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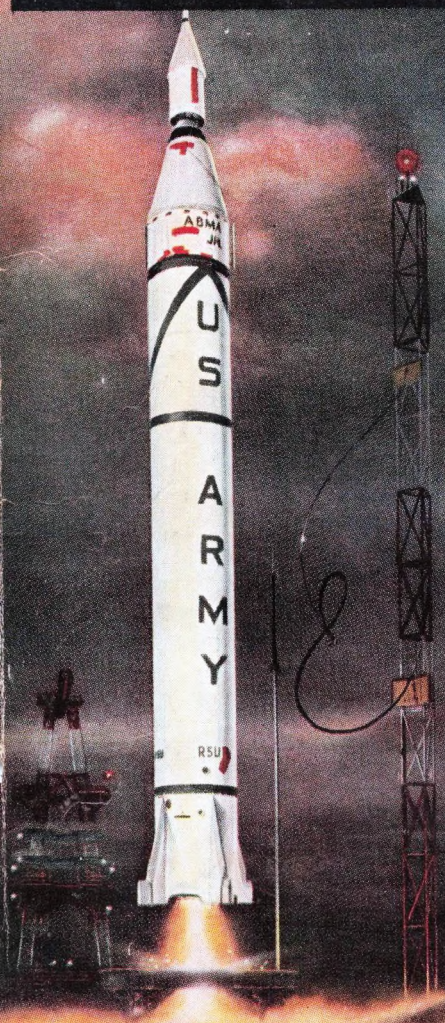

THE MILLION CITIES

An Amazing Novel of the Far Future

By J.T. McINTOSH

THE SONS OF FRANKENSTEIN
by Sam Moskowitz

NO MORE GUESSES

The future, it has often been said, is veiled in mystery and a hundred years ago Utopian novelists placed their reputations on the chopping block when they seriously attempted to strip away the veils. Some of them were so lacking in boldness that they apologized in advance for their timorous excursions into the unknown, writing prefaces that were masterpieces of long-windedness and that did them no credit. Others, like Swift, took refuge in a savage irony or clothed themselves in the comic spirit, as if it were a shell of ectoplasm that could be put on and off at will.

But today there is no need for such evasiveness. The future may still be problematical, but the unveiling can be done realistically, with the aid of modern science, and modern science has a strange way of making its inspired guesses come true overnight. Time and time again, within the past ten years, science fiction writers have ventured boldly and have been justified in their predictions, and the satellites which are now encircling the Earth have made that guessing game—if you wish to think of it as such—a part of Man's heritage of achievement that began with the polishing of the first rude flint and will end only with his disappearance from the face of the Earth.

Will Man ever disappear from the face of the Earth? And if he does, will that heritage still go on?

In THE MILLION CITIES—the new-horizon type science fiction novel which we're running complete in this issue—the well-known British writer, J. T. McIntosh tells us exactly why he thinks it will. And we'd like to call your attention, too, to Mel Hunter's fine cover, depicting the actual JUPITER rocket that launched America's first Earth satellite.

LEO MARGULIES,
Publisher

SATELLITE
science fiction

AUGUST, 1958 **Vol. 2, No. 6**

A COMPLETE NOVEL

THE MILLION CITIES

by J. T. McINTOSH

Science had changed the world for every man, and woman on Earth. So great was the challenge, so deadly the peril that the very existence of the human race hung in the balance.

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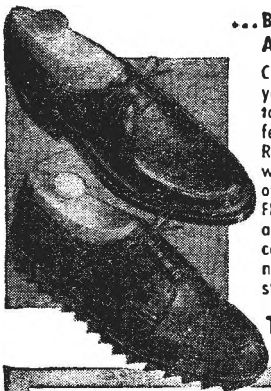

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A Complete Novel of Science in the Far Tomorrow

By J. T. McINTOSH

The Million Cities were buried deep in the Earth, far from the great moon and the stars of heaven. But not even a cruel bigot could destroy Man's proudest dream.

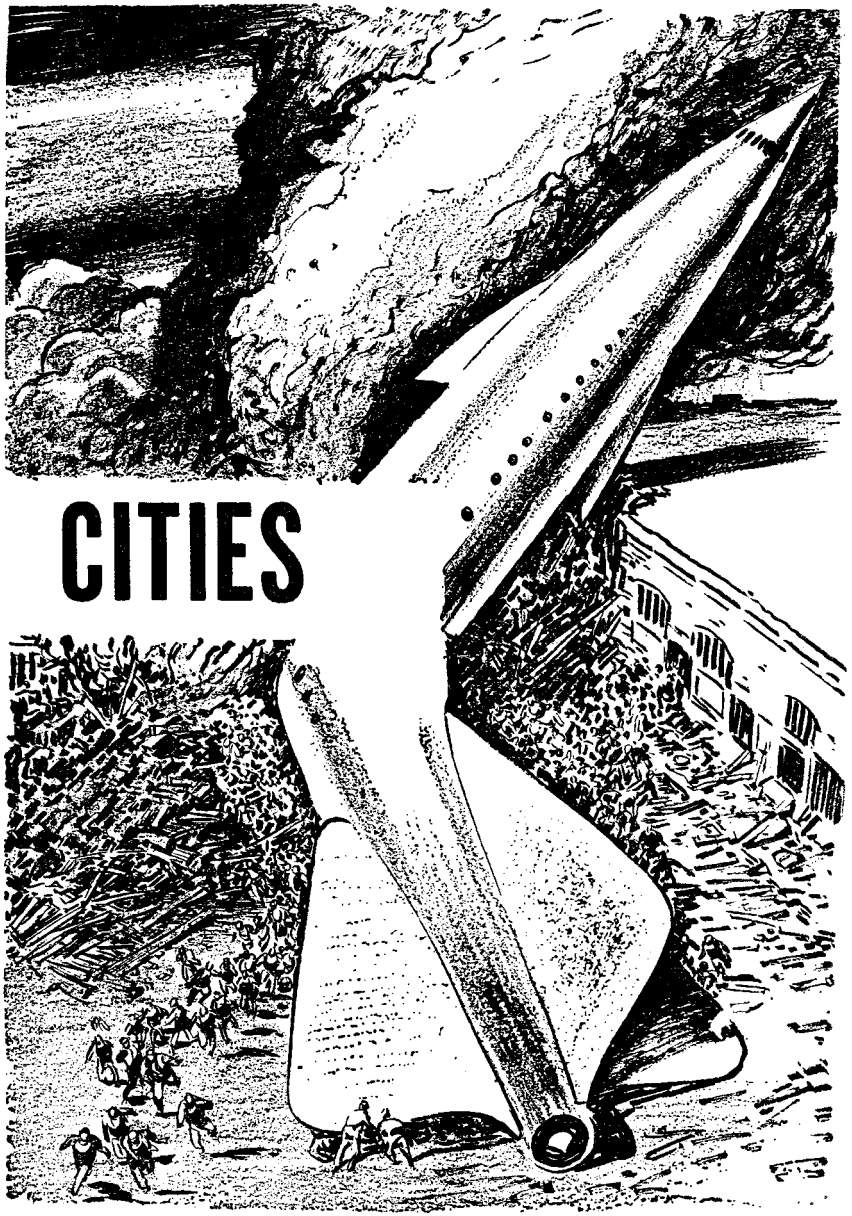
THE MILLION

THE PLANET WAS still called Earth—though there was hardly any earth left. The soil, rocks, water and organic matter of which the world had once been composed were now neatly compartmented into the Million Cities and the practically countless millions of people who lived in them.

