like that wouldn't be much of a God. The true answer, my friends, is that Jehovah God did nothing so impractical and no matter who tells you different, don't believe it!"

The little man's voice dropped to a husky whisper. "I have studied my Bible and I've listened to the scientists and I've talked to God

Himself about it and I tell you this is the truth. The sun is our heavenly light, the sure sign of God's love, and right this minute it is just two thousand three hundred miles from Los Angeles! It is not a wasteful million miles across, it is just forty-five and five-tenths miles across . . . just the right size to give us our beautiful California sunshine.

"How do I know?" The whisper had grown to a hoarse shout. "How do I know? I know because it's the Word of God, my friends! The personal word of God given to me by God Himself.

"What else do I know? What else has God told me, to confound the Godless scientists? Why, my friends, the Bible says that this earth upon which we live is flat—as flat as this book!" He brings his hand down with a sharp slap on the Bible. "You ask then how is it possible to circumnavigate the world when it is a flat plane. The answer is that it isn't possible. A ship that seems to go around the world really makes a circle on the flat surface like this." With a stubby forefinger he draws a circle on the book. "Now I know that those scientists up on the moon say that the world is round, but whoever saw or heard of a scientist that wasn't a liar? Can any of you really bring yourselves to believe that this flat earth of ours is traveling through space at the tremendous speed that they say it is? Tell me, do you feel any wind from this great speed? Do you feel anything at all?"

No, you have to admit, you don't. You don't feel a thing. Even his own congregation doesn't seem to.

This is thirsty work. You have a couple more drinks and then you look for another church. You find one called the Church of Christian Capitalism.

The thin old man with the dusty fringe of gray hair has his audience well in hand as you walk in and take a seat. He makes the sign of the cross and the sign of the dollar over their heads as he harangues them.

"Blessed are the wealthy for they shall please God," he says. "Christ was the first capitalist, dear friends. He took a loaf and seven fishes and blessed them and made them into enough food to feed a multitude. He walked in poverty but he came to own the world!

"God is the Good Capitalist, the Owner and Proprietor of all things on this earth. This country was created by those saints of Capitalism—Morgan, Rockefeller and Gould."

Christian Capitalism sends you home to bed by way of another bar.

YOU'RE SITTING in a room with people all around you. At first you don't know why you're there and then you remember it's a party. Everyone except you is laughing and drinking and having a good time. You have a strange sense of foreboding, of something about to happen that you can't avoid. You see a girl you know across the room and get up and start to cross the room to her.

There's a sudden blinding flash of light outside the house and the windows come crashing in. You see

murderous slivers of glass piercing the flesh of those about you and you hurry over to the girl you know only to find her face and neck slashed by the flying glass and blood streaming down over her bare breasts. You try to stop the flow of blood with a handkerchief but it's coming in such strong spurts that you can't.

A second shock wave follows the first with an even brighter flash. You're knocked to the floor and the building comes crashing down. You struggle against the falling masonry but it does no good. You feel the crushing weight and scream . . . and your screams wake you up.

You feel almost as bad awake as you did asleep, only now the crushing weight is on your head instead of your chest and your mouth is filled with the taste of death and decay. You figure you must have been drinking last night but you can't quite remember.

You reach out your hand and it locates a bottle that still guggles a little. Without opening your eyes you lift it hurriedly to your mouth and then almost choke trying to spit it out. Mouthwash!

You manage to get your eyes open, and remember with thankful heart that today is Sunday and you don't have to go to work. It's been five days since the last dream and that's not so bad, but just the same you'd better get up and get a drink because this one really shook you up. Or maybe you ought to go to church. Perhaps you'd better do both.

A tall blond man in a black suit is standing on a platform in the center of a group of forty or fifty intensely quiet people as you enter.

"Is there a wall in front of you?" he asks.

"Yes, there is a wall in front of us," the people answer.

"Can you see the wall in front of you?"

"Yes, we can see the wall."

"Is there a wall behind you?"

"Yes, there is a wall behind us."

"Can you see the wall behind you?"

They all turn around and look. "Yes, we can see the wall behind us."

"Is there a floor beneath your feet?"

"Yes, there is a floor beneath our feet."

"Are you sure? Feel the floor with your feet."

There is a loud shuffling as they do as they are told.

"Are you sure the floor is there?"

"Yes, we're sure the floor is there."

"Now feel your feet with the floor."

There is more shuffling and during this you steal quietly out. This one reminds you of the D.T.'s and you want nothing at all to do with that.

You get tossed out of the next place you try because the preacher says you're drunk. You're not, but you wish you were, so you head toward The Bar. You stop when you see the sign, "FLYING SAUCER CONVENTION." It's over the door of a large building and underneath in smaller letters it says, "Listen to the words of the Space People. Hear the advice they bring us in these troubled times."

Surely, you tell yourself, the Space People will have a solution, surely they can bring peace. You enter and see a young, ordinary-looking fellow addressing a crowd of about three hundred. You take a seat next to a bald man who is writing down what the young man is saying even though it doesn't seem to make much sense.

". . . member of a small group that has been in touch with the Space People and feel that this world can be saved only through the aid of superior beings. I will now play this tape which I obtained from the captain of a Flying Saucer."

He places the tape on the spindle and it begins to whirl. A voice begins to speak in slightly stilted English. "I am Lelan. I am what you people of Earth think of as the head of the government of the planet Nobila. I speak to you across the parsecs in order to bring you good and bad news. The good is that a new age is about to begin for the people of Earth through the aid of we Nobilians. We have already contacted the President of the United States, the Pope of the Catholic Church and all other world leaders. A new age is about to begin for you as soon as we have saved you from the evil influence of the vicious Zenonians from the planet Zeno. All Earth knowledge will become obsolete as we supply you with new information and all good things will be free in the days after we drive the Zenonians from among you.

"But first we must warn you that the Zenonians will try to stop us, but you can help avoid this if you are alert. Look around you for persons who seem strange. It is the Zenonians who have made you what you are. It is the Zenonians who cause your wars and your crime with their evil rays. We will use our good Nobil rays to combat their evil Z rays. When we have driven them out, the world will be a better place in which to live. But—beware! They are all about you. Examine the man next to you. Beware! They are all about you. You shall hear from us again."

You turn and look at the man next to you; he's looking at you. He *is* a rather strange-looking guy and you edge away from him just as he edges away from you. You turn to look at the man on the other side of you. He is moving away from you also.

Then you hear the stories of the people in the audience. Every one of them who stands up to speak has had a mysterious visitor in the night or had a flying saucer land in his backyard. Most of them have had trips to the moon and elsewhere in flying saucers. Space you think must be as crowded as the Hollywood Freeway at rush hour. Almost all of them have been contacted by superior beings from space because they are the only people in the world who are wise enough to interpret the Space People to the Earth people.

You feel pretty good from the drinks you've had, so you stand up and tell them what you think.

"The first flying saucers were sighted after the atomic bombs were first exploded," you begin. "And

they became very prevalent after the first Earth satellites were put into space and again after the first moon rockets. I therefore think that the Earth is a cosmic madhouse in which the human race has been incarcerated for its own good and that every time we start rattling the bars, the keepers hurry down to take a look."

No one seems to care much for your theory, and you are escorted to the door none too politely.

No, the Space People don't seem to have the answer. With the headlines you see at every corner chasing you, you head for The Bar and dive gratefully through the door.

"So everybody dies," Ian is saying. "We're all dying, just sitting here."

"Will you stop that? God damn it, will you stop that?" you yell at him.

Ian looks at you owlishly for a few seconds and then back at his drink. Jones-Very and the others go right on with the conversation.

"It's merely what I was saying the other night," Jones-Very says. "It's the contagious spread of the madness that is epidemic in our time. No one wants war. But still we are going to have a war. After all, the very zeitgeist of our times is one of complete callousness toward human life. You have only to think of the Russian slave camps, the German gas chambers and our own highway slaughter."

"Maybe life itself is just some sort of stupid mistake," Anna says. "Maybe we're a cosmic blunder, a few pimples on the tail of the universe."

"That isn't so," you blurt out. "There's purpose—there's got to be purpose. You can't look around you and say there isn't purpose in the universe; that there isn't a reason for our being here."

This time they all turn and look at you strangely. Then they look at each other.

"I wonder," Jones-Very says, "if I wasn't closer to the truth than I thought when I talked about contagion."

"What the hell do you mean by that?" you demand, half rising from your seat.

"Nothing . . . nothing at all," Jones-Very says, looking at the others.

"What this world needs is a moral renovation—a new birth of the spirit," you go on.

"Oh, my God," Jones-Very moans, his head in his hands.

"Would you listen to that, in this age of space stations and moon guns," Anna says.

"John, you're right—you're right! It's got him!" Bushman says.

You won't listen to any more of this. You get to your feet and stagger with great dignity to the door.

YOU'RE DRESSED in high altitude equipment and you're sitting in the nose of a jet bomber listening to the vicious growling of the motors. You have a tremendous feeling of power and you think about how many you'll kill this trip. You think about the big black bombs nestled in the bomb bay and remember there is one for each of the three cities on your list.

God, it will be beautiful! You can almost see the glorious colors of the rising mushroom cloud and hear the screaming of the shattered atoms. You can't hear the screaming of the people up here, that's one of the nicest parts of this kind of murder. You can't hear them. This makes you as happy as it must have made Attila and Hitler when they killed their millions. Murder on a small scale may be illegal and unpleasant, but mass murder can be the most exhilarating thing in the world.

Then your bombs are gone and you're passing through the most beautiful clouds you've ever seen but somehow they smell of charred flesh and even up here you hear the screams of the people. The sound rips and tears at your brain, destroying what little sanity you have left. You've got to stop them! You've got to, before they drive you completely mad. You tilt the nose of the bomber and dive toward the screams. You've got to stop them! You scream back at them as you dive and again your own screams wake you up.

This is the worst one you've ever had and your hangover is almost as bad. You dress and hurry out of your apartment to get away from the terror and the guilt but suddenly you remember that you aren't really the guilty one. Or are you?

You look for a bar or a place to buy a bottle and then remember that you haven't any money. You see Pat O'Malley up ahead of you in the crowd and hurry to catch up with him. He hasn't any money either, so you suggest that both of you go to church.

"Why not?" he says. "We have only our souls to lose."

The two of you enter the first one you come to and the woman on the platform is an amazing sight. She's big and full-bodied and has all the grace and arrogance of a lioness. She's got the Word and she's passing it out in large doses.

"That's Dr. Elinda A. Egers, D.C.F.," O'Malley whispers. "Doctor of Complete Faith."

You watch fascinated as that lush body of hers moves restlessly around the platform.

"In these troubled times the tortured mind of man is hanging in the balance, because he has forgotten his great enemy," Elinda shouts. There's a wildness in her eyes and a sensuousness in the way she moves her body that makes you move forward until you're sitting on the edge of your seat. Any stripper, you muse, would give her G-string to be able to imitate this woman's uninhibited way with her hips.

"Why are our asylums filled with millions of the mentally sick? And why are there tens of millions of the physically sick among us? WHY?" she demands at the top of her lungs. "Because the doctors and the psychologists absolutely fail to recognize or blindly refuse to recognize the demoniac origin of these illnesses. They have failed, my dear friends, because they are bound to the unreality of conventional science. They have failed because they did not look into their souls to see what God has written there for all to read.

"If we face the truth, we will learn to recognize the presence of

demons and only then can we cure the inflicted!"

Demons, you think. What a lovely idea. Perhaps you have fallen through a rift in time and come out in the Middle Ages with only wonderful things like witches and demons to worry about. You turn to O'Malley to tell him this, only to find him sound asleep. You've often wondered where he did his sleeping, and now you know.

"The battle in the world today is not between nations but between Jesus Christ and the Devil!" She has gone into a kind of bump and grind routine now with her hands on those glorious hips and her body moving back and forth while her legs remain absolutely still. It looks real good from where you sit but you think it might look even better up closer so you leave Pat snoring gently and take a seat further toward the front.

"Come to me and the Lord will put out his hand and save you. He has said unto me: 'You shall have the power to cast out demons,' and I have replied that I will do so. If you feel it, say Amen!"

There is a lusty chorus of amen's from the winos and bums who fill the auditorium. You have an idea they were attracted here by the same thing that keeps you on the edge of your seat.

A man with the jerks of some sort comes down the aisle and the healing starts. Dr. Egers lays one hand on his head and the other at the back of his neck.

"Get out of him, you demons! Out! Out! In the name of the Lord, I charge thee—get out!"

The man jerks even more violently. "Heal him, Lord, heal him! They're coming out . . . the demons are coming out. Can't you feel them leaving you, brother?"

The fellow jerks once more and almost falls as an attendant leads him away. "He's cured," Elinda shouts. "Praise God! He'll never have another convulsion."

"Praise God! Praise God!" the congregation shouts. Only the still-jerking man seems to have any doubts as to his cure.

"The Power of God will save you," she says to the little boy now kneeling before her. "From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, I charge you, Satan, come out!" She hugs the child against those astonishing breasts of hers. "This can be your cure if you believe, Jimmy. All things are possible if you only believe. Little Jimmy, do you have faith?"

The boy nods his head eagerly and his face is so full of faith and belief that you find yourself nodding with him.

"Restore him tonight in the name of Jesus Christ!" she shouts, placing her hands on his thin little legs. "This little leg, Lord . . . send the Power to restore this little leg. Drive the demon of evil from it!" Her voice grows even louder. "The Power is coming! The Power is coming! The Power is within me now and it will flow from me to you. Do you feel it, Jimmy? Do you feel it? Do you feel it flowing in your legs?"

She has lifted him from the floor and is cradling him in her arms. "Do you feel it, Jimmy?"

Christ, you can almost feel it yourself.

"Don't your legs feel different, Jimmy?"

"I think they're tingling a little," he says.

"Do you hear that?" she shouts again. "His legs are tingling! The God Power is making them tingle!" She lowers the child to the floor. "You can do it, Lord! Send the Power in the name of Jesus! Send it into this little foot, into this little leg. Try, Jimmy, try it for me, try it now!"

Jimmy tries to stand up but wavers and falls. With renewed effort he manages to pull himself erect and stand swaying.

"YOU'VE SEEN IT! YOU'VE SEEN IT WITH YOUR OWN EYES!" Elinda screams at them joyously.

Sure they've seen it but they don't seem much impressed. In fact, most of them get up and leave after this round. You ease yourself out of your seat and head toward the door, because you need a drink, but you turn before going out to look back at her. She looks tired and disappointment shows in her full sensuous face.

You know that she's the most wonderful thing you have ever seen. You've found your religion. You've found something to worship—Elinda Egers, the only real goddess in the world. You'll come here every night and the bomb won't worry you because you have a religion now. Elinda Egers will save you. You head for the nearest bar, singing "Rock of Ages" at the top of your lungs.

YOU'RE RUNNING . . . running, terror riding you like a jockey using the whip. You're running while a boiling sea of flame rolls over the city. Behind you and close on your heels come breakers of radioactive hell, smashing buildings and lifting cars and people into the air. People are running on all sides of you. A girl in a spangled evening dress, a puffing little man in Bermuda shorts, a woman carrying two children, a man with a golf bag over his shoulder and two men in gray flannel suits followed by a woman in a sack dress that keeps blowing up over her face as she runs.

The harder you run, the closer the fire seems to get. You can feel it singeing your back and the fat little man screams as a lashing tongue catches up with him and turns him into a cinder. The woman in the sack dress tramples across the bodies of the two men in gray flannel but the man with the golf club fights her off with his mashie. Then the four of them are eaten up by the hungry flames. You moan and your legs pump harder. There's an underground shelter ahead and you run toward it only to find the entrance jammed with people. You try to fight your way in. You grab hold of a man but his boiled flesh comes away in your hands. Then you see they are all dead, packed together so tightly they can't fall. You're running again and you see the woman with the two children only there's nothing left of them but a charred arm and a hand which she still clutches. The girl in the evening dress falls in front of

you and you stumble over her. You see her dress and then her hair burst into flames. She throws her arms around you and you feel the suffocating flames.

"Oh Lord—Lord," you moan, and wake up. The bottle of wine on the nightstand is only half empty and you drink from it gratefully and think of going out for more. But you remember your goddess and you know that you have to go to see her.

She's in good form tonight as she talks about the Kinsey Report.

"If you're listening, say Amen!" She raises both arms as she yells this and you're amazed at the way her big breasts rise with them.

"In the Old Testament, God demanded death for the adulteress but Dr. Kinsey in his day tried to make her sins sound normal. But I tell you that this sin is the road to Hell, for the person and for the nation. God has destroyed other cities for this sin and His wrath will fall upon yours as well.

"If you're listening, say Amen!"

"AMEN!"

"Are you really listening? Do you honestly want to hear? Or do you prefer the way Los Angeles and the rest of the nation is going? Do you prefer the way of sex, the way of fornication and adultery? Do you prefer to read about sixteen-year old girls found in love nests with older men? Do you prefer to think of boys and girls in the back seats of cars? Do you prefer to think of some man's hand running over your daughter's body, touching her. . . ." Elinda Egers is swaying back and forth, her body rigid, her breath coming faster and faster.

Someone else is breathing heavily and you're not surprised to find it's you.

"If this is what you want, say Amen!"

"Amen!" you shout before you realize you're not supposed to this time. No one seems to notice. Beads of perspiration are forming on the back of your neck and trickling down your spine. The tabernacle is jammed and there isn't much ventilation. You're dizzy with the wine, lack of food and desire.

"Go ahead! Let your kids go to Hell! Let them read comic books and smoke and drink and fornicate in the back seats of jalopies! Let them go to filthy movies, let them listen to dirty jokes on television, let them look at the brazen women with their breasts hanging half out of their dresses."

"Oooooh . . ." a woman in front of you moans, and you feel like moaning with her.

"But if you don't want these things," Elinda shouts, her voice on the verge of breaking, "sing—sing, sing with me!

"Come home, come home,
Ye who are weary,
Come home."

You are sitting in a metal room with telescreens on the wall and a big red button in front of you. Sweat is standing out on your forehead and trickling down the back of your neck because you know the time is coming, the time when you have to decide whether to push that button and send a dozen

ICBM's with hydrogen warheads arcing over the Pole. In the telescreens you see cities . . . peaceful scenes of people going about their business. Then the people are running, leaping out of their cars and leaving them on the street, vanishing into buildings and underground shelters. Your hand is poised over the big red button and your muscles are tightened as if your whole hand and arm were turned to wood, and you know that even if you have to, you can't push that button and destroy half the world.

Then in one of the telescreens there is a sudden white glare, and the screen goes blank—burned out—and then in another telescreen you see destruction fountaining like dirty white dust boiling out of the streets . . . and you see the buildings breaking and falling in rubble, and now you hear the people's screams, a sound that tears through your guts and drives you crazy, and the rubble is falling and sending up more fountains of gray dust—and you know that this is happening to your own country, your own people, and you have to strike back, you have to push the button and avenge them, stop the slaughter by killing the enemy's people and destroying their cities too, but you can't make yourself push the button, your arm won't move and your fingers are paralyzed, and then all the telescreens are glaring white or blowing up in clouds of destruction, and you scream, scream in the metal room until you can't hear anything but your own screaming, and then somehow you force your hand down and push the button. And just as you feel it go down, the walls of the room burst inward in a volcano of noise and terror and the gray dust comes swirling in over you, blotting out your screams. . . .

You wake up and hurry through the streets with this last dream hanging over you more heavily than any of the others. You've got to run—you've got to get out. But look at all the other people. None of them are running. They're going home from work—going into cafes, walking the dog . . . oh God, walking the dog at a time like this. . . .

You're scared. The bloody world is coming to a bloody end. You know it just as sure as you're sitting here in the warm sun in MacArthur park with the fifth you've bought and are drinking from in a paper bag.

It's close now. You're not sure how close but it's close. The world is coming to an end and you know you can't convince anyone that it is. You feel the way Henny Penny—or was it Chicken Little?—must have felt. The sky is falling! The sky is falling! Hell—you're just one more caterwauling messiah in a city of messiahs. Los Angeles, where every man is his own messiah.

Then you know what the trouble is. You've been looking for someone to help you, when what you should have been doing was helping them. Now you realize that you are the *one,* you are the messiah you've been seeking. It's up to you to lead them out of the city into the wilderness. You drink more and you drink it fast and the more you drink the more a feeling of infinite compas-

sion comes over you for your fellow men.

You can save them. You can do it. You drain about two-thirds of the bottle and then get up and walk toward a man in that uniform of success, a gray flannel suit.

"Wait a minute, friend," you say, shifting the bottle to your left hand so you can take his arm with your right.

"What is it? What do you want?" he says, looking at you as though you're drunk.

"Have you seen the papers today, friend?" you ask.

"Let go of me," he says, pulling away.

"If you have seen them, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going home and eat my dinner." He hurries off.

You approach a plump, pretty little blonde pushing a baby carriage. "Miss, can I have a few minutes of your time in which to save your life?"

She looks frightened and tries to wheel the buggy around you.

"Have you thought about the future of this dear little child of yours?"

She breaks into a half trot and soon disappears with the baby carriage bouncing along ahead of her.

You sit down for a few minutes and have a few more swallows of the bourbon. When you get up you're surprised to find that you stagger a little. But you've got to tell the people, you've got to make them listen. Your eye lights on a garbage can a short way off and you know you've found the way to do it. You take a stand beside the can and with the bottle tucked safely in your pocket you begin to pound on the can with both hands.

"Hey, listen, everybody! I've got to tell you about the Last Days of Los Angeles. Listen to me! I can save you if you'll just listen! You're doomed. The city is doomed!"

You pound like mad on the can, but this being L.A. where such things happen every day, only a very few passersby stop. "Come over here and let me tell you about it!" you yell. "Do you know what the power of the H-Bomb can do? Have you heard of the C-Bomb? Do you know what nerve gas is? Have you seen the Sputniks overhead? Do you know how far an ICBM will travel and how fast? Do you know that there is no defense?"

You grab a man by the arm, but he shakes you off, so you reach for a gray-haired old lady and get an umbrella in your middle from the dear little thing.

"Boy, is he ever soused." Two teen-aged girls are standing in front of you, giggling. "Did you ever see a guy so drunk?"

You want to save them and you start toward them with outstretched arms, but they move back into the crowd. This makes you furious and you start to yell again.

You grab the nearest person. It's a woman but you shake her anyway. Someone has got to listen.

"Let go of me, you masher," the woman screams. "Help, somebody, help!"

The crowd closes in on you. A sailor grabs you from behind and

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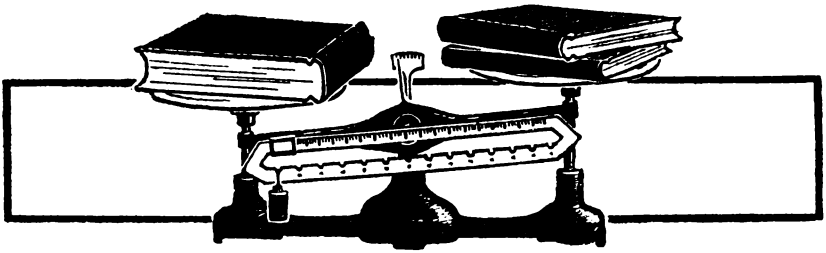


IN THE BALANCE

Book Reviews by the Editor

VOR, by James Blish (Avon, 35¢), is a novel which began its intermittent life some 17 years ago, as a story of mine called "Mercy Death." I had what I thought was a hell of a problem, but I couldn't think of any way out of it, so the story remained about half written until c. 1948, when Jim Blish completed it as a novelette. It was published in *Thrilling Wonder* as "The Weakness of RVOG." (All these initials refer to colors; the alien creature in the story has a color organ in place of a mouth, and his name was originally "Red-green-orange-violet," or "RGOV." Sam Merwin, then editor of *Thrilling Wonder,* switched the initials around for reasons best known to himself, and now Blish has simplified them to VOR.)

The essential part of the story consists of my problem and Blish's solution—the problem being, "What do you do when an apparently indestructible being tells you to kill him, or he'll kill you?" For Blish's solution, see the book.

Whether there ever was enough meat in this story to be worth developing into a novel, I don't know; I'm inclined to think not. At any rate, what Blish has done is to keep the original story more or less intact, and pad it by introducing a new set of characters and a new story line. The original characters were VOR (to give him his latest name), two scientists and a couple of supernumeraries. The new ones are a gaggle of CAP pilots, notably one named Marty Petrucelli who has a war-caused phobia against flying, and is losing his wife to a brash pilot named Al Strickland on account of it.

The CAP background is authentic and impressively technical (Blish was for several years a member of a CAP squadron); so is Blish's marshalling of details about the AEC, radiation problems, atomic physics, and so on.

The introduction of the CAP characters has some color of reason in the opening chapters: they're the nearest squadron to the site of

the alien's landing. After that, in spite of heroic efforts on Blish's part to shoehorn them into the plot, they simply get in the way.

As early as p. 50, for example, AEC Commissioner Holm confronts the alien, risking his life to try to open communication. If the story had been written from Holm's viewpoint, this could have been a scene of hair-raising drama. As it is, it takes place almost invisibly off-stage, while we get a worm's-eye view of Marty and his stone-cold love life.

In padding a novel, the problem is not to advance the story but to slow it down. This one is slowed to a crawl—one-sixth story, five-sixths the endless, repetitive emotional Laocoöns that identify Blish's hack-work. The writing itself, except for one or two notably good passages (particularly Marty's flight with the scared Russian scientist in chapter 9), is as tortuous and knob-jointed as Blish's worst. Nearly every sentence has too much information packed into it; and since most of it is unnecessary information, the result is the same as if it were noise.

Deadly Image, by Edmund Cooper (Ballantine, 35¢) is another of those curiously muffled science fiction novels that keep coming out of England. This one tackles the old suspended-animation plot with more than usual plausibility—the hero, John Markham, is accidentally deep-frozen in an underground food storage chamber, being prepared against World War III. The world he wakes up to, however, in the 22nd century A.D., is a flannelly compound of old ideas, tastelessly muddled. As in Jack Williamson's *The Humanoids,* men have fallen under the rule of benevolent but overcautious robots. Cooper adds the twist that the robots are close counterfeits of human beings, male and female; his hero, in a bathetic sequence, tries to make a woman out of one of them, a girl robot named Marion-A. In the process, it seems to me, everything that makes a robot interesting is smoothed out; Cooper might as well have made his robot characters human, and been done with it.

The novel is not by any means all bad; there are nice touches here and there, and even some markedly good thinking. But it has the same exasperatingly blunted and dimmed quality as *Bright Phoenix* by Harold Mead, *A Sign of the Times* by Robert Kee, and other recent British work: and the same well-bred reluctance to travel any but familiar paths.

Signet has issued an amiable but fatheaded satire called *43,000 Years Later,* by Horace Coon (35¢), which you had probably better avoid. The burden of the book is a long series of homilies on man and his history—most of them unexceptionable but awfully trite. And if you are extraordinarily sensitive to scientific ignorance, you may not even get through the first ten pages, in which Coon's alien space-travelers arrive on Earth from their home "on the Great Galaxy" (Coon seems to think this is a good name

for a planet), to find such relics of mankind's 43,000-years-dead civilization as rusted auto frames and concrete dinosaurs.

ROGER Lancelyn Green's *Into Other Worlds* (Abelard, $3.75) is a scholarly survey of space-flight fiction in hard-bound books, from Lucian to "the latest scientifiction." Lewis does not attempt to deal with the mass of material published in magazines, which is probably wise, and he stops with C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) and *Perelandra* (1943), which he names "the highest peak" of space-travel fiction. Although startled, I think he's right.

Green's religious and moral views color his judgments noticeably (*e.g.*, "the ghastly materialistic tenacity" of Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* in overcoming a hostile environment on Venus, instead of sitting on their noble fannies and admiring the work of God). He also drops some words about H. G. Wells that make me bristle; but it's hard to hate a man who loves the Burroughs Mars books so unashamedly.

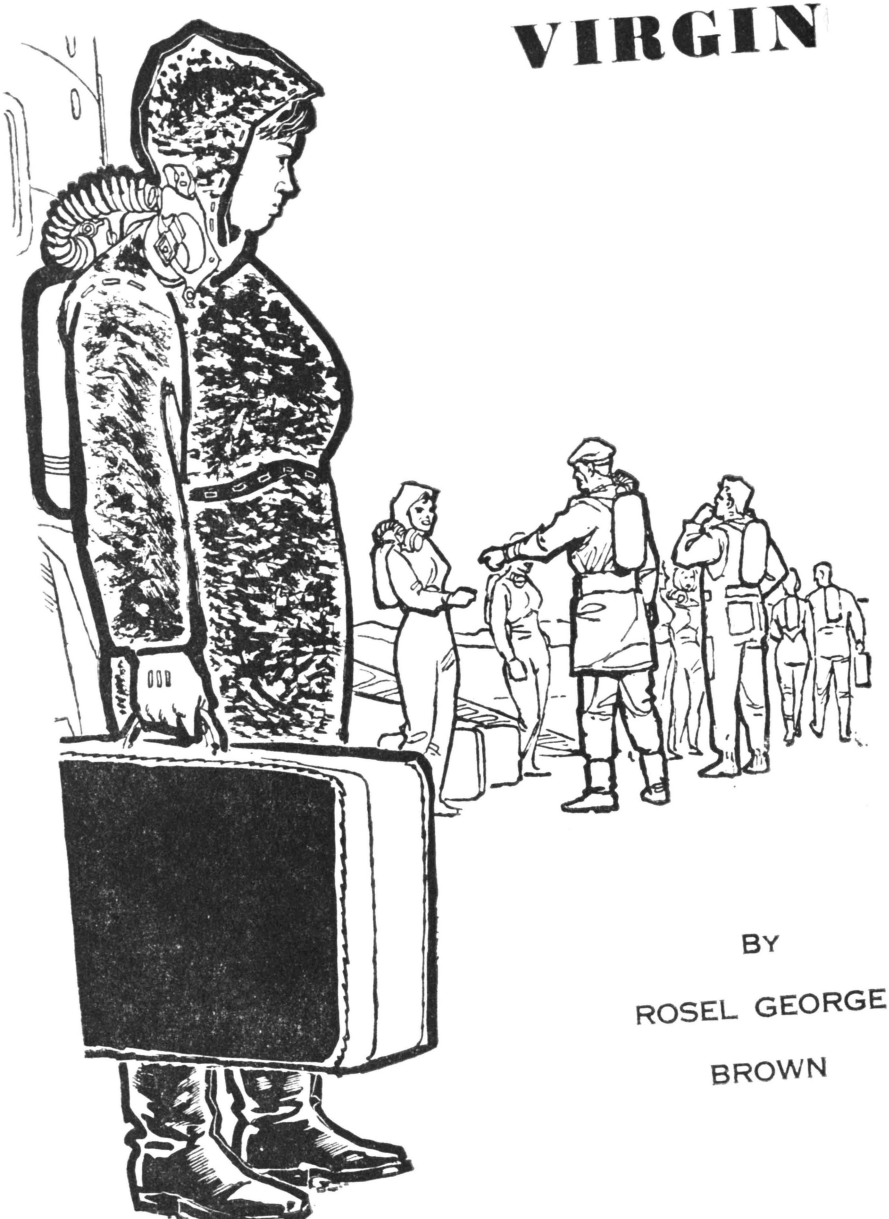
He makes the usual confident scholarly blunders about space-flight: "A schoolboy . . . could tell you that a human being cannot stand an increasing velocity of motion greater than thirty-two feet per second per second. . . ." Nevertheless, a great deal of the ground he covers is new to me, and I found the book a provocative introduction to science fiction before 1920. Robert Cromie's *A Plunge Into Space*, of which I'd never heard, seems to have been an 1890 forerunner of Tom Godwin's "The Cold Equations." Other obscure works that sound very lively in Green's descriptions are *Legends of the Lakes*, by Thomas Croften Croker (1829), *Across the Zodiac*, by Percy Greg (1880), *Lieutenant Gullivar Jones: His Vacation*, by Edwin Lester Arnold (1905), and *Voyage to Arcturus*, by David Lindsay (1920).