The Million Cities was another misnomer. There weren't a million separate cities, nor a thousand, nor a hundred, nor two. There was only one city.

Over the whole surface of the world, with the minor exception of the area occupied by the Park, the roof of Stratum One spread. But that vast construction was only the top level. Under it was another stratum of the Million Cities. Under the second level another, another, another, another, another, another, another—until at last, hundreds of miles down, the city stopped.

Yes, there was still a core of rock. It would continue to exist


CITIES

only until a research team a million strong, working on that problem alone, discovered how to build yet another stratum somehow beneath the ponderous pressure of the Million Cities as they now were.

The Million Cities didn't have names. They no longer had any separate existence. The Million Cities were a myth. There were no boundaries in the so-called million cities, no boundaries at all except the twenty-six sections and the hundreds of strata.

The letter and number method of indicating precise locations in the Million Cities wasn't entirely popular. People like to have names for places, and most districts had their own private designations. But there was one great advantage of this soulless letter and number method. You knew merely by its name where any place was.

Cue One, for example, was a tropical area on the surface—Cue One A to Cue One Z. Cue Two was the stratum over the same area just below the surface. Not just one level, for numbers were valuable and had to stand for more than a single level. Cue 100 was well down, but before all the rooms started getting tiny, and Cue 500 was so far down that there could be no halls, no cinemas, no theaters, nothing but tiny cells in narrow passages. Yes, the prisons were on the 500 stratum.

Air pressure, of course, had to be kept independent on every level. Each stratum had a constantly sustained air pressure of fourteen pounds per square inch, and was hermetically sealed from the strata directly above and beneath it. The only connections between strata were by vacuum tubes.

Concrete, metal and plastic, that was the Million Cities. Chemistry and physics had succeeded in reducing everything in the world to the Million Cities, and the people in them—thereby proving conclusively that you could get blood from a stone . . .

The whole world danced.

All over the Million Cities, on all the strata, every hall was packed. The avenues were deserted, the houses empty. The children were at parties of their own.

In all the millions of halls the music was synchronized so that everybody everywhere danced the same dance to the same music at the same time. On Thanksgiving "Sorry, I don't dance" was no excuse. If you didn't dance you found someone else who didn't dance either and walked round in time to the music. If you couldn't keep in time to the music you just walked.

There wasn't too much drinking, because over-indulgence in alcohol had become socially disgusting, like wearing dirty clothes or eating peas with a knife. Most people knew that at one time there had been a lot of heavy eating going

on around Thanksgiving, but that too had become socially disgusting. And there was no smoking because no tobacco had been grown for hundreds of years. Smoking was the most socially disapproved of habit of all in an environment like the Million Cities.

However, people of earlier civilizations wouldn't have found the scene and the people dull, for nakedness had ceased to be socially reprehensible and the moderation which applied to alcohol, eating and general conduct was thrown out of the window when it came to dress. Everyone wore exactly what he or she liked, and the result was nothing if not gay and colorful.

The men for the most part tried to look as much as possible like everybody else. Apart from wearing flamboyantly colored shirts and ties nobody liked to be too garish or individualistic.

The women, however, were trying to look as different as possible from everybody else. At nearly every hall there was some girl who had the nerve and the figure to come naked. Generally not more than one or two at the most had had the necessary nerve, for while clothes weren't obligatory, total nudity was sufficiently daring to provoke plenty of comment, and only a girl with a superb figure and infinite self-confidence could hope to get away with it.

There were women wearing skirts so long they trailed and tripped people, skirts so short they hardly seemed worthwhile, shorts with tops, shorts without tops, gowns that showed nothing but the face, outfits which were three-quarters off already, necklines that stopped at the neck and necklines that didn't stop at all.

After all, women who weren't allowed to have any more children had to find some other interest, some other emotional outlet, and clothes and beauty culture were the conventional forms of release.

Everyone danced and laughed and talked.

Much of the talk was on a topic which struck a false note. It was generally agreed to be inconsiderate of the Chartists to assassinate someone on Thanksgiving. They could easily have waited a day, surely.

"It's frightening, but absolutely frightening," said a woman at a hall in El. She was small, plump and fluttery and wore a white dress. "Think of it, murdered in his own house! How can anyone feel safe?"

The girl beside her was attracting more attention than any of the guests, but it wasn't because of her clothes. Jia Hisk had both the nerve and the figure to attend a ball in any dress that struck her fancy and she had been expected to choose something sensational. Aware of this, she had deliberately attired herself in the simplest gar-

ment in her wardrobe, and was still the most talked about woman present—the most conspicuous and admired.

"Considering," Jia said drily, "that this is the first Chartist assassination in twenty years and probably the last for another twenty years, I don't think there's any real cause for alarm."

"It's all very well for you, Jia," said the other woman. "Nothing ever scares you. But I'm different." The way she said it made her seem infinitely superior to someone who did not even know the meaning of fright. "I'm sure I won't be able to sleep a wink tonight."

"Then don't go to bed," Jia said. "Dance the whole night through, and sleep tomorrow."

The woman in the white dress would have made an indignant retort, but just then a young and handsome man, more young than handsome, came up to claim Jia.

"No, I don't think I'd better dance with you again, Robert," said Jia thoughtfully. "I've danced with you three times already, and—"

"Only twice, Miss Hisk," the young man protested, "and my name's Reg, not Robert. But if you don't want to dance with me, you don't have to." He departed enveloped in an aura of injured pride.

"I've never known you to forget a name before, Jia," said the woman in the white dress, diverted for a moment from her anxiety.

"I never do forget a name," said Jia calmly.

Also in El, but forty miles east and twenty-five miles up, Jon Onul came off the floor with a vision in pink mist and managed without apparent effort to avoid his wife's eye.

"You're a government man, Mr. Onul," the vision said. "Do tell me about the murder today. What was it all about?"

"I'm a government man," Jon admitted politely, "but homicide isn't my department, Vera."

The vision pouted. "I'm sure you know all about it. You just won't discuss it with me because of a few stupid secrecy rules."

Jon shook his head. "I know no more than you do, Vera," he said. Suddenly appalled by the ambiguity, he added, "About the assassination, I mean. Only the Chartists know why William Cronis was important enough to murder. And government officials are the last people they'd confide in."

"They'll be caught, won't they?"

"No," said Jon simply.

The vision stared at him. "What do you mean? What do you know?"

"Nothing," said Jon patiently, "except that it's about two hundred years since a Chartist assassin was caught—and he escaped on the way to jail. Can I get you anything, Vera?"

The vision seemed to sense that

he was keeping something back, that the subject was distasteful to him. "You don't want to talk about the murder, do you?" she asked.

"No, Vera," said Jon kindly. "About your love life or the philosophy of Descartes, yes. But about the assassination, here and now, no."

"Why not?" Vera asked. "Everybody else is talking about it. And what did you mean about my love life? Of course I haven't got a love life."

"Then it's high time you had," Jon said.

Vera's eyes became round. "Are you . . . Mr. Onul, I never thought you of all people would suggest—" She let the words trail off.

"I wouldn't," said Jon hastily. "Especially with my wife's eye on me. Vera, let me give you a piece of advice. Never get married. Or if you do, marry the first one."

"The first one?" Vera asked, puzzled—a not unusual state for her.