We also get the usual lengthy (and by now wearisome) discourses on Lucian of Samosata, Ariosto, Kepler, Godwin, Cyrano de Bergerac and the like, all of whom sound as dull as they ever did. Incidentally, Green traces the history of that idiotic noisy meteorite that roars through all the bad s-f films, to its first appearance in Poe's *Hans Pfaal*, and its second in Verne's *Autour de la Lune*.

What is surprising to me about the whole survey is that there should turn out to be so little in print on the subject, and so few ideas about other worlds and their inhabitants. The 17th and 18th century works are all pretty much of a stripe—satirical or moralistic fantasies with the moon or other planets as background. The Victorian novels have a monotonous family resemblance, too, and in fact only three or four writers in the whole lot seem to have produced anything really vivid and plausible. Probably adding the magazine stories would not lengthen the list much.

Something will have to be done about this.

VIRGIN



BY

ROSEL GEORGE

BROWN

GROUND

Annie signed on a bride ship for Mars. There were forty brides. And when she got there, thirty-nine men were waiting.

THE PILOT shoved open the airlock and kicked the stairs down.

"Okay, girls. Carry your suitcases and I'll give each of you an oxygen mask as you go out. The air's been breathable for fifteen years, but it's still thin to newcomers. If you feel dizzy, take a whiff of oxygen."

The forty women just stood there and looked at each other. Nobody wanted to be first.

Annie moved forward, her bulky suitcase practically floating in her hand. She was a big woman with that wholesome expression which some women have to substitute for sex appeal. She'd made a great senior leader at summer camps.

"I'll go first," she said, grinning confidence into the others. "I'm not likely to bring out the beast in them." She waved herself out, letting the grin set and jell.

It was odd to feel light. She'd felt too heavy as far back as she could remember. Not fat heavy. Bone heavy.

The sweat on her face dried suddenly. She could feel it, like something being peeled off her skin. Arid climate.

It was cold. But she had the warmth to meet it.

There they were! Forty men. There were supposed to be forty. What if one of them had died! Who would go back?

"Not me," Annie prayed to herself. "Dear God, not me." She tried to count them. But they moved around so!

They were looking at something. Not Annie. The girl coming down the ramp behind Annie.

It was Sally, with the blonde hair on her shoulders. That's all they'd be able to see from there. The blonde hair.

But a man was coming forward. He had a tam-like hat pulled low to good-humored eyes, and an easy stride.

"Wait, Ben," one of the other men said. "See the others."

"I pulled first, didn't I?"

"Yeah. But you ain't seen but two yet."

"I want that blonde one. Let

Gary see the others."

And he led Sally away.

He didn't feel her muscles or look at her teeth or measure her pelvic span.

After Sally came Nora. Nora giggled and waved, making a shape under the shapeless clothes. Wasn't that just like Nora? Okay. So she was cute.

Second man took Nora. He didn't wait for the others.

Third man took Regina. Regina looked scared, but you could see those big cow eyes a mile off. Regina obviously needed somebody to protect her.

The other girls came out. Annie counted and her heart hit bottom. Someone was going to be left over.

Four women, three men. They all felt embarrassed. It was the kind of thing the colonists would talk about for years. Who was last. Who was second to last. Spiteful people would remember, and in a tight little community, spite took root and throve on the least misinterpreted expression or— But then, this wouldn't be a tight little community, Annie remembered. The lichen farms were spread out over the whole temperate belt of the world. Because the lichens were grown only on hills, where the sand would not cover them. And because they did a more efficient job of oxygenating the atmosphere when they were spread over a wide area.

One man, hat in hand, even in the cold. A little shriveled man with a spike of dust-colored hair, but kind-looking.

"Aw . . ." he drawled in embarrassment. He clicked his tongue. "You're both probably too good for somebody like me. I don't know. Both fine women."

The two women stood in silence.

"What's your name?"

"Annie."

"Mary."

"Mary? My sister's named Mary. Fine woman." He took Mary's hand. "No disrespect to you, Annie."

They were all gone.

"I could take you on my Venus run," the pilot said. He, too, was embarrassed. "But I'm afraid I'll have a full ship after that. Unless you can buy the weight and space. I'd be glad to take you free. But the company . . ."

Annie's eyes were full but she wasn't going to let them spill.

Sally brought Ben by, already looking self-consciously married.

"I'm sorry, honey," she said. "Look, Annie, if you want to come stay with us until another shipment of pioneers come to break ground, you're welcome. Maybe you'd—er—find one of them you liked."

It was a gesture of kindness, of course, but it made Annie's eyes spill. She turned her head away, toward the red hills. Red and the cultivated ones green. Christmas colors.

"Sure," Ben said. "Swell. Any friend of Sally's is a friend of mine."

And the way they looked at each other made Annie's heart lurch.

"Thanks, kids," she said. "But I don't believe I'll try it. And don't worry. This isn't the first time I've been stood up."

"Are you coming?" the pilot shouted across the field. "Hate to

rush you, but I've got a schedule to meet."

Was she coming? What else could she do?

"What happened to him, Ben?" Annie asked. "My—the other man that should have been here."

Ben worried a hole in the sand with one foot and cleared his throat. "He stayed home."

"You mean he's *alive!* Here?"

"Well . . . yes. But he didn't—"

"Never mind. I don't need anybody to strum a guitar under my window. If he couldn't get away from the farm today I can certainly go to him. I've got a pair of legs that'll walk around the world."

"You coming?" the pilot shouted.

"No!" Annie cried. "I live here."

The spaceship took off, a phoenix rising from the flames.

Ben was shuffling his feet, hands in his pockets. "We'd be proud to have you stay with us, Annie."

"Oh, cut it out, Ben. I'm no hothouse rose. Just tell me which way and I'll find my own farm." She paused, trying to guess his thoughts.

"You think he might be disappointed when he sees me? Is that it, Ben? I know I'm no pinup girl. But I'm a worker and a breeder. He'll see it. In the end, that's what's going to count."

Ben was still making holes in the sand with his feet, trying to say something.

"Please don't worry," Annie went on, "your friend won't be sorry. If he doesn't want to marry me right away—okay. I can understand it. But I can give him a chance to watch me work."

"That isn't it," Ben said finally. "I think you look fine, Annie. It's —it's *any* woman. He told them not to send a wife for him. *Any* woman."

"But that's ridiculous. He knows the laws. Five years and then a wife. Why did he stake out in the first place?"

"That was before," Ben answered.

"Before what?"

"Aw, it's not for me to say. Why don't you just forget Bradman. He's a good enough guy. But not for you. You come—"

"Which way and how far?"

Ben looked at her hard. "Okay. On Mars your life is your own." He pointed. "Second farmbubble you come to. And you'd better hurry. It ought to take eight hours and night falls like a ton of bricks here."

Annie made it in seven. Easy.

SHE WENT up to the transparent hemisphere. He was inside working. She shouted, but if he heard her he didn't look up.

She went to the flap that must be the door. There wasn't anything to knock on, so she opened the flap and walked in.

There was nothing in the room but a cot, kitchen equipment and lichen, growing on a number of tables. The air was richer than outside and Annie breathed it thirstily.

"I'm Annie Strug," she said, smiling and wishing it wasn't such an ugly name.

He glanced up, angry blue eyes under a growth of black hair. He didn't say a word.

Annie set her suitcase down and

looked out at the green growth on the hills.

"Look, Mr. Bradman," she cried suddenly, pointing a spatulate finger to the western horizon. "What in the name of heaven is that?" There was a catch of fright in her voice.

"We don't say 'mister' on Mars," he said reluctantly. "Brady. But you don't have to call me anything because you're leaving soon." He was a big, arid man with a sandy voice. But his hands, as he stripped the lumpy brown fruits from a giant lichen, were surprisingly delicate.

"What *is* it?" Annie asked again, turning instinctively to the big man for a reassurance and protection she had no reason to expect.

Bradman straightened and moved away from her, looking at the black giant growing up from the earth in the distance and moving straight toward them.

"It's a sandstorm," he said. "It'll be here in ten minutes."

Annie let out the breath she had been holding. "Oh. That doesn't sound so bad. I don't know what I thought it was. I was just frightened." She smiled shyly and apologetically at Bradman.

Bradman grimaced at her, his agate eyes frozen in a pallid face that should have gone with red hair. The sand-blown lines in his face were cruel. "Sister, you've got a smile like a slab of concrete. Don't try it again."

"You didn't *have* to say that," Annie said quietly, closing her eyes against the winds of her anger.

"You didn't have to come here," he replied. "Goodbye."

"I'm not leaving," she said, still holding tight the doors of her anger.

"*I* am." He paced heavily over the sand floor and pulled back the flap of the door.

"Where are you going?" Annie glanced back at the towering giant, now glowing red in the sunlight, like some huge, grotesque devil.

"Into the storm cellar. Nobody lives through a Martian sandstorm."

Annie ran after him. "For God's sake take me with you! You can't leave me . . ."

"Mine's built for one," he said, and pulled the top in over him as he disappeared into the hole.

Annie broke her fingernails pulling at the cover. The wind was blowing sand in her eyes. She saw blood staining the rim of her index finger. She pounded with her fists.

"Let me in!" she screamed. "In the name of God!" But all she heard was the keening sand in the wind.

She looked around. The devil was closer, malignant and hungry. It wanted to eat her alive.

It made her angry.

"I'll fight it," she screamed. "By God, I'll fight!"

Five minutes, she guessed. Maybe five minutes left. She ran into the house, ripped open her suitcase. Bundles of nylon marriage clothes. She began to sob. Some were with lace.

"Fight!" she shouted to herself. There was her oxygen mask. How much oxygen? Anybody's guess. It was made for maybe a few whiffs a day over a period of several months.

Swell. But it wouldn't keep the

sand from tearing through her eyeballs and flaying her alive.

Wrap in nylon nightgowns? Ridiculous.

Spacesuit?

Annie went through the one-room house as fast as she could. No spacesuit. Why should he have one?

Three minutes left.

Sand was blowing under the hemisphere, piling up at one end and oozing out beneath.

It was possible she would simply be buried.

The refrigerator!

That wasn't a refrigerator. Only a cabinet, loosely joined.

Annie went outside, on the side where the field of lichens grew up a smooth, stone hill. The red devil was whistling at her now; a low, insinuating whistle.

Something rattled faintly against one steel rib of the hemisphere. It was a shrub, about five feet tall.

Annie began to laugh hysterically. Brady had protected the shrub with loving care. It was tied to the steel rib through grommetted holes in the hemisphere, and covered with its own plastic bag to shield off the wind.

One minute.

The red devil was shouting now, laughing with triumph. He ran his sandy fingers through her hair and blew his gritty breath in her eyes.

She pulled the zipper at the bottom of the polyethylene bag that covered the shrub and yanked the bag off. It was heavy, almost oily plastic, slippery and pliant.

There was no time to decide whether it would be better inside or outside the house. She pulled the bag over her head inside out, so the zipper would close completely. Then she folded the zipper part under once and wedged herself as far as she could go into the space between shrub and hemisphere, holding the oxygen mask in her teeth.

With infinite care, though she was not likely to split the heavy bag, she pulled off her shoes and her heavy, woollen walking socks. She put the shoes back on. Her slacks covered her legs. Only her ankles were bare.

She unraveled one sock and stuffed the yarn in her ears. There was a sudden, remarkable quiet. Then, even through the yarn came the roar of the storm. For it was upon her.

She looked through the milky plastic into a wild, red inferno, spitting at her in furious frustration. Then she bound the other sock over her eyes.

She was in a blind, muffled world now, buffeted against the shrub and the wires and the steel rib, but not painfully, because of her heavy clothing. It was as though suddenly all her senses had been switched to the last pitch before silence.

"I might live," Annie thought. "I might."

THERE WAS sand in the bag now. Annie could feel it sifting under her collar and blowing up her ankles. Not much. It was coming from the bottom of the bag. Probably the end of the zipper had worked open just a little.

Was that the dull roar of the

storm through her stoppered ears or the rushing of her own blood? If sand were seeping in, the storm must still be on.

How did Bradman breathe in his storm cellar? Would the storm last long enough for the air to go bad? It would go bad fast, in an enclosed place on Mars.

Bradman. What sort of monster would walk off and let another human being die? Without a glance backwards? Did the cold desert wear the humanity out of a man? How did a human being get like that?

" 'You've got a smile like a concrete slab.' " Is that what you say to a person when you know you're about to leave them to die?

UNMARRIED WOMEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 21 AND 30. GOOD HEALTH. WELL ADJUSTED. MARRIAGE ON ARRIVAL. MARS TRANSPORT LEAVES OCT. 1.

Good health . . . well adjusted . . . she could see the printed words, red stereo words reaching out from the page. Unmarried women between . . . they came and went in her mind and there was a roar in her ears. The words were gone now. Only a redness that came and went. No. A blackness.

Annie snatched the exhausted oxygen mask off her face and gulped a pallid, sandy breath of air. It wouldn't do. She took the sock off her eyes and bound it around her nose and mouth. It would filter some of the sand out. She opened her eyes briefly and closed them. The grit stayed in. She didn't dare open them again.

But the storm looked weaker. Or was it her imagination?

She groped for the zipper. Foul air would kill her quicker than sand. She couldn't find it.

Hell with the zipper! She pulled her little mending kit out of her pocket and slashed the bag with the scissors.

The storm sounded louder now, with the bag gone. The sand blew under her eyelids. Ripped her face. Tore a burning circle around each ankle.

Annie put her face in her hands, breathing through her nose and the sock.

She held herself stiffly. She didn't want to cough.

The whole world was a blind, gritty pain. There was no end to think of. Only pain.

A grayness.

A blackness.

Finally, a voice. Bradman.

"You ruined my shrub. Did you have to slash the bag, too?"

Annie opened her eyes. They felt red and ruined. They were watering so much her cheeks were wet. She could hardly see.

She was having a coughing fit. She dragged herself upright. All she could see was sand. The plastic bubble had blown off the girders and if the furnishings and her suitcase were there, her eyes were still too dim to see them.

"Do you know what that shrub's worth on Mars?"

Annie found the yarn had fallen out of one ear and she pulled it out

of the other.

"Do you know what that *bag's* worth?"

Gall ran in her veins. She spat it out of her mouth.

She backed up to the steel beam and braced her feet against it, light in the Martian gravity.

"I told them not to send a woman out here."

She pushed off and sank her fist into his teeth. He went down.

She was too light. But he was too light, too. It evened out.

She turned his face and held it in the sand. Her strength was insane.

"Do you know what a human life is worth?" she screamed.

He struggled, but she fought his bucking body, kept his face buried in the sand until he was dead and a long time after.

An age passed. Annie was frozen in a world rimed over with white starlight, sequinned with frost.

Then the crosseyed moons came up.

She found an edge of the plastic bubble, rumpled and limp and half buried in the sand. She pushed off the heaviest hills of sand with her hands and pulled it out. She climbed up the anchored girders with it, and then slept the rest of the night in her own home.

The next day she dug out her household supplies from the sand.

The day after she cleared the sand from the lichens on her farm.

On the fourth day she called a few neighbors in and late in the evening she buried Bradman.

No one questioned her. It had been, after all, self-defense.

She kept the farm as well as any man. Better. She worked. How she worked! She kept herself numb with labor, her mind drunk with the liquors of fatigue.

After five years, he came. He just appeared inside the door flap, looking a little nervous but grinning.

"I'm Jack Hamstrong," he said, his voice full and wholesome, like Iowa corn. "I—you weren't at the spaceport so I figured, what the heck. I just walked."

"This is *my* farm," Annie said. "My hands are on every inch of it."

Hamstrong's ruddy face turned in on itself a little. "I know. I know the story. I didn't come to take anything away. I came to—good Lord, didn't you *know* you'd be sent a husband?"

Annie's eyes went queer, like a cat's. "A husband?" If they'd told her, she hadn't heard. "Go away," she said. She looked around at her farm, the fruits of her travail—alone. The virgin birth.

"No," he said firmly. "It's yours *and* mine. Legally. I'm not a mean man, Annie. You'll find me patient. But stubborn. I can wait."

Annie sighed. Or was it a shudder? She looked up again at the puckering edges of the evening sky.

She put down the knife she had been peeling a giant lichen with. She wiped her hands on her apron and lifted the door flap.

"All right, then," she said. "Wait."

"For what?"

"The sandstorm," she said.

And she got into the storm cellar and pulled down the weighty lid, locking it behind her. **END**

DISCIPLINE

BY MARGARET ST. CLAIR

"EXCUSE ME, sir," Denton said deferentially, "but isn't the gender of *'shar-su'* feminine?"

"No," Walsh replied brusquely. He turned away, to end the discussion, but Denton had already got *A Lexicon of the Bi-Yan Language* from its place on the cabin shelf, and was ruffling its pages.

"Shen—sheg—shar—" he read. "Here it is. *'Shar-su.* Adverbial noun of two terminations. Feminine. Warningly, in a warning manner. (To take) warning.' Yes . . . it does seem to be feminine."

Walsh felt his face growing hot. How could he have forgotten that the damned word was feminine now, in the revised Gerson-McMahon grammar? In his student days there hadn't been any gender at all in Bi-Yan, or Te-Hok as they called it then. It seemed to him that things had been going to pot ever since that upstart, Gerson, had put over his revised system of pronouncing Bi-Yan, ten years ago. It meant that older scholars had practically had to learn the language all over again. It was most unfair. Suppose there *had* been a few inconsistencies in the old phonetic system? Nobody could ever know how the Bi-Yan themselves had pronounced their language, and so what was the point of calling them Bi-Yan instead of Te-Hok? Or saying *shar-su* instead of *mosh-ta?*

He must have muttered the old word under his breath, because Denton said in that irritating way of his, "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Nothing. Never mind. Well, you've proved your point. But don't you think we ought to be getting back to the dig? It isn't wise to let robot shovels work too long unattended, you know. I imagine you'll agree with me about that, at any rate."

There was an instant's silence. Denton too had turned red. He stood holding the lexicon between his hands, his head lowered. Then he followed the older man through the airlock into the ship's changing room.

Their suits were hanging under sterilamps. Walsh climbed into his gear stiffly; his arthritic knee was bothering him again. Denton was ready before he was, and stood waiting while Walsh opened the outer lock.

Walsh jumped to the ground. If he didn't hurry, Denton would try to help him. Why had the Foundation saddled him with a "trainee-

No one had labored harder in alien archaeology than Walsh.

He was not going to let them destroy his life's work now.

assistant," anyhow? Did they think he was too old to excavate a Bi-Yan shrine without a younger man to help him? Hell, he was only sixty-four. An archaeologist wasn't old until he was eighty. Or did the Foundation think that he, the dean of Bi-Yan archaeologists, the top authority in the field, needed a younger brain to check up on his work?

The way to the dig was over rough ground. Like all the Proxima planets except one, Marianna had a thin, cold atmosphere, unbreathable by human standards, but the surface was covered with primitive algae, lichens, molds and a few mosses. The puzzle was why the Bi-Yan had erected most of their tomb-shrines on these inhospitable planets, and almost none on the mother world. That was one of the questions he was attempting to answer in the book he had in progress —*The Bi-Yan Tomb-Shrine: An Archaeological Estimate.*

Absorbed in these thoughts, Walsh stumbled over a loose stone. He would have taken a sharp fall if Denton hadn't caught him by the elbow and steadied him. "Thanks," Walsh said harshly, and jerked away.

They reached the dig in silence. The robot shovels were working away carefully at the excavation of the back wall of the shrine, the only part yet unexcavated. The shovels stopped every six inches for an automatic camera to take pictures of the sides of the trench.

It probably wasn't necessary to have so many pictures. It was a simple site. On the other hand, it was the best-preserved Bi-Yan tomb-shrine that anybody had ever found. All the others had been in various stages of wreckage. This one was almost miraculously perfect. Except for an enormous gaping hole in the left wall, caused by a meteor impact eons ago, it was almost as it had come from the hands of its builders.

Lovely . . . Walsh's ill-temper was leaving him. It was impossible to feel anger while looking at the shrine.

Denton was as affected as he. "Beautiful," Walsh heard him say softly. "Millennia have gone by. And yet it's like the first days of spring."

There were things to be said for Denton after all. "Let's go inside," Walsh said.

The plan of the shrine was like that of all the other Bi-Yan tomb-shrines. A smallish oval building, perfectly proportioned, with a deeply recessed door.

Inside, in the shrine proper, were the double storerooms, one on either side of the door, where the offerings to nourish the dead were kept. And then the inner shrine, with the checkered twenty-foot ellipse on the floor that marked the "holy of holies," and the statues of the dead whom the tomb—actually a cenotaph—was designed to commemorate.

"Stay clear of the ellipse," Walsh cautioned automatically as they stepped into the inner shrine.

Denton grinned. "Still think there's a density field generator under it, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. That, or something very

similar." Walsh raised an arm to indicate the calligraphic inscriptions that ran around the interior wall of the cella. "The warnings about touching the 'holy of holies' are certainly explicit. The curse . . . Sooner or later we'll try some experiments to find out just what is under the floor."

"Ye-es," Denton replied. "There's no doubt there's something under there. Fragments of machinery have been found under the ellipses in other digs. But—" He began to walk up and down restlessly, between Walsh and the ellipse.

"But!" Walsh said, trying to laugh. He didn't like the way Denton kept arguing with him. "Do you think it was merely a coincidence that the dirt in the cella had stayed completely clear of the elliptical area? You remember, Denton—the cella was half full of dirt. It had been drifting in through the hole in the wall for centuries. It was packed up to the ceiling in spots. But there wasn't a grain of dust on the ellipsoid."

"Oh, I remember," Denton said, laughing. "I'll never forget those two weeks with hand tools. But—"

"But what?" Walsh said with a touch of irritability.

"Well, sir—" He hesitated. "Sir, what was the holy of holies *for?*"

"For?" Walsh repeated rather blankly.

"Yes, sir. What did they use it for?"

"It was the center of the shrine, the focal point. If they 'used' it for anything—if there's actually a density field generator under it—I think it was to immolate victims."

"To immolate victims?" Denton repeated.

"Animal victims, in honor of the dead man whose cenotaph the tomb was."

"In honor of the dead man," Denton repeated in an unsatisfied voice. He began to walk up and down even more rapidly.

ABRUPTLY he stopped in front of Walsh. "Look here, sir," he said, "have you considered—"

"Considered what?"

"Considered—" Denton paused to swallow— "considered, sir, that this may not be a shrine?"

"May not be a shrine!" Walsh felt a touch of pure amazement. His eyebrows went up. He began to laugh. "Oh, my dear boy!"

Denton flung out one hand in an impatient gesture. "Please, sir! What I mean is, why does everyone take for granted that the Bi-Yan constructions on the outer planets *are* shrines?"

After a moment, Walsh decided to treat the absurd question as if it were serious. "For a number of reasons," he replied. "The tomb 'curse' —you can read it on the walls here yourself—that is one of them. Then, there is the offering of food to the dead, and the holy of holies in the center. And, finally, the very existence of the shrines, so beautifully wrought, so filled with art treasures. There is nothing other than shrines that they *could* be."

"Isn't there?" Denton asked keenly. "Isn't any other explanation possible?"

His voice had taken on that

needling edge that Walsh so disliked. He felt himself growing angry, and it exasperated him. "No," he answered. "No, it isn't." He turned away.

"But, sir—"

"I don't want to discuss it further. You're not here to argue with me, Denton, but to be trained in archaeology."

Denton stepped in front of him, between Walsh and the elliptical area. "Don't be such a fool," he said in a low, choked voice. ". . . Sorry. I— Sorry. You get under my skin. But if you'd only listen—"

"You couldn't tell me anything," said Walsh, losing control of himself. "You're a young ass who brays instead of thinking. Keep your hee-haws to yourself." His hands had clenched.

"You old fool!" Denton cried wildly. "It's not a shrine, it's a ma—"

He was not allowed to finish the sentence. At the repetition of the unbearable word "fool," Walsh, blind with fury, struck out.

It was an old man's blow, weak and badly aimed. But Denton involuntarily stepped backward to avoid it. He stepped across the dark-checkered rim, fairly into the elliptical area.

His mouth came open. Walsh heard him give a faint cry. His body grew diaphanous. In less than two seconds after he had taken the backward step, he was gone. He had disappeared.

Gone . . . Walsh looked around dazedly. It had happened so quickly that he couldn't take it in. One moment there had been the argument, and his sudden anger. The next, Denton had been gone. Walsh felt an irrational impulse to go about the shrine looking for him.

What had happened? Walsh had always felt the "holy of holies" was dangerous, but now that its potency had been actually shown, Walsh was stunned. The density field generator must still have been active, after all these ages; poor Denton had been immolated in much the same way the old Bi-Yan priests' sacrificial victims had been. An engineer could examine the generator later and find out how it worked. Walsh wouldn't poke about with it —he didn't want to share Denton's fate.

Had it been his fault? He gave a deep sigh. No, he didn't think so. True, he had struck the blow that had driven Denton into the danger area. But on the other hand, he had warned him against the spot again and again, and Denton hadn't listened. There was a certain poetic justice—Walsh managed a shaky laugh—in Denton's having fallen victim to the very "curse" whose existence he had denied.

Walsh felt an overpowering fatigue. He hadn't liked Denton. Indeed, he had hated him. But it had been dreadful to see the young man disappear like that. Walsh wanted to go back to the ship and rest—and, now that there was no longer a need to keep up appearances, there was no reason why he shouldn't. He would feel better after a rest.

He went outside the shrine, still haunted by the illogical feeling

that Denton must be hiding in it. He shut down the robot shovels. He switched off the lights. He'd come back later. . . . What was it Denton had been trying to say when he disappeared?

"This isn't a shrine, it's a ma—" A what? What would the word have been if Denton had lived to finish it? Walsh didn't even have an idea what the first syllable would have been. Man? Mar? Mat? Matter . . . well, it probably *didn't* matter. Denton was gone.

WALSH entered the ship's main cabin, switched on the phosphors, and lay down in his bunk. After he'd rested, he'd get himself something to eat. And, before he went to bed, he'd tape an account of Denton's mishap for the ship's log.

Desperately tired as he was, he couldn't relax. He kept shifting about on his mattress and sighing. No matter how he had felt about Denton, it had been appalling to see the younger man's body thin out and disappear. Denton—

What had Denton been trying to say?

Walsh swung his feet around and sat up on the edge of his bunk. After a moment he rose and went over to Denton's bunk. He opened the foot-locker.

Denton's diary was on top of the folded shirts and underwear, just where Walsh had often seen him put it. Walsh went back to his own bunk with it.

He opened the book. He wouldn't go too far back in the entries—say a week or ten days. Denton's writing was clear and easy to read.

Almost at once Walsh found traces of what he was looking for. "More than ever I doubt the reality of the Bi-Yan 'curse,' " ran an entry dated a week ago. "The 'curse' inscribed on the cella of the shrine, about whose direfulness Walsh is so insistent, seems to me, properly read, much less of a curse than a caution. Or—an idea I am just beginning to form—a series of instructions. Instructions for what? I don't know. I can't but feel, though, that Walsh is basing his interpretation on a misconception. I don't suppose it will do much good to tackle him about this."

Walsh raised his eyebrows. He gave a short laugh. But the curse had got Denton—poor young fellow—in the end.

He read on. Two days on unimportant things. Then, "I *cannot* accept the reality of the 'neolithic psychology' Walsh talks so much about. No comparisons with the tombs and shrines of ancient Egypt will convince me. It is, to me, incredible that people as technically advanced as the Bi-Yan could believe that by putting food in the tomb-shrines of their dead they were providing for them in the after-world.

"Bi-Yan art is unsurpassed. We have a considerable body of evidence that their spaceflight had carried them to the ends of our galaxy. And these people thought they could feed their dead—or, rather, the images of their dead; no one has ever found any bodily remains in a Bi-Yan tomb-shrine—

with canned protein? Faugh!

"Nor does Walsh's lugging in the 'transubstantiation' of the old Catholic mass-ritual make his idea about the Bi-Yan any the more convincing. Again, faugh!"

Denton seemed, Walsh thought sourly, to have used most of the space in his diary in trying to refute whatever Walsh had told him. He went on with his reading.

The day before yesterday's entry was only one line: "I have a hypothesis."

And then the last entry of all, yesterday: "Yes, I have a hypothesis. And, unlike Huygens and his idea about the existence of the rings of Saturn, I am not going to encode it elaborately.

"The Bi-Yan shrines are not shrines at all. They are relay stations in a space-spanning system.