"The one you don't think you should marry. The one there's about fifty good reasons for *not* marrying. The one you quarrel with and don't trust and get jealous over and say you're not going to have anything more to do with. Marry that one, Vera. Don't wait until you meet someone who's just right for you and whom all your friends agree is the right one for you."

"Mr. Onul!" said Vera, startled. "I always thought you were very happily married."

"It's not me we're talking about, it's you." Jon paused, then added with a trace of bitterness, "No, we're not—not any more. Mahomet is coming to the mountain. It's time for a landslide . . . Good night, Vera."

Without having seemed to notice the approach of Liz he made his way rapidly in the opposite direction and joined Pet's group. Normally he wouldn't have gatecrashed on his daughter, but this was an emergency.

"Is this one taken, Pet," he asked, "or will you dance it with me?"

Pet turned to him with a delighted smile. "I thought you were never going to ask me," she said radiantly. She was an extremely beautiful girl.

"Watch that Electra complex," Jon murmured as he steered her to the floor.

"I don't care," said Pet. "So most girls won't admit their fathers ever had anything. So most girls haven't got a father like mine."

"So grow up," said Jon. "You're eighteen, Pet. You should have half a dozen boy friends by this time. You haven't even got one—or have you?"

Pet snuggled her head against his shoulder and didn't answer.

In Doe, a considerable distance away, another related couple were

dancing together. Rik and Lorna Tenn were twins, which was the only way anyone could have a brother or a sister in the Million Cities. No couple could have two children.

"Any ideas?" Rik asked. "Did you get anything?"

"Nothing," said Lorna. "And I found out all there is to know about Cronis—just for curiosity's sake. There isn't a clue as to why the Chartists should have thought it necessary to kill him. He couldn't possibly be a future dictator like Ennis, or an agitator like McFarlane — or even a diabolist like Dawson."

"But there must have been a reason," said Rik, frowning. "A good reason."

"I'm not arguing," said Lorna. "I'm simply stating a fact."

"I wish we could find the reason. Damn it, Lorna, I'd almost made up my mind to join the Chartists."

"Not so loud," Lorna murmured warningly . . .

And in Cue Senator Wilmington Smith was standing alone. His son joined him, studying him curiously.

"What are you looking so pleased about, Dad?" he inquired.

"The murder," said Smith.

Ron raised his eyebrows. "You bloodthirsty old devil," he said, with no apparent filial respect.

"It's not that. They don't know it, Ron, but the Chartists have just committed suicide."

"How?"

"Tomorrow I'm going to try to push through a program that'll finish the Chartists for good and all. This morning I hadn't a chance of succeeding, and I knew it. Now I've got a very good chance."

Ron shrugged. "Maybe. I don't think anything will ever finish the Chartists for good and all, though."

"We'll see," said his father.

Ron shrugged again and walked away. Ron was nineteen, and could think of better things to do on Thanksgiving than discuss an assassination . . .

Of these ten—Jia and her friend, Liz, Pet and Jon Onul, Vera, Lorna, Rik, Wilmington Smith and Ron—two were already enrolled in the Chartist organization and three more were considering joining it. This was admittedly a high average.

II

THE LETTER WAS addressed to John Onul, and marked *Personal*, so of course it had been opened when Jon made a particularly last-minute appearance at the breakfast table. He was never early, but just after Thanksgiving he found it extremely difficult to pry himself out of bed.

"It's from the Bureau of Population Control, and they say *no*," Liz snapped, making it unnecessary for Jon to read the letter at all.

"Naturally," said Jon, taking a bite out of a roll, and surveying

sleepily, while he masticated, the thin crescent of the lighting fixture.

"What's natural about it," Liz demanded bitterly. "Don't you want another child?"

"No," said Jon absently.

There would have been an explosion at that point, but Pet chose that precise moment to burst in and descend on the breakfast table.

"Daddy," said Pet breathlessly, "I know you're in a hurry, and I realize breakfast isn't the best time to discuss things, but my vacation starts next month and you haven't said yet whether we're going to Parkside."

"Sorry, Pet," said Jon glancing at his watch and wincing even before he saw the time, "we're not going. The Park is being closed."

"Closed!" Pet exclaimed. "For how long?"

"For ever," said Jon, hoisting himself reluctantly to his feet. "But don't tell anyone I said it. It hasn't been officially announced yet." He kissed her hurriedly and left.

Pet sat staring after him in dismay. The Park was closed! It wasn't possible. The Park over on Cue—*the* Park, the imperishable park—was the only real vacation wonderland left in the world. It had beaches and lakes, grass and trees, flowers, gardens, springs. It could provide only a square yard or two apiece for the holiday seekers, true. But despite that limitation it was a paradise compared to the monotonous sameness of the Cities.

"Eat your breakfast," said Liz.

"Oh, please!" said Pet rudely, and hurried away. Liz looked after her furiously.

Liz was unfortunate in her husband and daughter. They wouldn't fight with her. Often they treated her as if she weren't there. In fact, Liz shrewdly suspected that if Jon hadn't been an Inspector of Means —a very important official and one who couldn't stand a breath of scandal—there would have been a divorce with its attendant social penalties.

The tragedy of it was that Liz really loved Jon and Pet, but couldn't bring herself ever to show any sign of it.

A moment later Pet dashed through the room again on her way to work, and the door shivered apprehensively shut behind her.

"THERE'S NO harm in trying," said Tom Gest.

"Isn't there?" asked Rik meaningly. "Suppose your plan's turned down, which isn't difficult to suppose since it's a ninety-nine percent probability. Suppose later we want to go ahead with it—without permission?"

Tom jerked back, startled. The possibility of continuing without official sanction hadn't even crossed his mind. Rik and Lorna exchanged glances, and Lorna nodded very slightly.

Nothing very much can ever be accomplished without a partnership of creative and executive ability. Tom in this case was the creator, Rik Tenn the executive chief, and Lorna her brother's staff. Tom was tall, thin, and nervous. Rik was just the opposite. He was on the small side, heavily built, and had never been nervous in his life. Rik might know fear, but he would never experience self-consciousness or worry.

Lorna was exactly the same height as her brother, and resembled him closely mentally. But physically all they had in common was their height. Lorna was slim and wiry, and her clear, flawless skin very nearly gave her beauty. Despite a too-long nose and a too-square chin she was attractive enough and could have been more so.

"Look here, Tom," Rik said sharply, "you've got a plan, and you believe in it, don't you? You think it will work?"

"Yes, but—"

"Shut up then, and listen to me. You've got to have faith in a thing before you can expect to do much with it. If it failed you'd be in a spot. Now, let's suppose we go ahead without help."

"Illegally?" protested Tom.

"Sure. Illegally. Anything you do without official backing is illegal. So we do it, and it fails. So you're still in a spot. But just let's imagine for a moment that it succeeds. You could write your own commendation. You saved the world, you did the greatest thing in history, you—"

"Who would back it?" Tom asked, "if Senator Smith wouldn't."

"The Chartists," said Rik simply.

Tom stared at him in stunned horror for an instant. Then he swayed and a whiteness overspread his face. His knees gave way and he sank to the floor in a dead faint.

Lorna dropped down beside him, her face tight with concern and almost equally white. Rik looked at her in alarm. "He won't go to the police?" he asked quickly.

Lorna shook her head. Together they worked over Tom, trying to revive him. It took a long time. The very mention of working with the Chartists had seemingly given him a nasty shock. Gradually his normal color returned, and Tom rose slowly. He walked toward the sofa and sat down.