"Why hasn't anyone else suspected this? There are, I think, two reasons. One, the surpassing beauty of the Bi-Yan installations. And, two, the fact that no Bi-Yan 'shrine,' except the one Walsh and I are currently engaged in excavating, has ever been found reasonably intact. Meteor falls, mechanical failure in the course of ages, and wars have gutted them. Only in the present 'shrine' has the 'holy of holies,' which I suspect of being a matter-transmitter, survived."

. . . *which I suspect of being a matter-transmitter.* Walsh's whole body was trembling. Oh, yes, Denton's idea—damn him, *damn* him—had a horrible cogency. The cans of food: not offerings, but provisions for travelers. The curses, not curses but warnings and instructions on how to handle awesome potencies.

Yes, Denton was undoubtedly right. And Walsh's work—his whole work, the work of his whole life—had been wrong. He had built on sand.

Everything he had written had been wrong. His new book, the book he had been preparing for thirty years to write, could never be written. It would be nothing but lies. And he would be a laughing stock. The dean of Bi-Yan archaeologists. Talking about neolithic psychology as if he knew something. It had taken a smart *young* man to show him up.

Walsh had to bite his lips to keep from groaning. Archaeology had been the only thing he had ever had, the only thing he had ever cared for. And now it had been taken away from him, forever, ruined by a few pages in a diary. Pages written by a smart *young* man.

No. No, it hadn't. No, it *hadn't.*

Walsh didn't even hesitate. He didn't even give an order to his fingers. Of their own accord they reached for the diary and ripped the bad pages out.

He drew a terrible, shuddering breath. On wobbling legs he walked over to the waste-reducer and threw the pages in. They flared up and were gone.

It was going to be all right. He could forget all about the nonsense Denton had written. Now he could go ahead and write his own book. His wonderful, exhaustive, monumental book.

For a moment Walsh covered

his face with his hands. God, if only he hadn't been curious! Now, before he could think about his book, he'd have to fix things. He'd destroyed the diary, yes. But he hadn't put things back to where they'd been before. He'd have to do a lot of lying to accomplish that.

He'd have to make up some plausible account of what had happened to Denton, something that didn't involve the material working of the Bi-Yan curse. And then he'd have to destroy the shrine.

It was so beautiful! But as long as it was intact, it was a danger to him. The first engineer, if not the first archaeologist, to investigate it would surmise what the "holy of holies" was for. There must be a lot of machinery under the ellipsoid area where Denton had disappeared. Walsh would have to destroy it. There was some blasting powder among the ship's stores. Perhaps he could fake damage from a meteor fall.

He was so tired. He'd try to concoct some reasonable-sounding story about Denton's disappearance, and get it into the log tonight. He didn't think he'd be able to sleep at all unless he got at least part of his difficulties settled. And tomorrow, when he was a little fresher, he'd try to destroy the telltale machinery.

WHAT COULD have happened to Denton, reasonably? A young man, strong, impetuous . . . Oh, now he had it.

Denton had contracted a general infection from one of the local fungi or bacteria—it had been known to happen—and in his delirium had wandered off into the wasteland while Walsh was asleep.

Then . . . oh, yes. Then Walsh had gone after him in the ship's launch, and hadn't been able to find him. He simply hadn't been able to find him, that was all.

It was such a simple story that Walsh was sure people would believe it. It wasn't complicated enough to sound like a lie. . . . When he read it into the log, he'd put in some sad reflections about how Denton must even now be dying of asphyxiation.

And *that* was probably the truth, Walsh thought. Wherever the matter-transmitter had sent Denton, even if there had been a still-functioning receptor at the other end, it wasn't likely he'd be able to get away from there. Assuming he'd survived the journey, Denton must even now be sitting on the bleak surface of some wretched planet, watching the gauge on his air tank slip around to zero, and wondering how much longer he could last.

A wretched way to die. But at least this was something Walsh didn't have to blame himself for. He wasn't even morally responsible. He hadn't sent him there.

He switched on the recorder. Better get his account of the matter down now, while it was still clear in his mind. Tomorrow he'd destroy the site.

He switched the recorder off again. It wasn't so much that he minded telling lies about what had

happened to Denton. And certainly no reasonable person could expect him to go after Denton, to risk his own life trying to save a man he hated. He could excuse himself these things.

But he couldn't excuse himself if he destroyed the site.

He had put Denton's diary in the waste-reducer; that was disgraceful, but a personal matter. He was willing to connive at Denton's death; he wasn't under any obligation to try to save him. But he couldn't destroy an archaeological site. A science, in the old and honorable term, was a *discipline.*

Walsh's head had gone up a little. He might be old, and a fool. He might be willing to tell lies. But he was a scientist. And he couldn't destroy an archaeological site.

Once more he switched on the tape recorder. He gave a full and complete account of what had happened, including his destruction of the diary. He hesitated. Then he said, "I am going to try to rescue him. I do not think my chances are very good. Earth technology has not yet been able to build a matter-transmitter, and I have no idea what being 'transmitted' will be like. But I am willing to try to rescue him. End of entry."

He opened the ship's belly, got out the launch, and climbed into the tiny cabin. On low manual power he worked the craft over the rough terrain, through the hole in the wall, and onto the rim of the elliptical "holy of holies". He made sure that the nose of the launch was centered on the same dark-checkered area that Denton had stepped over. If there was any control system built into the transmitter—anything that determined where you landed—that might be it. One more little push, and the craft would be over in the transmitting area.

He paused. Did he still hate Denton? Yes, as much as ever. The smart young bastard. The smart *right* young son of a bitch.

He was risking his life to save a man he still hated. He couldn't explain his action, even to himself. He grinned sourly. Still faintly grinning, he touched the manual control and gave the craft the last little push. **END**

IN THE JAG-WHIFFING SERVICE

BY DAVID R. BUNCH

I HAD ALWAYS said there was an easier way. And I think, when we invade, I'll be proved right. But you know how things get started, and how powerful tradition can be and how old-line thinking can keep people, even a whole planet, in a rut.

The big cargo saucers were getting bigger and bigger each year, what with the growing popularity of the jag-whiff places, and the jag-whiff places themselves were growing in number with more and more people going "on the jag" because —well, partly because—of troubles in the sky, like strange balls whirling around and unexplainable objects going *beep* and *wuff* and *wuff wuff*. We of the saucers had slipped past these first baby objects O.K. and knew they were just little old harmless ping-pongs that chattered a little now and then like a greeting going past. But tell the people that! They'd throw a big glass on one of the whirlers and see spikes sticking out and maybe a big pair of eyes inside and a nose and a long red tongue hanging down. "The Earthits!" they'd scream like they'd just fallen into one of the hot canals, and they'd race off to a jag-whiff jag like Judgment-Day-of-Sins itself was after them. And the funny part of it is, I guess the people were right being scared like that, the way things turned out.

But is it any wonder we were having to increase the size of the saucers to space-haul all that jag-whiff up through the rattleballs? And a big reason makes me think it could have been done more efficiently, we were having to take so much junk stuff, extra accessories

The jag-stuff in those black rings was wonderful, but why did they have to package it with so many extra accessories?

I guess you'd call it, to get the jag-whiff. Our Earthit contacts were always giving us the old breeze about cost of labor, cost of materials, improvement in design and next year's inventories. Apparently the dealers didn't understand at all what the play was with us because they'd give us so much blab-blab that didn't apply, all about futuristic design and about how one jag-whiffer machine had it all over another jag-whiffer machine, which to us didn't mean a thing. And we didn't talk, because we'd heard already how some Earthits feared the saucers, and how some Earthits said they didn't exist at all, and how some other Earthits were on the fence, saying maybe they did maybe they didn't so what? and how there was wide fear and great unrest among the Earthits in general. And when it's like that, and you're a possible source of the wide fear and unrest, a whole planet full of people can easily decide they don't want any part of contributing to your pleasure.

And that's what the jag-whiff was to us actually, pleasure. Back home when our troubles had us down, or maybe we just felt like raising a little dust, we'd go to a jag-whiff place. We'd plunk down our pay-pictures, and the whiff-tender would wheel out one of those black rings, which they have to keep under special pressures in our climate. Then he'd screw on the tube with the face piece and we'd take our whiff and something out of the black ring—just seemed like real thick chest filler to me—would spread all through to the farthest reaches of our breath bags and go into our blood and suddenly all five of our eye sticks would start whirling and focusing and zeroing-in for dames and our arms and legs would start a kick and a slap dance, enough to shake the planet down. And when our face spines and head tubes would go into that special sharp buzz of contentment, we'd know we were on our jag, full and warm and happy with as much pleasure as any Martian is ever supposed to know. But we never revealed the play to our Earthit contacts, just slipped in at night in our noiseless saucers with all lights dimmed, cleared our cargo tubes of the tons of pay-picture we'd brought (green copy of the Earthits' currency) and took on as many of the gleaming jag-whiffer machines as our cargo tubes would hold.

BUT IT IS ten years now since a jag-whiffer captain has steered his saucer through the whirling balls. It got so the satellites would drum on the saucer from a long way out. Deafening! Dreadful! We saw what was coming and we tried to beat it. We saucered around the clock for a while trying to stockpile enough jag-whiff to last us. But of course we couldn't. We are about out of it now, and our land is strewn with the glittery shells that were once attached to the black tubes of the jag-whiff.

And it could all have been done so different. I'm sure it could. That stuff wasn't just in the tubes of the jag-whiffer machines down there, I'm convinced of that. That stuff

may have been all around us down there. I believe it was. But our government would insist we get into these suits, about so far out, you see, about the time we'd start contacting the rattle balls. And they threatened us with removal of the contacts if we broke the rules about the suits. In addition to that, they said we'd die anyway. So you see how life can be—grim and fuzzy and unsafe most of the time. And to make things even more uncertain, just because they couldn't duplicate the product we were hauling, our scientists got uppity and ignored the whole problem. Except to run off to the jag-whiff places of course to ease their frustrations, which they did plenty often when they thought they wouldn't be seen.

But when we invade down through there, which we plan to do soon now, with our special equipment to catch and explode the whirlyballs, I think we're going to find out plenty. Among other things, I think we're going to find out that the stuff we cargoed up here at such great cost, that was so inefficiently packaged, is all around us down there. I think when we take over down there, with the right filtering equipment, jag-whiffing may become as common and economical as breathing. And another thing, I think we're going to find out we were taken for quite a ride by the Earthits with their silly way of packaging jag-whiff. Imagine having to buy all that chrome and steel, guaranteed to go over one hundred miles per hour, just to get four little black rings of whiff. And for all the Earthits talked about it, the rings with the white sidewalls didn't whiff one bit better than the others! **END**

THE LAST DAYS OF L.A.

(Continued from page 74)

a man in working clothes hits you with a lunch bucket. You let go of the woman and hit back at him.

"Help! Help!" the woman is still yelping.

"Call the cops—a man's trying to rape a girl!"

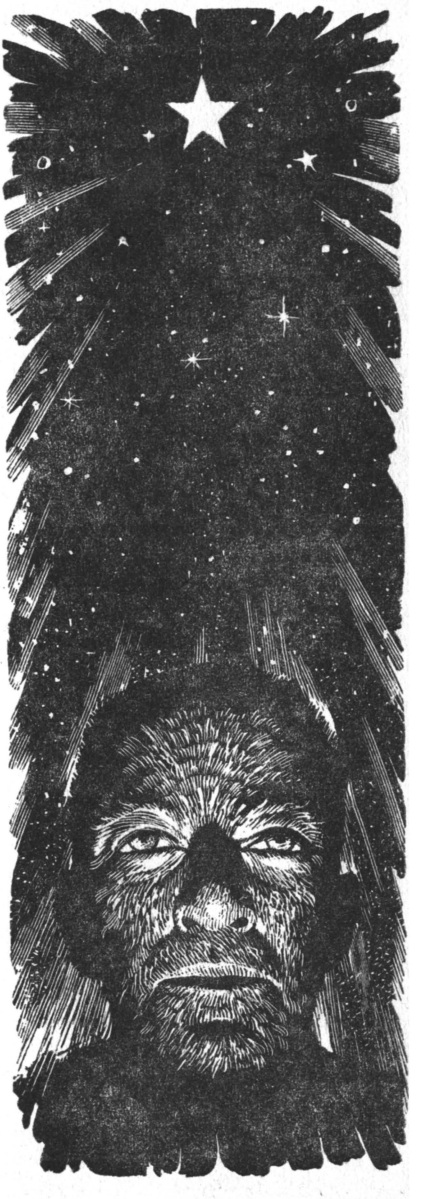
Someone hits you with an umbrella, and you know it's the same dear little old lady. A guy grabs you by the neck and tries to throw you to the ground but you kick him in the groin and trade punches with two others. Then they're all over you. The old lady trips you and you go down. She starts beating you with the umbrella as a man's foot smashes against your head. You see a woman's nylon-clad leg as she raises her spiked heel and brings it ripping down across your cheek. Other feet crash into you.

"Let me help you," you're still yelling, but they keep on kicking. Some of the shoes have blood on them, you notice through the haze, but they still keep on kicking.

Then it's getting dark and you lie there and think how Henny Penny—or was it Chicken Little?—must have felt. You want to tell someone about it but you don't. You just lie there and wait for the screaming sirens to come and take you away. **END**

STAR OF REBIRTH

Atanta knew the red star was the home of his people after death.... And for months now it had been growing brighter.



BY BERNARD WALL

EVERYONE should have known. They should have known as surely as though it were written in the curved palm of the wind. They should have known when they looked up at the empty sky; they should have known when they looked down at the hungry children. Yet somehow they did not know that their last migratory hunt was almost over.

The straggling band had woven its slow trail among the mountains for forty days of vanishing hopes and shrinking stomachs. Ahead of the main party, the scouts had crawled until their knees and palms were raw; but still there was no track of game, and the only scent was that of the pungent air that rose from the ragged peaks of ice.

At last they halted, only a few footsteps from The Cave of the Fallen Sun, the farthest western reach of their frozen domain. In the rear of the column the women threatened the children into silence and the scouts went first to the mouth of the cave to look for signs of an animal having entered. Presently the scouts stood up with their massive shoulders drooping, turned to the rest and made a hopeless gesture.

Atanta, who stood alone and motionless between the scouts and the rest of his band, knew that all were waiting for him to use his magic to make a great leopard appear in the empty cave. "A *very* great leopard," he thought sarcastically. Enough to feed them all for a hundred days. A leopard so huge it would whine pitifully while they killed it. A leopard so gigantic that it would not leave its footprints in the snow. Indeed, Atanta was sure, the leopard his people wanted would be much too large to fit into the cave. Well, perhaps there would be a bird.

He held himself very tall and straight so that his dejection might not show to either his people or his gods. But after forty days of the trackless hunt, Atanta felt with certainty that the gods were deaf or dead . . . or at least very far away.

The sun was hot and the gods were gone, and he would not keep his people waiting with false hopes. He closed his eyes and took up the crude bone cross that hung from his waist, and he cursed the gods with silent venom. And when his chastisement of the delinquent gods was done, he dropped the cross to dangle at his waist again.

Two hunters moved stealthily forward, their spears disappearing before them into the cave. It was somehow pathetic, Atanta felt, the way they moved so courageously into the empty darkness.