"Let's go up to Stratum One," Lorna said later, when Tom had completely revived. "It's always safer to talk there."

"I don't want to talk," said Tom.

Lorna shrugged. "Not talking about it won't solve it." She went to the door and motioned for Tom to follow. Soon she reached the nearest tubestop without looking round, taking it for granted that Tom would agree to accompany her. He was right behind her. They

stepped into the car, and Lorna set the buttons.

"I don't think these cars are wired to pick up sound," she said. "But they quite easily could be."

She knew that Rik would make the decisions, as usual. But it would be up to her to handle Tom and it would not be a task which was wholly new to her. Once or twice before the job of keeping men with ideas in line had fallen to Lorna.

Lorna and Rik Tenn had been born to a woman of fifty-three and a man of eighty-four. Now that human expectation of life was well over a hundred years and senility had been telescoped into a short, rapid downward curve there was nothing surprising in this except that the Tenns hadn't had their child at an earlier age. It should have been perfectly safe for Angela Tenn to bear a child, a first and only child, at fifty-three. But the fact that it wasn't one child but two had been enough to turn the scale, and Angela hadn't lived.

Rodney Tenn was rich—and old. Death duties were such that no inheritance ever amounted to much. But by giving Lorna and Rik all he possessed and living for twenty years after that, Rodney had beaten the tax.

Thus Rik and Lorna were unusual in being twins, in never having known their mother, and in possessing so much money that they never needed to work for a living.

The twins were thirty-one now and had done a lot of constructive work. Some of their plans had benefited society in a small way. Now they were excited about their championship of Tom Gest.

The car came right up on to the rooftops of Stratum One. Lorna and Tom stepped out, blinking a little. The sun was no stronger than the bright lights of the Million Cities, but its subterranean illumination was different—harder, a light of greater contrasts, and you could feel its warmth on your skin. The lighting of the Million Cities was bright yet soft, putting no strain on the eyes and supplying all the vitamin D necessary for human health.

A line of tubestops stretched as far as the eye could see, broken here and there to allow passage to the other side. Beneath that almost continuous transportation feature, behind and below the cars, were concealed the vacuum tubes. The cars, ejected beyond the first airlock door and standing flush with the second, opened directly on the flat roof.

The rooftops were all much the same everywhere—all on the same level, with grass growing in shallow trays, concrete walks, flower-beds, seats, shelters. There was no communication with the Cities below except by tubestop. Every stratum was sealed off from every other stratum, and had its own air-pressure stations. Otherwise, air pres-

sure alone, a few miles down, would have been overpowering.

The roof was completely flat. There was no drop to ground level, for there was no ground level apart from this. No ground, no streets. Just one flat roof stretching in all directions, with thousands of people walking about on it, a few singly, but mostly in couples and in groups. Happy, laughing people, intoxicated by the vast emptiness overhead, reminding themselves what the sun and the sky and the open air were like.

The roof was split up into blocks, partitioned by low parapets, simply because the strata below were built in blocks. There were no curves. The curve was wasteful, and the Million Cities had no space to waste.

There were no planes in the sky, just as there were no longer any airlines, or space projectiles. A world which had only a millionth of its surface built up could safely use planes, and rockets, and could experiment with manned spaceships. A world without a square inch where a crippled, heavier-than-air machine could crash without disastrous consequences dared not use heavier-than-air machines, no matter how safe their construction.

And so space travel, which might have solved Earth's population problem, was denied all possibility of realization.

Lorna took Tom to a seat at least a hundred yards away from the nearest person. "Now," she said, "no one can possibly be listening."

Tom still appeared to be in a state of extreme agitation. "You don't understand, Lorna," he said. "I knew Bill Cronis, and—"

"You *what?*" Lorn exclaimed.

"I knew Cronis. And if the Chartists killed him they're just as likely to kill me!"

"Tell me about that," said Lorna, gripping his arm tightly. "Begin at the beginning. When and where did you know Bill Cronis?"

"Bill Cronis was in research, just like me," Tom answered quietly. "And whatever reason the Chartists had for killing him, it was because of something he'd discovered."

"Yes, that could be it," said Lorna. "Cronis made some discovery so big, so dangerous, that the Chartists killed him to keep it a secret." Her eyes hardened. "Listen, Tom, let me put you straight on the Chartists. You hear a lot of rubbish about the organization, but I happen to know—"

"They kill people," Tom interrupted vehemently. "They steal, they kidnap, they—"

"I'm not a Chartist myself," Lorna said quickly. "But Rik and I have learned all there is to be known about them. We'd have joined them long ago, only we like to be free. The Chartists, you see, aren't criminals. They're the shadow senate, if you like to think of them that way. They do the things the

Senate can't or won't do. Twenty years ago Wallace Ennis was so powerful that no man or group of men could stand against him. His avowed intention was to become a dictator, first of Ay and then of Bee and so on until he had absolute control of the Million Cities. The Chartists snuffed him out just as determinedly as they removed Bill Cronis."

She leaned toward him, looking into his face earnestly. "Why haven't we got space travel now? Can you tell me that?"

Tom couldn't, apparently, and stayed silent.

"It kept being delayed," said Lorna. "The first three moon attempts were so disastrous that there was more delay. Then the atomic truce was agreed upon—and that held everything up for a long time. Eventually the cities became too big. There was no place in America or Europe which could possibly be used for tests. Australia refused, and Africa wasn't suitable. There were two attempts in Asia, and a million people were killed.

"So space travel never got beyond the experimental stage. Then after that there were the Million Cities. Gradually people were conditioned to believe that building underground was a better solution than space travel. Finally there was the Senate."

She paused for a moment, but Tom remained silent.

"The Senate postponed coming to a decision as they postponed everything else," said Lorna. "Another attempt was made at last. Do you know how many people were killed that time? Seven million. It's not surprising, perhaps, that no further attempt was made. But—more attempts *must* be made. Do you understand? There is no alternative."

"Maybe they were right," said Tom. "A world like this can't afford to risk mass destruction."

Lorna leaned still further forward. Here eyes bored into Tom's, as if his comment had profoundly disturbed her. "A world like this can't afford *not* to have space travel!" she said. "We can live on the moon—we can live anywhere. All we need are spaceships to take us there. If the research and the tests and the experiments kill half the people in the Million Cities, we've got to conquer space. Rik and I were convinced of that long before we met you . . ."

"I thought you were talking about the Chartists," said Tom, with a puzzled look in his eyes. "Frankly, I don't quite see the connection. But—well, go on, Lorna. I didn't mean to interrupt."

Lorna relaxed again. "Yes, the Chartists," she said calmly. "When the Senate got too big and unwieldy, a determined, unusual group banded together to take forceful, courageous action. Some of the early Chartists were builders and daring innovators. They took

risks the Senate was afraid to take. They built some of the lower strata, you know. They invented most of the invaluable alloys which we use now. They re-planned the vacuum tube system."

"And then became murderers," Tom said.

"Yes," Lorna admitted. "The first was Johnson of Panama. He was going to start a war. Probably the war was just, but the Million Cities would have suffered grievously and the Chartists assassinated him. There was no war."

Tom stared at her intently. "But now?" he asked.

Lorna's reply was direct and forceful. "Now *you* have detailed plans which practically guarantee safe passage to the moon. But we know without putting it to a vote what the Senate's attitude would be."

Tom said nothing.

"And we know, with just as much certainty, that the Chartists would back your plans," said Lorna triumphantly. "Well, Tom Gest, what are we waiting for?"

They stared at each other. Tom was the first to lower his gaze. He knew then that he was beaten, that Rik and Lorna were determined to have their way—that he was completely trapped.

The Million Cities would have space travel against their will, and against the will and better judgment of the inventor.

III

A NOTE LAY on Jon Onul's blotter when he reached his desk at the Ess Income Reallocation Bureau—IREAL for short. His conscience easy, Jon opened it without haste or interest. It was only after he had opened it, and before he had glanced at its contents that Jon realized what had been written on the envelope, and turned it back to look at it.

Jon—just Jon.

John Onul had worked at IREAL for nearly twenty years. His bureau's function was to settle all labor wage claims. He had accomplished many things. One was his 'Mr.' At IREAL he was *Mr. Onul* to everybody.

At last Jon looked at the letter itself. He jumped in his chair, fully awake at nine-fifteen for the first time in living memory. *Jia!* The very sight of the letter rocketed him back twenty years. He had known Liz then, but they weren't married. Jia had been a very special girl. Liz was the girl he had married. Jia was the girl he had wanted to marry.

He hadn't seen Jia since he had married Liz. Now, as if twenty years were nothing, Jia wrote: *Meet me at Blake's for lunch. Jia.*

Feeling slightly confused for a moment, Jon toyed with the idea of not going. But even after all these years his heart leapt at the thought of meeting her again. He

had to see her, if only to free himself from her spell. He picked up the phone and called Blake's for a table and was amazed when he was informed that Miss Jia Hisk had already reserved one.

Three hours later Jon caught sight of Jia across the floor at Blake's and she smiled charmingly at him. Half the people in Blake's, having been watching Jia openly and covertly, swung round for a good look at the fortunate man who rated that dazzling smile. She was so lovely that Jon hesitated before approaching her.

"Hullo, Jia," he said.

"Hullo, Jon," she replied, looking up at him with a half smile on her lips.

"You haven't changed a bit," said Jia, leading him to a table.

"You have," he said fervently. Then he asked, his voice lower, after they were seated, "Just to refresh my memory, Jia, did I ever kiss you?"

"It's not very polite of you to admit you've forgotten," Jia said reprovingly.

"I haven't forgotten. I just couldn't believe it."

She smiled and leaned back, looking for the waiter, and as she did so Jon noticed something that made him realize that in another and more important respect this wasn't Jia he had known. Some people couldn't hide intelligence. There was something in Jia's movements, something in the fine modelling of her face, something in her eyes, that convinced Jon that Jia had matured. And she had always been a very clever woman.

That put things on a different footing. He wasn't merely a man lunching with a disturbingly desirable woman. He was an important government official fencing with a brilliant opponent who wanted something.

All through the meal she was unaccountably pleasant, interesting, interested, and admiring. At last they leaned back and Jon said, "What do you want, Jia? What do you *really* want?"

She looked at him steadily. "Tell me about your daughter," she said.

Jon couldn't think of a single reason why Jia should be interested in Pet, and said so.

"I can think of one," Jia said thoughtfully. "She might have been my daughter. Tell me what she's like, Jon."

"Well, she's like most girls," Jon said, "except that she hasn't shown much interest in boys yet. I think that maybe she's developing late. She's always taken up things with enthusiasm, spending most of her spare time on only one interest or pursuit . . . for a while. Once it was amateur dramatics, then reading. Once she was going to be an inventor. Right now, she'd like to be a designer. And, oh yes, she goes to the movies a lot."

"Alone?"

"Sometimes with a girl friend. Rarely with a boy."

"I see," said Jia. "And you love her."

"Of course I love her." Jon was uncomfortable. He looked at his watch and started unconvincingly. "I have to go," he said, getting to his feet.

"Come to my apartment tonight," said Jia.

She had meant all along to ask him to come to her apartment. Talking about Pet probably was only a blind. *What could she want?* he wondered. *Information concerning his work, his future plans?*

Jia seemed to read his thoughts. "I have no ulterior motive, Jon. You must believe me. I am not angling for any secret information you may have."

It was probably true that it wasn't information she wanted. As far as Jon realized he had little or nothing which would be of any great value to anyone, and Jia would know better than to try to get him to do any string-pulling at IREAL. It would have been impossible, anyway. Jon wasn't concerned with El, his section and Jia's, but Ess, a section on the other side of the planet. IREAL's affairs were always run in that way.

"Thank you, I'll come," he said.

Jia had slipped a card into his hand. It bore her name, her address, and a penciled note—*7:30, and don't be late.*

Jon noticed it was still Jia Hisk. It was incredible that she had never married. Presumably she had separated from her husband, and gone back to using her maiden name.

When Jon got back to his office there was another note for him, but a very different one this time. A messenger was waiting with it, and he had to sign for it. It was marked TOP SECRET and was heavily sealed.

Note: This is a recommendation of the Reorganization Committee under Senator Wilmington Smith appointed by the Senate, and requires Senate ratification before it can be implemented. It is a memorandum intended as a warning to IREAL officials who will be concerned in the change, if ratified.

Even before he read on Jon wondered fleetingly if this explained Jia's sudden interest in him. He read the rest of the memorandum:

This Reorganization Committee finds that the only real solution to the present desperate situation is further restriction of the number of births. But surveys have shown beyond dispute that any direct Senate order to this effect would almost certainly result in the overthrow of the Senate. The new Senate would then have precisely the same problem to solve.

It has been decided, therefore, that a determined and unceasing effort must be made to so change the thinking of the entire population that they will not oppose the

necessary steps. For this reason the Park is being closed. Also — and this is the aspect of the problem which concerns your department— incomes will have to go down.

IREAL's function heretofore has been to keep the living standard up —to set the highest possible wages consistent with the lowest possible cost of living. It is conclusion of the Reorganization Committee that the higher standard of living has a tendency to make the population resistant to all direction. If the standard of living is brought down, we believe that after a fairly brief period it will be possible to impose population controls which would not at the moment be countenanced.

Heretofore there have been no special provisions in our code of laws for dealing with Chartists. No penalty has been imposed on any member of that sinister organization.

The Reorganization Committee demands a change in the law. It is now necessary to declare open war on the Chartists. If we cannot destroy those creatures by justice, we have to destroy them by fear. The Chartists must be stamped out by violence! The Reorganization Committee demands the re-introduction of the death penalty, third degree interrogation, and suspension of the civil rights of all suspected Chartists.

Jon stared at the memo concernedly. It was an amazing document. It was true that population controls would be violently opposed by the population at large. The government of the Million Cities was democratic, and that meant that the people could throw out any recommendation they didn't like, even an essential one.

Such being the case, Jon wondered if they would stand for the lowering of the cost of living. Obviously Senator Smith's Committee thought they would. He had already learned that the park was to be closed.

Jon pushed aside the papers on his desk, and reflected. The murdered Bill Cronis had brought about the declaration of war on the Chartists, but how far could the Committee go?

A FEW HOURS later, Jon arrived at Jia's apartment punctually. Her manner was cordial, but she treated him more like an old friend of the same sex than like a man in whom she was emotionally interested.

"What do you do for a living?" Jon asked, when they had settled down to a casual, relaxed interchange of pleasantries.