How many caves had there been, Atanta wondered, since they left the mouth of the river? Fully a dozen, always empty, except for the scattered bones of bears and men. Perhaps he should have kept his people at the river. No, he told himself. He had done the only thing he could do. The season had been bad and their meager catch of fish carefully stored. But the already heavy ice thickened with the approach of winter and made fishing almost impossible. When their supplies were almost gone, he had done as so many had done before him. He had led his people on the futile

hunt, hoping for the miracle of a dozen sleeping bears or a great white leopard. Such miracles had happened in the past. Once he had gone with his father on such a winter hunt.

But miracles without footprints were quite another matter. That was the way his people lived: just existing when the catch was good, starving when it was not.

Presently the two hunters stepped out of the darkness with the blunt ends of their spears dragging behind them, and their countenances told the others that the cave was indeed empty.

Children began to cry. Women picked up their packs and slung them across their shoulders. The men mumbled inaudible words that turned into whisps of smoke in the icy air. At Atanta's signal, everyone entered the ice-floored cave, thankful at least to be out of the blinding brightness of the sun and snow, and into the soothing dark where they could rest.

Atanta stood while his people stretched their furry bodies out over the frozen ground. He looked down at his woman who lay before him, watching him with her black eyes large and warm. It made his stomach clutch itself into an angry knot, to see her young face so drawn with exhaustion and hunger. There were lines in her face he had never seen before; the fur of her head and body had lost its sheen and was now brittle and dry. She patted the ice and motioned him to lie down beside her; but he turned his eyes away from her, because he knew that he must tell the others before he could rest.

"Listen to me," he said, and his voice rang through the ice-sheeted cave. The tired eyes of the men and women opened and everyone sat up.

How should he tell them? They were waiting now. Should he simply say it swiftly and have done with it? Tell them that they had followed an impotent god until now they were to die? Surely he should prepare them somehow. Prepare them for the importance of what he was to say.

"Listen, for I tell you of the end of the empty caves."

He stood silent for a moment watching hope filter into their faces, hope that made their dull eyes shine in the semi-darkness.

"Do not let joy curl your lips until you have listened, for it would be a false joy."

The lines of tiredness and worry returned to the faces about him. Atanta did not look down at his woman's face, for she knew him very well and she would know what he had to do.

"WE ARE told of a time long ago, when the cave of man was filled with food as the night is filled with stars, and the caves and the men covered the five corners of the world. But these were not the caves that we know now. They were magic caves, and these were magic men. The men of that long-ago world created the very mountains into which they dug their caves. The mountains they created raised their peaks through the high-

est clouds, and every mountain held countless caves . . . caves stuffed with bear and fish and captive winter winds. These were magic times when every man was a priest. Every man could make fire blossom from nowhere and every man could fly through the air like a bird.

"All this was long ago when the world was young, and the world was hot, and our people could live in the heat. But Nuomo the God of Night became jealous of these magic men, for he had seen them fly into the night itself in search of the stars. And so Nuomo wrapped his black wings around the world and shook it for ten tens of days. The world cracked and burst with flame that sprouted up into the darkened sky. The people ran in terror and their mountain-caves were sucked down into the earth or burned into ash by the flame. At the end of the ten tens of days, Nuomo thought that all were dead and so he rolled a sheet of ice across the earth to cool it.

"Only one man was able to escape the wrath of that ancient god. He was an old man with only little magic and he felt himself on the edge of death. He took from his body a rib which he fashioned into a son. But he made the son in such a way that he could live upon the ice itself, as we do now.

"The son knew that the old man was about to die, and so he said: 'Father, use your magic to make a woman to keep me from being lonely.'

" 'Woman!' the old man cried. 'I should think you would want me to teach you the use of magic.'

" 'Yes, father,' the son answered, 'if you can.'

" 'No,' the old man told him. 'I am so near to death there is no time. A woman will have to do.'

"And so the old man drew from his chest another rib which he fashioned into a woman. This being done, he turned to his son and said: 'My son, the time has come for me to die. Do not mourn for me, for when each evening comes you will see my home—the red star which travels quickly in the night. For many ten tens of years, I have been preparing it to become a suitable place to be born again. When your time comes, you too will be welcome there.'

"Thus saying, the old man placed his hands upon the shoulders of his son. Then he wrapped his cloak about him and rose up into the heavens to the star of rebirth.

"Only when the old man had gone to the star of rebirth, did the son turn to his woman. Only then did he see that she had not been made in his image, for she was hairless and delicate and not made to live upon the ice. She was a Hotland woman. But the son, whose name was Dectar, took his woman whose name was Sontia, shielded her from the icy winds and comforted her as best he could. Some of their children had hair and loved the cold; some were weak and hairless and did not. In those days the hunting was good and the strong sheltered the weak, fed them, carried them on the long hunts. But Sontia was a jealous woman. Jealous of her strong husband and their offspring of his kind. She

prayed to Ram, God of the Sun, and begged him to melt the ice. And so the ice began to melt, leaving the Hotlands a paradise for weak selfish creatures. Sontia deserted Dectar, taking with her those of their children who were hairless and weak like herself.

"When the ice began to melt, we sons of Dectar were forced to hunt farther northward year by year. The game became not so plentiful as it had been. Our people learned to fish and hunt as we do now—to fish in the summer, to hunt when the ice becomes thick.

"But the jealous sons of Sontia who swarm in the Hotlands were not content to see us perish year by year. Even to this day, if we should wander down to the edge of their domain to beg for a few scraps of food, they would answer our plea with death. And even in death they would allow us no dignity, but would strip us of our hides and wear them in mockery.

"I tell you of this now, because when a man comes on a long hunt which ends in an empty cave, it is well to remember and be proud of the successful hunts of other years."

Atanta took the white bone cross carefully from about his waist.

"It was I who first saw this god go across the sky." He held up the cross for all to see. "It went slowly like a bird from horizon to horizon and I knew that it was not a bird for it did not flap its wings, but kept them still and outstretched. I believed it to be the god who would fill our hunting trails with game, but now I know that this god is impotent. At worst it is a foolish god, lying somewhere on the white floating ice of heaven, wallowing in idleness while my people starve."

He dropped the cross to the smooth ice floor, knelt and smashed the cross into pieces with one swift blow of his hammerstone.

When he looked up the people were silent and unmoving. Perhaps he had been a fool. Perhaps he had told them nothing they didn't know. Perhaps they had already given up and knew that they would die here in the cave and that he could produce no magic to help them.

"Will you take another god?" one of the scouts asked.

"I see no other god to take."

"Then do you think we can be delivered without a god?"

Wasn't it evident? Surely they must know. Should he tell them there was no deliverance, with or without a god?

"I don't know," he lied. "I don't know."

Ark's woman drew a strip of leather from the mouth of a sleeping child and put it in her own mouth. "Then you'll have to deliver us yourself," she said and lay down to go to sleep.

A sudden rage burned in Atanta's brain. The muscles in his square jaw trembled as he glared at the sprawling furry figures, who would lie there and die while they waited like children for him to provide for the future.

Abruptly he turned and left the cave, and walked out under the yellow sun that made the ice-covered mountains shimmer. He felt that he must get away from them. He did not want to die with fools.

THE SUN blazed hot upon the hair of his head and back as he traveled rapidly downward and away from his people in the cave. He traveled too quickly to think of anything else but where his next footstep should be, and within an hour he was at the edge of a great ice field that stretched itself out before him like the footprint of a giant. There could be no more swift traveling now. Cautiously, he started out over the empty plain, prodding the ice before him with his spear.

It was not that they were children. He knew that he had been wrong to judge them so. There was nothing they could do. They had walked their lives away on the long hunt that ended now without a sign or scent of prey.

And he, Atanta, had led them. They were strong and loyal people, too, for if he ordered them up and back along the trail that they had come, each man would go without a word and hope that there was some magic Atanta had yet to use.

But the animals were gone and the gods were gone, and there was but one thing left. He would go down below this range where the Hotlanders were known to be. Probably he would simply die in the sun. If not, the Hotlanders would kill him on the spot, as they were usually so quick to do. The Hotlanders had good magic. Not as good as his ancestors', Atanta was sure. But still, they could kill a man from a great distance, simply by pointing a magic charm and making a certain noise.

Perhaps the Hotlanders wouldn't see him and perhaps he would not die in the sun. Perhaps he would find some game by the edge of the Hotlands. Perhaps . . .

The sun had tucked itself behind a white western peak when Atanta at last came to the end of the ice field. Tired now, he crouched for a moment like a bird with his bottom sitting squarely upon his heels. Presently his tiredness became true exhaustion, so he dug himself a little space in a shadowed snow bank and then covered himself with a mound of snow.

While Atanta slept, a great lost bird came on the last feeble rays of light, flapping its black wings because there was no wind to glide upon and there was no footing but the frozen ground. When above Atanta, the bird caught a slight scent in the air, held its wings stiff and tilted itself to glide in slow circles that became smaller and smaller and ever lower until at last the bird's tired feet sank deep into the snow beside the mound where Atanta lay. The bird folded its wings about itself and pecked at the mound, its beak digging cautious holes in the snow. Atanta stirred slightly at this intrusion, and the bird drew its beak away and flapped its wings against the windless air and flew away.

When Atanta woke, the night wind had curled itself with a scream about the mountains and brought with it a fresh snow. He dug himself from his bed and smiled with his eyes closed at the night that sent the wind and snow to caress his hair. When he opened his eyes, his face was tilted upward to the sky,

and he smiled at the lonely stars.

The moon was full and heavy tonight, and it hung low in the western sky. Atanta wished his woman could be here beside him, nestling close to him in the soft snow, her delicate hands caressing the hair on his cheek. He thought of her hands rubbed raw from the straps of the heavy pack. Perhaps it was better that he had left without saying goodbye.

He felt rested enough to go on, and was about to hoist himself to his feet when the red star caught his attention. For months now it had been growing brighter with every night that passed, as if heralding some important event. This was the red star of rebirth, and he wished he could believe that he and his people would someday go to live there; but he no longer believed in anything.

It was then that Atanta saw the god. It was a great and fearful god that turned the black night yellow and screamed louder than the wind. In an instant it fell out of the sky; then the yellow light was gone and the voice of the god was gone, and the dark night returned and the voice of the wind returned.

Atanta fell to his knees and his trembling hand etched out the sign of the cross in the snow. Surely this must be a sign. The god had come out of the sky and fallen in the path before him—forbidding him to go into the lowlands. He knew he must pray and ask forgiveness but for many moments he was too frightened to pray, and when the fear subsided, he was too proud. Why should he pray to a god who would let his people starve? He raised his eyes, and saw the very head of the god peering up above the next rise.

He stood up with a semblance of dignity on his unsteady legs. When the god did not move from behind the rise for many minutes, Atanta's courage overbalanced his fear and he kicked the snow with his foot and obliterated the sign of the cross. He waited for the god to strike him dead, but nothing happened. The head of the god was motionless.

Atanta set out with cautious steps. Presently he hid behind a little ice dune where he could see the god in its awesome entirety. Now he was close enough to hurl his spear at it if the god suddenly struck in anger; and he gripped the spear in readiness. Suddenly he was filled with a new awe, for he realized that this was not the god of the cross! There were no stiff wings at its side. It was like a huge shining spear with its dull end stuck in the snow and its point stretching up to the sky. But how could this be a god?

Perhaps he should not yet pray. Time had shown there were many false gods.

Presently a black mouth appeared magically in the side of the great still thing. The mouth sucked in the icy air for a moment and then extended a long jagged tongue down to the fresh snow.

Atanta saw something move in the blackness of the gaping mouth and then a figure stepped out onto the tongue and looked about at the falling snow and the white jagged mountains in the darkness. It was the figure of a man. At least it was

in a man's shape, but it did not look like a man of the mountains nor did it look like the man-creatures of the Hotlands. It walked slowly and laboriously down the tongue, and it seemed to be made of the same shiny stuff as the tongue and the flying wingless god itself. For a moment, Atanta wondered which was the god. The great huge thing with the mouth and the tongue, or the man-thing?

The stranger stepped off the tongue into the snow where he knelt and scooped up the snow in his arms, tossed it into the wind which hurled it to the ground again. Then he stood and clutched his head. For a moment Atanta thought he had taken his own head off, but then he could tell that he had taken a covering off his head which he tossed into the snow. Then it seemed that the man had been entirely covered, like the men of the Hotlands who wore furs.

Presently the man had taken off all his covering, and stretched his furry arms up to feel the sweetness of the wind. Atanta leaped up, shouting his surprise. For this was a true man.

For a moment the man was startled and then his face filled with joy. Showing his empty palms, he began to walk slowly toward Atanta.

Atanta moved to meet him, the dark fur of his shoulders glistening in the moonlight. He spoke, but the man did not understand. Then he pointed up to the sky, then to the man, and tilted his head questioningly.

The man smiled and nodded his head. He pointed to the sky, but not straight up. He pointed to a spot low in the west.

He pointed to the star of rebirth.

While Atanta watched in unbelieving awe, the man touched his own chest, then stooped to lay his palms on the snow at his feet. Then he pointed once more to the red star and made a rapid upward gesture. Then he laid his closed hands beside his head and pretended to be asleep. His fingers opened and closed, again and again. "Many sleeps," said Atanta, understanding. "Tens of ten sleeps."

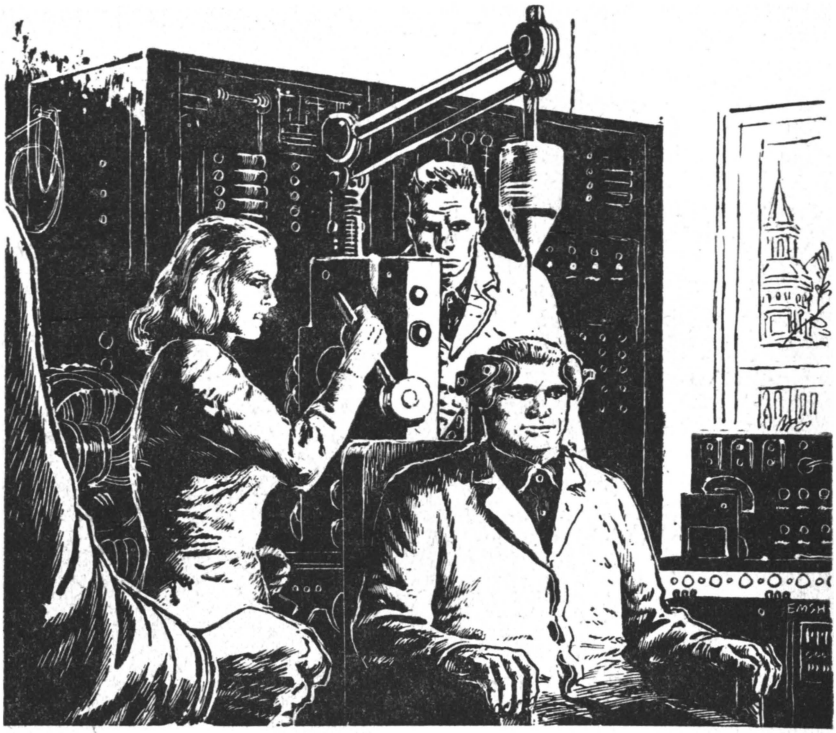
Smiling, the man straightened and made a rapid downward gesture, ending with his palms again on the snow. Then he stepped forward, placing one hand on his chest, the other on Atanta's.

The two furry men stood as tall and straight as their dignity could make them, and their faces were bright with joy. Then Atanta took the hammerstone out of the binding about his waist, and tossed it into the snow.

The man nodded. Stepping back, he lifted his hand in an arc across the sky, and offered Atanta the stars. **END**

Human history is in essence a history of ideas.

—H. G. Wells



NO, NO,

"We may even spy into the brain of the chief rascal himself. . . . Wouldn't it be wonderful if our machine could stun him and leave him addled at his desk?"

BY CORDWAINER SMITH

NOT ROGOV!

That golden shape on the golden steps shook and fluttered like a bird gone mad—like a bird imbued with an intellect and a soul, and, nevertheless, driven mad by ecstasies and terrors beyond human understanding. A thousand worlds watched.

Had the ancient calendar continued, this would have been A. D. 13,582. After defeat, after disappointment, after ruin and reconstruction, mankind had leaped among the stars.

Out of the shock of meeting inhuman art, of confronting nonhuman dances, mankind had made a superb esthetic effort and had leaped upon the stage of all the worlds.

The golden steps reeled. Some eyes that watched had retinas. Some had crystalline cones. Yet all eyes

were fixed upon the golden shape which interpreted "The Glory and Affirmation of Man" *in the Inter-World Dance Festival of what might have been A. D. 13,582.*

Once again mankind was winning the contest. Music and dance were hypnotic beyond the limits of systems, compelling, shocking to human and inhuman eyes. The dance was a triumph of shock—the shock of dynamic beauty.

The golden shape on the golden steps executed shimmering intricacies of meaning. The body was gold and still human. The body was a woman, but more than a woman. On the golden steps, in the golden light, she trembled and fluttered like a bird gone mad.

THE MINISTRY of State Security had been positively shocked when they found that a Nazi agent, more heroic than prudent, had almost reached N. Rogov.

Rogov was worth more to the Soviet armed forces than any two air armies, more than three motorized divisions. His brain was a weapon, a weapon for the Soviet power.

Since the brain was a weapon, Rogov was a prisoner.

He didn't mind.

Rogov was a pure Russian type, broad-faced, sandy-haired, blue-eyed, with whimsy in his smile and amusement in the wrinkles at the tops of his cheeks.

"Of course I'm a prisoner," Rogov used to say. "I am a prisoner of State service to the Soviet peoples. But the workers and peasants are good to me. I am an academician of the All Union Academy of Sciences, a major general in the Red Air Force, a professor in the University of Kharkov, a deputy works manager of the Red Flag Combat Aircraft Production Trust. From each of these I draw a salary."

Sometimes he would narrow his eyes at his Russian scientific colleagues and ask them in dead earnest, "Would I serve capitalists?"

The affrighted colleagues would try to stammer their way out of the embarrassment, protesting their common loyalty to Stalin or Beria, or Zhukov, or Molotov, or Bulganin, as the case may have been.

Rogov would look very Russian: calm, mocking, amused. He would let them stammer.

Then he'd laugh.

Solemnity transformed into hilarity, he would explode into bubbling, effervescent, good-humored laughter: "Of course I could not serve the capitalists. My little Anastasia would not let me."

The colleagues would smile uncomfortably and would wish that Rogov did not talk so wildly, or so comically, or so freely.

Rogov was afraid of nothing. Most of his colleagues were afraid of each other, of the Soviet system, of the world, of life, and of death.

Perhaps Rogov had once been ordinary and mortal like other people, and full of fears.

But he had become the lover, the colleague, the husband of Anastasia Fyodorovna Cherpas.

Comrade Cherpas had been his

rival, his antagonist, his competitor, in the struggle for scientific eminence in the frontiers of Russian science. Russian science could never overtake the inhuman perfection of German method, the rigid intellectual and moral discipline of German teamwork, but the Russians could and did get ahead of the Germans by giving vent to their bold, fantastic imaginations. Rogov had pioneered the first rocket launchers of 1939. Cherpas had finished the job by making the best of the rockets radio-directed.

Rogov in 1942 had developed a whole new system of photo-mapping. Comrade Cherpas had applied it to color film. Rogov, sandy-haired, blue-eyed, and smiling, had recorded his criticisms of Comrade Cherpas' naivete and theoretical unsoundness at the top-secret meetings of Russian scientists during the black winter nights of 1943. Comrade Cherpas, her butter-yellow hair flowing down like living water to her shoulders, her unpainted face gleaming with fanaticism, intelligence, and dedication, would snarl her own defiance at him, deriding his Communist theory, pinching at his pride, hitting his hypotheses where they were weakest.

By 1944 a Rogov-Cherpas quarrel had become something worth traveling to see.

In 1945 they were married.

Their courtship was secret, their wedding a surprise, their partnership a miracle in the upper ranks of Russian science.

The emigre press had reported that the great scientist, Peter Kapitza, once remarked, "Rogov and Cherpas, there is a team. They're Communists, good Communists; but they're better than that! They're *Russian,* Russian enough to beat the world. Look at them. That's the future, our Russian future!" Perhaps the quotation was an exaggeration, but it did show the enormous respect in which both Rogov and Cherpas were held by their colleagues in Soviet science.

Shortly after their marriage strange things happened to them.

Rogov remained happy. Cherpas was radiant.

Nevertheless, the two of them began to have haunted expressions, as though they had seen things which words could not express, as though they had stumbled upon secrets too important to be whispered even to the most secure agents of the Soviet State Police.

In 1947 Rogov had an interview with Stalin. As he left Stalin's office in the Kremlin, the great leader himself came to the door, his forehead wrinkled in thought, nodding, *"Da, da, da."*

Even his own personal staff did not know why Stalin was saying "Yes, yes, yes," but they did see the orders that went forth marked ONLY BY SAFE HAND, and TO BE READ AND RETURNED, NOT RETAINED, and furthermore stamped FOR AUTHORIZED EYES ONLY AND UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES TO BE COPIED.

Into the true and secret Soviet budget that year by the direct personal orders of a noncommittal Stalin, an item was added for "Project Telescope." Stalin toler-

ated no inquiry, brooked no comment.

A village which had had a name became nameless.

A forest which had been opened to the workers and peasants became military territory.

Into the central post office in Kharkov there went a new box number for the *village of Ya. Ch.*

Rogov and Cherpas, comrades and lovers, scientists both and Russians both, disappeared from the everyday lives of their colleagues. Their faces were no longer seen at scientific meetings. Only rarely did they emerge.

On the few occasions they were seen, usually going to and from Moscow at the time the All Union budget was made up each year, they seemed smiling and happy. But they did not make jokes.

What the outside world did not know was that Stalin in giving them their own project, granting them a paradise restricted to themselves, had seen to it that a snake went with them in the paradise. The snake this time was not one, but two personalities—Gausgofer and Gauck.

STALIN DIED.

Beria died too—less willingly.

The world went on.

Everything went into the forgotten village of Ya. Ch. and nothing came out.

It was rumored that Khrushchev himself visited Rogov and Cherpas. It was even whispered that Khrushchev said as he went to the Kharkov airport to fly back to Moscow, "It's big, big, big. There'll be no cold war if they do it. There won't be any war of any kind. We'll finish capitalism before the capitalists can ever begin to fight. If they do it. If they do it." Khrushchev was reported to have shaken his head slowly in perplexity and to have said nothing more but to have put his initials on the unmodified budget of Project Telescope when a trusted messenger next brought him an envelope from Rogov.

Anastasia Cherpas became a mother. Their first boy looked like the father. He was followed by a little girl. Then another little boy. The children didn't stop Cherpas' work. The family had a large *dacha* and trained nursemaids took over the household.

Every night the four of them dined together.

Rogov, Russian, humorous, courageous, amused.

Cherpas, older, more mature, more beautiful than ever, but just as biting, just as cheerful, just as sharp as she had ever been.

But then the other two, two who sat with them across the years of all their days, the two colleagues who had been visited upon them by the all-powerful word of Stalin himself.

Gausgofer was a female: bloodless, narrow-faced, with a voice like a horse's whinny. She was a scientist and a police woman, and competent at both jobs. In 1920 she had reported her own mother's whereabouts to the Bolshevik Terror Committee. In 1924 she had commanded her father's execution. He was a Russian German of the old

Baltic nobility and he had tried to adjust his mind to the new system, but he had failed. In 1930 she had let her lover trust her a little too much. He was a Rumanian Communist, very high in the Party, but he had a sneaking sympathy for Trotsky. When he whispered into her ear in the privacy of their bedroom, whispered with the tears pouring down his face, she had listened affectionately and quietly and had delivered his words to the police the next morning.

With that she came to Stalin's attention.

Stalin had been tough. He addressed her brutally, "Comrade, you have some brains. I can see you know what Communism is all about. You understand loyalty. You're going to get ahead and serve the Party and the working class, but is that all you want?" He had spat the question at her.

She was so astonished that she gaped.

The old man had changed his expression, favoring her with leering benevolence. He had put his forefinger on her chest, "Study science, Comrade. Study science. Communism plus science equals victory. You're too clever to stay in police work."

Gausgofer fell in love with Rogov the moment she saw him.

Gausgofer fell in hate—and hate can be as spontaneous and miraculous as love—with Cherpas the moment she saw *her*.

But Stalin had guessed that too.

With the bloodless, fanatic Gausgofer he had sent a man named B. Gauck.

Gauck was solid, impassive, blank-faced. In body he was about the same height as Rogov. Where Rogov was muscular, Gauck was flabby. Where Rogov's skin was fair and shot through with the pink and health of exercise, Gauck's skin was like stale lard, greasy, gray-green, sickly even on the best of days.

Gauck's eyes were black and small. His glance was as cold and sharp as death. Gauck had no friends, no enemies, no beliefs, no enthusiasms.

Gauck never drank, never went out, never received mail, never sent mail, never spoke a spontaneous word. He was never rude, never kind, never friendly, never really withdrawn: He couldn't withdraw any more than the constant withdrawal of all his life.

Rogov had turned to his wife in the secrecy of their bedroom soon after Gausgofer and Gauck came and had said, "Anastasia, is that man sane?"

Cherpas intertwined the fingers of her beautiful, expressive hands. She who had been the wit of a thousand scientific meetings was now at a loss for words. She looked up at her husband with a troubled expression. "I don't know, comrade . . . I just don't know."

Rogov smiled his amused Slavic smile. "At the least then I don't think Gausgofer knows either."

Cherpas snorted with laughter and picked up her hairbrush. "That she doesn't. She really doesn't know, does she? I'll wager she doesn't even know to whom he reports."

That conversation had reached into the past. Gauck, Gausgofer, bloodless eyes and the black eyes—they remained.

Every dinner the four sat down together.

Every morning the four met in the laboratory.

Rogov's great courage, high sanity, and keen humor kept the work going.

Cherpas' flashing genius fueled him whenever the routine overloaded his magnificent intellect.

Gausgofer spied and watched and smiled her bloodless smiles; sometimes, curiously enough, Gausgofer made genuinely constructive suggestions. She never understood the whole frame of reference of their work, but she knew enough of the mechanical and engineering details to be very useful on occasion.

Gauck came in, sat down quietly, said nothing, did nothing. He did not even smoke. He never fidgeted. He never went to sleep. He just watched.

The laboratory grew and with it there grew the immense configuration of the espionage machine.

IN THEORY what Rogov had proposed and Cherpas seconded was imaginable. It consisted of an attempt to work out an integrated theory for all the electrical and radiation phenomena accompanying consciousness, and to duplicate the electrical functions of mind without the use of animal material.

The range of potential products was immense.

The first product Stalin had asked for was a receiver, if possible, one capable of tuning in the thoughts of a human mind and of translating those thoughts either into a punch tape machine, an adapted German Hellschreiber machine, or phonetic speech. If the grids could be turned around, the brain-equivalent machine as a transmitter might be able to send out stunning forces which would paralyze or kill the process of thought.

At its best, Rogov's machine was designed to confuse human thought over great distances, to select human targets to be confused, and to maintain an electronic jamming system which would jam straight into the human mind without the requirement of tubes or receivers.

He had succeeded—in part. He had given himself a violent headache in the first year of work.

In the third year he had killed mice at a distance of ten kilometers. In the seventh year he had brought on mass hallucinations and a wave of suicides in a neighboring village. It was this which impressed Khrushchev.

Rogov was now working on the receiver end. No one had ever explored the infinitely narrow, infinitely subtle bands of radiation which distinguished one human mind from another, but Rogov was trying, as it were, to tune in on minds far away.

He had tried to develop a telepathic helmet of some kind, but it did not work. He had then turned away from the reception of pure thought to the reception of visual

and auditory images. Where the nerve-ends reached the brain itself, he had managed over the years to distinguish whole packets of microphenomena, and on some of these he had managed to get a fix.

With infinitely delicate tuning he had succeeded one day in picking up the eyesight of their second chauffeur, and had managed, thanks to a needle thrust in just below his own right eyelid, to "see" through the other man's eyes as the other man, all unaware, washed their Zis limousine sixteen hundred meters away.

Cherpas had surpassed his feat later that winter, and had managed to bring in an entire family having dinner over in a nearby city. She had invited B. Gauck to have a needle inserted into his cheekbone so that he could see with the eyes of an unsuspecting spied-on stranger. Gauck had refused any kind of needles, but Gausgofer had joined in the experiment and had expressed her satisfaction with the work.

The espionage machine was beginning to take form.

Two more steps remained. The first step consisted of tuning in on some remote target, such as the White House in Washington or the NATO Headquarters outside Paris.

The second problem consisted of finding a method of jamming those minds at a distance, stunning them so that the subject personnel fell into tears, confusion, or insanity.

Rogov had tried, but he had never gotten more than thirty kilometers from the nameless village of Ya. Ch.

One November there had been seventy cases of hysteria, most of them ending in suicide, down in the city of Kharkov several hundred kilometers away, but Rogov was not sure that his own machine was doing it.

Comrade Gausgofer dared to stroke his sleeve. Her white lips smiled and her watery eyes grew happy as she said in her high, cruel voice, "*You* can do it, comrade. You can do it."

Cherpas looked on with contempt. Gauck said nothing.

The female agent Gausgofer saw Cherpas' eyes upon her, and for a moment an arc of living hatred leaped between the two women.

The three of them went back to work on the machine.

Gauck sat on his stool and watched them.

IT WAS the year in which Eristratov died that the machine made a breakthrough. Eristratov died after the Soviet and People's democracies had tried to end the cold war with the Americans.

It was May. Outside the laboratory the squirrels ran among the trees. The leftovers from the night's rain dripped on the ground and kept the earth moist. It was comfortable to leave a few windows open and to let the smell of the forest into the workshop.

The smell of their oil-burning heaters, the stale smell of insulation, of ozone, and of the heated electronic gear was something with which all of them were much too familiar.

Rogov had found that his eyesight was beginning to suffer because he had to get the receiver needle somewhere near his optic nerve in order to obtain visual impressions from the machine. After months of experimentation with both animal and human subjects he had decided to copy one of their last experiments, successfully performed on a prisoner boy fifteen years of age, by having the needle slipped directly through the skull, up and behind the eye. Rogov had disliked using prisoners, because Gauck, speaking on behalf of security, always insisted that a prisoner used in experiments be destroyed in not less than five days from the beginning of the experiment. Rogov had satisfied himself that the skull-and-needle technique was safe, but he was very tired of trying to get frightened, unscientific people to carry the load of intense, scientific attentiveness required by the machine.