She shrugged. "I don't do anything for a living. I married a man who had a lot of money, and he died. I prefer to use my maiden name. If he hadn't died there'd have been a divorce. But enough about me—tell me about yourself."

Jon hesitated and looked away.

It was apparent that he didn't wish to talk about himself.

Jia laughed. "You didn't use to be so suspicious," she said.

"I didn't use to be an Inspector of Means." There was a touch of annoyance in his voice.

"I'm not asking about your job," Jia told him. "I'm asking about you. Why can't you trust me, Jon?"

"Why should I?" he asked simply. "Why should I trust you? I've told you quite a bit about myself in a general way, but would it be wise for me to go beyond that?"

Jia looked at him thoughtfully. "I think it would be," she said, "and I'm going to tell you why. But it'll take a while. I can't explain in one word."

She moved about the room pensively. Jon watched her, though he had a feeling it might be better if he didn't. He was in great danger, he suddenly realized, of falling in love with Jia all over again.

"We were in love at one time, Jon. When we did get married it wasn't to each other. I was careful never to see you again, and quite a while ago, to be truthful, I got over it. I almost forgot you."

She smiled at him, and Jon smiled back. "Then just the other day," Jia went on, "I was in Cartons, and a very pretty girl attended to me—a girl I thought I knew. Something in her face and voice was familiar. I found out her name. She was Pet Onul—your daughter."

"What's unusual about my daughter working at Cartons? If she's in danger, I ought to know. And why the mystery?" insisted Jon. "If you know about something that's threatening Pet, you . . ." He stopped abruptly. "I see," he said more quietly. "The Chartists."

Jon felt a sudden, agonizing stab of panic. Pet was the one human being he really cared about, and the only person he deeply loved. But there *couldn't* be any reason for the Chartists to be after Pet, he thought—aware, even as the fear came fully alive, that others had said of William Cronis: "But there *couldn't* be any reason for the Chartists to kill a man so free of all political taint or complicity."

"Hold it, Jon," said Jia sympathetically. "It's not that kind of danger. I didn't want to tell you anything at all, but I was quite sure you wouldn't help me otherwise."

"Are you a Chartist, Jia?" Jon asked.

"Don't be a fool," she said sharply. "If I was—do you think I'd say yes? Just tell me this. Do you always know what Pet's doing? Does she confide in you?"

"No. But, Jia, I absolutely insist you tell me—"

Suddenly and unexpectedly Jia said a very ugly word. Jon stopped, startled. Jia was staring at him in exasperation which she didn't even try to conceal.

"Haven't you even been listening to what I've been telling you?" she asked. Her whole attitude had

changed now. "Jon, frankly, I thought you'd be of more help. I even let myself believe I could be of some help to you and Pet. But until you get over this childish 'I've-got-to-know' attitude, I can't even talk to you."

"Jia, if this concerns Pet it just as vitally concerns me," said Jon. "You can't expect me to confide in you without reservation."

"Forget it," Jia said, her voice hardening. "And I suggest you don't say a word about this to Pet. Don't probe."

"Jia," said Jon helplessly, "anything you want to know, I'll tell you."

"No, Jon. I guess I expected too much. I thought you'd trust me, tell me things without demanding a signed statement guaranteeing you absolute immunity. I didn't intend to tell you anything at all. Now, go away, please. And remember—not a word to Pet."

IV

"VERY WELL, madam, I'll send it round," said Pet Onul pleasantly, and added mentally: *Silly old fool!*

It was Pet's ambition, as it was of many girls, to become a designer. But the nearest she had got to this so far was selling lingerie in a leading store. Eventually, she had been promised, she'd get her big chance.

Pet glanced at the card the woman had left, taking care to note the address on a delivery slip. As the significance of the address dawned on her she went rigid, and only by a supreme effort of will did she manage to complete writing it down. When the card had been lightly underscored she crumpled it into her pocket as if it didn't matter.

In urgent cases agents were sometimes contacted in this way, Pet knew that. But it still came as a shock, for this was the first time it had happened to her.

The card informed Pet that there was to be a meeting that night at eight-thirty. Yes, the hour was all right. She hadn't told her father and mother that she *wasn't* going out. She could go home, move about restlessly until eight-fifteen, and then suddenly announce she decided to see a movie.

Liz would say something sharp, but her mother's bad temper was nothing unusual. Jon would merely say, "Have a good time, Pet."

Every time Pet heard the Chartists mentioned she got butterflies in the stomach. Sometimes she wished she had never joined the movement. But if it was frightening being a Chartist, it was a romantically exciting kind of fright. She was somebody—not just a girl who worked in a store. She had a big secret.

Pet went home a little earlier than usual. The hours seemed almost to fly. She sat silently through the dinner hour, and as soon as she dared she hurried to her bed-

room, throwing off her dress. She glanced at her watch. *Plenty of time,* she told herself. *I mustn't become panicky.*

At that moment Jia Hisk was also occupied. From a drawer she took a small box, and removed from it fragments of parchment which looked like ten small pieces of dried skin. She smeared her fingertips carefully with thin adhesive, placed the pieces of plastic skin in position and pressed them hard one after the other against the top of her dressing-table.

Jia now had two right thumbprints, neither of which was her own. One identified nobody at all. The other, which she placed over her left thumb, identified Pet Onul. Jia had removed the girl's prints from the small box Pet had wrapped at Cartons.

Jia preferred to disguise her face instead of wearing a mask. And her set of false fingerprints was one of her own refinements. There was nothing on her now to identify Jia Hisk. Hurriedly she left her home, making sure there was nobody outside to watch her leave.

She went to a house and entered it even more carefully than she had left her own. Inside Jia walked along a bare corridor lined with cubicles.

Two of these cubicles were locked. Jia went into the third, closed the door behind her, stripped to the skin and put on a white overall she found on a hook, and a pair of sandals. Her own clothes she placed in a locker which opened at the pressure of her right thumb. When she closed it the door was locked to everything but her thumb-prints.

Having done this Jia tried the other lockers in the cubicle with her left hand. One of them opened for her. She went through a doorway. Jia's nerve was pretty good, but her heart was thumping as she tried yet another cubicle. By being here, at a Chartist meeting, she was making herself a criminal in the light of everybody except Chartists. By trying to identify a particular Chartist, she was breaking one of the most important rules of the Chartists.

Finally, however, a locker opened. Jia's heart leapt, not entirely with satisfaction or pleasure. Inside, she quickly noted a white sweater and black skirt. Pet Onul was, as she had suspected, a Chartist. Jia closed the locker and hurried to the meeting.

SENATOR Wilmington Smith picked up his briefcase as the car came to a stop at the tubestop nearest to his home. He stepped out and turned left.

A hail of bullets just missed him and spattered the wall past his head. He jumped back, still clutching his briefcase tightly. The man who had fired was opposite the tubestop, and no more than fifteen yards away. Only a complete

novice with a gun would have missed at that range.

Smith threw the leather case wildly at the man, and hurled himself after it. The case struck the assassin's gun hand just as he fired again. Smith cannoned clumsily into him. Someone screamed and a dozen people who had been nearby converged on the two struggling men.

"He must be a Chartist," a woman yelled. Immediately half a dozen voices took up the cry.

"You're Senator Smith, aren't you? That speech of yours—"

It had just been released late that afternoon.

"God, yes, this must be a Chartist killer," cried Smith.

"They're trying to get you just like they got Cronis."

Before Smith reached his own house, only a few yards away, there was already a reporter on the scene.