Somewhat ill-humored, he shouted at Gauck, "Have you ever known what this is all about? You've been here years. Do you know what we're trying to do? Don't you ever want to take part in the experiments yourself? Do you realize how many years of mathematics have gone into the making of these grids and the calculation of these wave patterns? Are you good for anything?"

Gauck had said, tonelessly and without anger, "Comrade professor, I am obeying orders. You are obeying orders too. I've never impeded you."

Rogov raved, "I know you never got in my way. We're all good servants of the Soviet State. It's not a question of loyalty. It's a question of enthusiasm. Don't you ever want to glimpse the science we're making? We are a hundred years or a thousand years ahead of the capitalist Americans. Doesn't that excite you? Aren't you a human being? Why don't you take part? How will you understand me when I explain it?"

Gauck said nothing; he looked at Rogov with his beady eyes. His dirty-gray face did not change expression. Cherpas said, "Go ahead, Nikolai. The comrade can follow if he wants to."

Gausgofer looked enviously at Cherpas. She seemed inclined to keep quiet, but then had to speak. She said, "Do go ahead, comrade professor."

Said Rogov, *"Kharosho,* I'll do what I can. The machine is now ready to receive minds over immense distances." He wrinkled his lip in amused scorn. "We may even spy into the brain of the chief rascal himself and find out what Eisenhower is planning to do today against the Soviet people. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our machine could stun him and leave him sitting addled at his desk?"

Gauck commented, "Don't try it. Not without orders."

Rogov ignored the interruption and went on. "First I receive. I don't know what I will get, who I will get, or where they will be. All I know is that this machine will reach out across all the minds of men and beasts now living and it will bring the eyes and ears of a

single mind directly into mine. With the new needle going directly into the brain it will be possible for me to get a very sharp fixation of position. The trouble with that boy last week was that even though we knew he was seeing something outside this room, he appeared to be getting sounds in a foreign language and did not know enough English or German to realize where or what the machine had taken him to see."

Cherpas laughed, "I'm not worried. I saw then it was safe. You go first, my husband. If our comrades don't mind—?"

Gauck nodded.

Gausgofer lifted her bony hand breathlessly to her skinny throat and said, "Of course, Comrade Rogov, of course. You did *all* the work. You *must* be the first."

Rogov sat down.

A white-smocked technician brought the machine over to him. It was mounted on three rubber-tired wheels and it resembled the small X-ray units used by dentists. In place of the cone at the head of the X-ray machine there was a long, incredibly tough needle. It had been made for them by the best surgical steel craftsmen in Prague.

Another technician came up with a shaving bowl, a brush, and a straight razor. Under the gaze of Gauck's deadly eyes he shaved an area of four square centimeters on the top of Rogov's head.

Cherpas herself then took over. She set her husband's head in the clamp and used a micrometer to get the skull-fittings so tight and so accurate that the needle would push through the dura mater at exactly the right point.

All this work she did deftly with kind, very strong fingers. She was gentle, but she was firm. She was his wife, but she was also his fellow scientist and his colleague in the Soviet State.

She stepped back and looked at her work. She gave him one of their own very special smiles, the secret gay smiles which they usually exchanged with each other only when they were alone. "You won't want to do this every day. We're going to have to find some way of getting into the brain without using this needle. But it won't hurt you."

"Does it matter if it does hurt?" said Rogov. "This is the triumph of all our work. *Bring it down.*"

Cherpas, her eyes gleaming with attention, reached over and pulled down the handle which brought the tough needle to within a tenth of a millimeter of the right place.

Rogov spoke very carefully: "All I felt was a little sting. You can turn the power on now."

Gausgofer could not contain herself. Timidly she addressed Cherpas, "*May* I turn on the power?"

Cherpas nodded. Gauck watched. Rogov waited. Gausgofer pulled down the bayonet switch.

The power went on.

With an impatient twist of her hand, Anastasia Cherpas ordered the laboratory attendants to the other end of the room. Two or three of them had stopped working and were staring at Rogov, staring like dull sheep. They looked embarrassed and then they huddled in a white-smocked herd at the

other end of the laboratory.

The wet May wind blew in on all of them. The scent of forest and leaves was about them.

The three watched Rogov.

Rogov's complexion began to change. His face became flushed. His breathing was so loud and heavy they could hear it several meters away. Cherpas fell on her knees in front of him, eyebrows lifted in mute inquiry.

Rogov did not dare nod, not with a needle in his brain. He spoke through flushed lips, speaking thickly and heavily, "Do—not—stop—now."

Rogov himself did not know what was happening. He had thought he might see an American room, or a Russian room, or a tropical colony. He might see palm trees, or forests, or desks. He might see guns or buildings, washrooms or beds, hospitals, homes, churches. He might see with the eyes of a child, a woman, a man, a soldier, a philosopher, a slave, a worker, a savage, a religious, a Communist, a reactionary, a governor, a policeman. He might hear voices; he might hear English, or French, or Russian, Swahili, Hindi, Malay, Chinese, Ukrainian, Armenian, Turkish, Greek. He did not know.

None of these things had happened.

It seemed to him that he had left the world, that he had left time. The hours and the centuries shrank up like the meters, and the machine, unchecked, reached out for the most powerful signal which any human mind had transmitted. Rogov did not know it, but the machine had conquered time.

The machine had reached the dance, the human challenger and the dance festival of the year that might have been A.D. 13,582.

Before Rogov's eyes the golden shape and the golden steps shook and fluttered in a ritual a thousand times more compelling than hypnotism. The rhythms meant nothing and everything to him. This was Russia, this was Communism. This was his life—indeed it was his soul acted out before his very eyes.

For a second, the last second of his ordinary life, he looked through flesh and blood eyes and saw the shabby woman whom he had once thought beautiful. He saw Anastasia Cherpas, and he did not care.

His vision concentrated once again on the dancing image, this woman, those postures, that dance!

Then the sound came in—music that would have made a Tschaikovsky weep, orchestras which would have silenced Shostakovich or Khachaturian forever.

The people-who-were-not-people between the stars had taught mankind many arts. Rogov's mind was the best of its time, but his time was far, far behind the time of the great dance. With that one vision Rogov went firmly and completely mad.

He became blind to the sight of Cherpas, Gausgofer, and Gauck. He forgot the village of Ya. Ch. He forgot himself. He was like a fish, bred in stale fresh water, which is thrown for the first time into a living stream. He was like an in-

sect emerging from the chrysalis. His twentieth-century mind could not hold the imagery and the impact of the music and the dance.

But the needle was there and the needle transmitted into his mind more than his mind could stand.

The synapses of his brain flicked like switches. The future flooded into him.

He fainted.

Cherpas leaped forward and lifted the needle. Rogov fell out of the chair.

IT WAS Gauck who got the doctors. By nightfall they had Rogov resting comfortably and under heavy sedation. There were two doctors, both from the military headquarters. Gauck had obtained authorization for their services by a direct telephone call to Moscow.

Both the doctors were annoyed. The senior one never stopped grumbling at Cherpas.

"You should not have done it, Comrade Cherpas. Comrade Rogov should not have done it either. You can't go around sticking things into brains. That's a medical problem. None of you people are doctors of medicine. It's all right for you to contrive devices with the prisoners, but you can't inflict things like this on Soviet scientific personnel. I'm going to get blamed because I can't bring Rogov back. You heard what he was saying. All he did was mutter, 'That golden shape on the golden steps, that music, that me is a true me, that golden shape, that golden shape, I want to be with that golden shape,' and rubbish like that. Maybe you've ruined a first-class brain forever—" He stopped short as though he had said too much. After all, the problem was a security problem and apparently both Gauck and Gausgofer represented the security agencies.

Gausgofer turned her watery eyes on the doctor and said in a low, even, unbelievably poisonous voice, "Could *she* have done it, comrade doctor?"

The doctor looked at Cherpas, answering Gausgofer, "How? You were there. I wasn't. *How* could she have done it? *Why* should she do it? You were there."

Cherpas said nothing. Her lips were compressed tight with grief. Her yellow hair gleamed, but her hair was all that remained, at that moment, of her beauty. She was frightened and she was getting ready to be sad. She had no time to hate foolish women or to worry about security; she was concerned with her colleague, her lover, her husband Rogov.

There was nothing much for them to do except to wait. They went into a large room and waited.

The servants had laid out immense dishes of cold sliced meat, pots of caviar, and an assortment of sliced breads, pure butter, genuine coffee, and liquors.

None of them ate much. At 9:15 the sound of rotors beat against the house. The big helicoptor had arrived from Moscow.

Higher authorities took over.

The higher authority was a dep-

uty minister, a man named V. Karper.

Karper was accompanied by two or three uniformed colonels, by an engineer civilian, by a man from the headquarters of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and by two doctors.

They dispensed with the courtesies. Karper merely said, "You are Cherpas. I have met you. You are Gausgofer. I have seen your reports. You are Gauck."

The delegation went into Rogov's bedroom. Karper snapped, "Wake him."

The military doctor who had given him sedatives said, "Comrade, you mustn't—"

Karper cut him off. "Shut up." He turned to his own physician, pointed at Rogov. "Wake him up."

The doctor from Moscow talked briefly with the senior military doctor. He too began shaking his head. He gave Karper a disturbed look. Karper guessed what he might hear. He said, "Go ahead. I know there is some danger to the patient, but I've got to get back to Moscow with a report."

The two doctors worked over Rogov. One of them gave Rogov an injection. Then all of them stood back from the bed.

Rogov writhed in his bed. He squirmed. His eyes opened, but he did not see the people. With childishly clear and simple words Rogov began to talk, ". . . that golden shape, the golden stairs, the music, take me back to the music, I want to be with the music, I really am the music . . ." and so on in an endless monotone.

Cherpas leaned over him so that her face was directly in his line of vision. "My darling! My darling, wake up. This is serious."

It was evident to all of them that Rogov did not hear her.

For the first time in many years Gauck took the initiative. He spoke directly to the man from Moscow. "Comrade, may I make a suggestion?"

Karper looked at him. Gauck nodded at Gausgofer. "We were both sent here by orders of Comrade Stalin. She is senior. She bears the responsibility. All I do is double check."

The deputy minister turned to Gausgofer. Gausgofer had been staring at Rogov on the bed; her blue, watery eyes were tearless and her face was drawn into an expression of extreme tension.

Karper ignored that and said to her firmly, clearly, commandingly, "What do you recommend?"

Gausgofer looked at him very directly and said in a measured voice, "I do not think that the case is one of brain damage. I believe that he has obtained a communication which he must share with another human being and that unless one of us follows him there may be no answer."

Karper barked: "Very well. But what do we do?"

"Let *me* follow—into the machine."

Anastasia Cherpas began to laugh slyly and frantically. She seized Karper's arm and pointed her finger at Gausgofer. Karper stared at her.

Cherpas restrained her laughter

and shouted at Karper, "The woman's mad. She has loved my husband for many years. She has hated my presence, and now she thinks that she can save him. She thinks that she can follow. She thinks that he wants to communicate with her. That's ridiculous. I will go myself!"

Karper looked about. He selected two of his staff and stepped over into a corner of the room. They could hear him talking, but they could not distinguish the words. After a conference of six or seven minutes he returned.

"You people have been making serious security charges against each other. I find that one of our finest weapons, the mind of Rogov, is damaged. Rogov's not just a man. He is a Soviet project." Scorn entered his voice. "I find that the senior security officer, a policewoman with a notable record, is charged by another Soviet scientist with a silly infatuation. I disregard such charges. The development of the Soviet State and the work of Soviet science cannot be impeded by personalities. Comrade Gausgofer will follow. I am acting tonight because my own staff physician says that Rogov may not live and it is very important for us to find out just what has happened to him and why."

He turned his baleful gaze on Cherpas. "You will not protest, comrade. Your mind is the property of the Russian State. Your life and your education have been paid for by the workers. You cannot throw these things away because of personal sentiment. If there is anything to be found, Comrade Gausgofer will find it for both of us."

The whole group of them went back into the laboratory. The frightened technicians were brought over from the barracks. The lights were turned on and the windows were closed. The May wind had become chilly.

The needle was sterilized. The electronic grids were warmed up.

Gausgofer's face was an impassive mask of triumph as she sat in the receiving chair. She smiled at Gauck as an attendant brought the soap and the razor to shave clean a patch on her scalp.

Gauck did not smile back. His black eyes stared at her. He said nothing. He did nothing. He watched.

Karper walked to and fro, glancing from time to time at the hasty but orderly preparation of the experiment.

Anastasia Cherpas sat down at a laboratory table about five meters away from the group. She watched the back of Gausgofer's head as the needle was lowered. She buried her face in her hands. Some of the others thought they heard her weeping, but no one heeded Cherpas very much. They were too intent on watching Gausgofer.

Gausgofer's face became red. Perspiration poured down the flabby cheeks. Her fingers tightened on the arm of her chair.

Suddenly she shouted at them, *"That golden shape on the golden steps."*

She leaped to her feet, dragging the apparatus with her.

No one had expected this. The chair fell to the floor. The needle

holder, lifted from the floor, swung its weight sidewise. The needle twisted like a scythe in Gausgofer's brain.

The body of Gausgofer lay on the floor, surrounded by excited officials.

Karper was acute enough to look around at Cherpas.

She stood up from the laboratory table and walked toward him. A thin line of blood flowed down from her cheekbone. Another line of blood dripped down from a position on her cheek, one and a half centimers forward of the opening of her left ear.

With tremendous composure, her face as white as fresh snow, she smiled at him. "I eavesdropped."

Karper said, "What?"

"I eavesdropped, eavesdropped," repeated Anastasia Cherpas. "I found out where my husband has gone. It is not somewhere in this world. It is something hypnotic beyond all the limitations of our science. We have made a great gun, but the gun has fired upon us before we could fire it.

"Project Telescope is finished. You may try to get someone else to finish it, but you will not."

Karper stared at her and then turned aside.

Gauck stood in his way.

"What do you want?"

"To tell you," said Gauck very softly, "to tell you, comrade deputy minister, that Rogov is gone as she says he is gone, that she is finished if she says she is finished, that all this is true. I know."

Karper glared at him. "How do you know?"

Gauck remained utterly impassive. With superhuman assurance and calm he said to Karper, "Comrade, I do not dispute the matter. I know these people, though I do not know their science. Rogov is done for."

At last Karper believed him.

They all looked at Anastasia Cherpas, at her beautiful hair, her determined blue eyes, and the two thin lines of blood.

Karper turned to her. "What do we do now?"

For an answer she dropped to her knees and began sobbing, "No, no, not Rogov! No, no, not Rogov!"

And that was all that they could get out of her. Gauck looked on.

On the golden steps in the golden light, a golden shape danced a dream beyond the limits of all imagination, danced and drew the music to herself until a sigh of yearning, yearning which became a hope and a torment, went through the hearts of living things on a thousand worlds.

Edges of the golden scene faded raggedly and unevenly into black. The gold dimmed down to a pale gold-silver sheen and then to silver, last of all to white. The dancer who had been golden was now a forlorn white-pink figure standing, quiet and fatigued, on the immense white steps. The applause of a thousand worlds roared in upon her.

She looked blindly at them. The dance had overwhelmed her, too. Their applause could mean nothing. The dance was an end in itself. She would have to live, somehow, until she danced again. **END**

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