"I wonder, Senator," he said breathlessly, "if you'd care to say a few words for the *Daily*—"

Smith knew that it was essential for his Reorganization Committee's recommendations to have the frenzied, would-be assassin accepted as a Chartist. He spoke with vehemence. "I call for stronger methods against the Chartists and what happens? An attempt is made on my life. What could that wretch be *but* a Chartist? He'll deny it, of course. But I think there's only one conclusion to be drawn."

Smith nodded to the newspaper man and went into his house.

Coincidences do happen. The man who had tried to shoot Wilmington Smith was not in fact a Chartist. He was an artist, enraged by the closing of that last piece of nature, the Park.

MEANTIME, at the Chartist meeting in El, there was a call for volunteers for an important task.

It was a quite ordinary meeting in general aspect except that everyone, men and women, wore clean, plain overalls. There were about fifty men and women present, sitting quietly attentive like any run-of-the-mill guild or lecture audience. Three people sat facing Jia, two men and a woman. They were senior Chartists and there was no point at all in trying to recognize them.

Jia had tried hard to place Pet and had finally narrowed the choice down to half a dozen members. Most of the women present were young and about Pet's height.

There was no mention of Senator Smith's speech, though practically everyone present must have heard reports of it. The appeal was simply for volunteers for an important task. A half dozen people stared at Jia intently when she didn't rise with the others. It didn't disturb her. Jia had certain privileges in the Chartist movement.

Theoretically, everyone could

refuse, but not many had the courage to do so.

There was a ballot and a girl was chosen. Soon afterward the meeting was dismissed. Some forty people departed. Only the three Chartists seated at the table, the chosen volunteer, and the privileged agents who hadn't volunteered, remained. The meeting became tighter.

"Step forward, please," said the president.

The girl who had been chosen wore a tight mask. She stepped hesitantly to a chair just in front of the president.

"A great deal depends on you," said the president, his expression grim. "Your task is this: you must remove Senator Wilmington Smith."

The girl gasped and jerked convulsively in her chair. The word 'remove' in Chartist circles was a synonym for 'kill'.

The president nodded. "Naturally such a course is repugnant to us — particularly since we so recently found it necessary to remove someone else. I'm quite sure some of you will be able to guess why William Cronis was removed."

"Yes," said Jia, "and if our guess is right, we agree that Cronis' death was necessary. But I object. Senator Smith is different."

The president looked at Jia thoughtfully. "His influence is going to be such, that for the safety of the organization, for the safety of all our individual members, he must be removed. Senator Smith is a greater danger to the Chartist organization than any ordinary individual can possibly believe."

During this discussion the volunteer sat absolutely still. The president looked at her and said, kindly, "You'll receive detailed instructions some time tomorrow."

Jia spoke again, reluctantly. "I withdraw my objection," she said, "provided you can give me an assurance that this isn't merely the first of a series of murders . . . in self-defense."

"I can do that," said the president. "The removal of Smith is quite definitely all that is required to preserve the *status quo*. Let me reassure you particularly on one point. We aren't disloyal to our agents. A plan is being worked out to enable our agent to remove Smith and escape afterwards."

He stopped as a man in the familiar Chartist overall appeared and handed him a note. He read it carefully to himself and handed it to the others. Quickly they scanned it.

The very absence of reaction was significant.

"This will alter our plans," the president said, "and make the removal of Smith very much more difficult. The man accused has been detained as a Chartist. I need hardly tell you we had nothing whatever to do with it." Then without another word the president rose,

and the meeting was dismissed.

Jia hurried to her cubicle, dressed rapidly and got out into the avenue. She saw the others who had remained at the meeting appear one by one, but paid no attention to them. None fit the height of the volunteer. Soon a girl in a white sweater and black skirt slipped out of the house. This girl was Pet Onul. Jia knew immediately she was the chosen volunteer, the Chartist who was to murder Senator Smith. This girl was identical in height and bearing to the one selected for the job.

The following day Jia spent a long time at Cartons, paying more attention to Pet than to her purchases. Jia had no difficulty in seeing that the lovely girl had apparently spent a sleepless night.

Jia knew that she shouldn't have come to see Pet. One of the strictest rules of the Chartists was that no agent should attempt to identify any other agent. If such mutual identification occurred by chance, which sometimes happened, both parties were strictly enjoined to forget what they had learned. The sole exception was in the case of married couples. It was easier to maintain secrecy if a man and his wife were both aware of their shared obligations.

Jia had come because, after all, she bought a lot of things in Cartons and it was in no way odd that she should visit the store again. She had also decided to ignore the rules because she wanted to see how Pet was taking her responsibility.

Somehow Pet sensed the sympathy of this beautiful woman standing on the other side of the glass counter and almost instantly warmed to her. As Jia was leaving, she made a mistake, however. She should have paid in cash and taken her purchases with her. Instead, when Pet said, "Shall I send them?" Jia replied absently, "Yes, please do," and gave Pet her card.

Pet glanced at it. "Jia Hisk!" she murmured, subconsciously recognizing the name, but unable for the moment to place it. Then she looked up, startled.

Jia realized the mistake too late.

There was fear in the girl's eyes —a new fear. It could only mean that Jon had warned his daughter to beware of Jia Hisk. Jia felt a stab of pain at the thought. She had refused to believe there had been no trust at all in him. It hurt to think that he'd immediately gone to Pet and warned her.

"Did your father mention me?" she inquired quietly.

Pet nodded, obviously disturbed, and at a loss for words.

Jia made a snap decision. "Where do you go for lunch?"

"The canteen here," Pet told her.

"Will you lunch with me instead?" Jia asked, trying hard to keep her voice casual.

Pet hesitated, knowing that if she

refused, she'd continue to wonder who Jia was, what she wanted, and what Jon knew or suspected about her.

"All right," she said, not very graciously.

And so Jia arranged to meet her, reflecting wryly that it was a new experience to lunch one day with her former boy friend, and with his daughter the next. She waved her gloved hand into the air and left.

Pet's instructions from the Chartists were slipped to her soon afterwards, and between Jia and the business of Senator Smith and the instructions burning a hole in her pocket, she was on tetherhooks.

In the washroom Pet glanced at the instructions. They were simple and direct. They told her, without circumlocution, that Senator Smith had a son, Ron, and that she would make his acquaintance that evening. They told her exactly how that important first step was to be accomplished.

JIA HAD chosen a quiet little restaurant, not Blake's. After the first course, she asked, "What did your father tell you about me, Pet?" Her manner was easy and friendly, as if she had known the girl for a long time.

She smiled at Pet's hesitation, then said earnestly, "Of course, I can hardly ask you for your confidence when all you know about me is that your father probably warned you against me."

"He didn't warn me against you," said Pet quickly. "He just said, when we spoke late last night, that I seemed tense and . . . well, he felt something was wrong. He asked if it had anything to do with a woman named Jia Hisk. I said 'no'. Naturally, I didn't know you then."

Jia felt relieved. In a surge of warm feeling towards Jon and his daughter she decided to do a mad thing, knowing it was mad. "Pet," she said quietly, "I know what the trouble really was."

Pet stared at her, the color draining from her face. "You don't —you can't," she murmured.

Jia nodded. "Why did you join them, Pet?" she asked.

Pet shook her head. Her lips had tightened and now a slight flush suffused her cheeks.

Jia sighed. "You're right, of course. This could be a trick." She told Pet enough about the evening before to show it was no trick.

"Then you're a—" Pet began.

Abruptly Jia stopped her. "No one admits it," she said, almost harshly. Then her eyes grew compassionate. "Listen, Pet. You don't want to do this, do you?"

"No," Pet said in a low voice. "I'd do anything—anything I felt was right, no matter how dangerous it was. But this is—no, I didn't want to."

"I understand," said Jia. "Pet, when I was your age I was in love with your father."

Pet's eyes opened wide. "I wish you'd married him," she said frankly.

"I didn't, Pet — unfortunately. But I still — well, I still have a tender spot for him. You know what would happen to him if you were caught?"

"They couldn't touch him!" Pet exclaimed.

"Of course they could — and would."

Pet bowed her head. "Is there any way out?" she whispered.

"I'll find one if I can," Jia promised. "Only you must trust me. Have you been told what to do?"

"Yes," said Pet, and hesitated.

"Tell me," said Jia.

Pet had to make a dangerous decision one way or another, and she made it in favor of Jia. She told her.

"I understand," said Jia. "Go ahead and do as you're told. There's just one thing though, Pet. You may get a chance to make them change their minds about you. Perhaps you could get yourself suspected. Not enough to get yourself arrested, but enough to get yourself watched. Then someone else would be appointed."

Pet looked up eagerly. "If I can do that, should I?" she asked.

Jia hesitated, a tormenting indecision in her eyes. "It's up to you, Pet," she said finally, wishing the job had been given to someone in the inner circle.

V

SPACE TRAVEL proved a far more formidable undertaking than the early rocket ship designers and technicians and the research physicists had imagined it would be. The more they learned, the greater became the number and variety and complexity of the problems which had to be solved. All these problems *would* have been solved, however—if popular concern and interest hadn't been whipped to fever pitch by failure after failure.

Even advanced departures in stratospheric jet propulsion resulted in a heavy loss of human life, but not everybody heard about those who died. There was no complete, official, easily-consulted list of casualties, a plain record in black and white setting forth the frightful price that had to be paid whenever man triumphed over nature in his high-altitude penetration of the skies.

Many other scientific and medical achievements killed a great many men and women in their developmental stages. But again no complete international deathroll was ever published. People somehow found it extremely difficult to think of progress in these fields in terms of life and death.

In the case of actual space travel there was no such difficulty, however. The newspapers quickly got into the habit of listing the casualties after every new space flight

attempt had failed, and the fact that a number of innocent bystanders were usually included in the tabulations caused the public to denounce space travel experiments almost from the first.

But even if the newspapers had been less honest and fearless people would still have known, would still have considered space travel dangerous and suspect. Everybody knew when a space bid was taking place. Everyone found out, at the time or later, exactly what had happened, and it became automatic to find out principally how many had died. Soon the total was immense.

Groups of people of various shades of opinion began to agitate for a ban on all such attempts, and though no actual ban had so far been imposed, the weight of popular opinion was almost a ban in itself.

Space travel was postponed, month after month, and year after year, until at last there was a ban—not law, but a firmly-grounded tradition. Everyone knew that if the problem were ever to be solved, Earth's population problems would vanish almost overnight. But was it worth so frightful a price—a million lives, perhaps, for every unsuccessful attempt? Nobody who might reasonably be expected to be included in the million thought so.

The construction of the Million Cities was a wonderful feat of engineering. Metals had been developed to take unbelievable strains. Yet the safety margin was never large. A crash on the surface might collapse every stratum in a section, perhaps the adjoining sections as well, perhaps all the sections throughout the Million Cities.

Technically, even yet there wasn't a flat veto on space-travel experiments. But all such experiments had to be reported to the Senate—and it was general knowledge that the Senate was practically certain to rule that no further action should be taken. Theoretically, the Senate was waiting for a foolproof, completely safe scheme. Practically, the Senate wasn't going to take a chance on anything short of telekinesis.

The Senate might be almost criminally wrong in stopping all space travel. But nobody could say that the Senate had set its face against progress in the most vital of all human areas without reason.

The Million Cities slumbered—all at once. Since mankind was now independent of the sun, there was no point in having different time zones all over the world. So time was the same everywhere.

In Cue, below the Park, Senator Smith worked late making amendments to the report of the Reorganization Committee's findings. Now two policemen sat in the Senator's front hall. He had had it in mind at first to refuse to countenance a police guard, but the stubborn aggressively-minded Senator

had a wife and a son of nineteen. The possible danger to himself from other assassins didn't unduly worry him. It was the thought of danger to Mara and Ron which frightened him and caused him to reconsider his decision.

INDEED THE bond between Rik and Lorna Tenn was not only rare, it was deep and powerful. No other person meant as much in Lorna's life as Rik, and nobody ever would. And Rik's feeling for her was just as profound and steadfast.

They had molded themselves to each other. They had learned that Tom Gest planned to use two ships, both chemically fueled and they hoped the Chartists would back the plan. They had experts who could check the whole idea from inception to culmination. The Senate, of course, would oppose it.

Lorna had no nerves. The knowledge that she, Tom Guest and Rik were committed to something very important pleased her, but she lost no sleep over it.

In the adjoining section, Ee, Tom lay staring at the ceiling for hour after hour, until at last his racing thoughts ceased to torment him, and he slept.

Jia, in El, realized that even if she wished, she couldn't have left the Chartist organization. And if she had been free to make a choice, her life would have in no way been altered.

She had suspected from her first brief glimpse of Pet Onul that the girl must be a Chartist. There was something about Jon's daughter that was unusual, something apart from her mere physical resemblance to Jon. Pet was the sort of girl who would seek adventure passionately, exactly the sort of girl who would have been almost irresistibly drawn to the Chartists. Besides, she was the daughter of a government official, and it was the Chartists' wisely-considered policy to recruit such people wherever possible.

Jia had gotten in touch with Jon for two reasons. The first had been to check her suspicions about Pet. The second had centered around the possibility of recruiting Jon as a Chartist. Jon, unlike Pet, who was too young and irresponsible, would soon have been admitted into the inner circle.

But Jon's attitude hadn't allowed her to go on. In the circumstances it would do no good and a lot of harm for Jon to know the truth about Pet.

Jia was a Chartist agent, but if she could have released Pet from the organization she would have done so with no feeling of disloyalty or guilt. Jia wondered for a moment whether or not the ballot had been fixed. There seemed a strong possibility that Pet Onul, daughter of an Inspector of Means, had been chosen for the task all apart from the ballot. Jia put the light out and went to bed.

Also in El, Jon wakened to the sound of Pet sobbing. He immediately joined his daughter. "I thought you'd be all right today. Are you quite sure I can't do anything?" he asked, gently patting her arm.

"Quite sure. Just leave me alone, Daddy. And please don't ask questions."

Jon was silent for a long time. He was deeply troubled. Pet's involvement in something serious and quite possibly dangerous was clearly what Jia had been so concerned about. He wished that he'd spoken more freely to Jia. He half-believed now that she had been telling the truth from the first, that she wished only to spare him grief and had no desire to pry some important secret out of him.

"You're in trouble of some kind, and you're very young to have such trouble, Pet," he said softly. "Trouble you can't share with anyone."

"Go away!" Pet said. Her tears began to flow once more. "You can't help. Nobody can."

Jon pressed her hand and left her because he saw that that was what she really wanted.

In the darkness Pet waited until she was sure her father must be asleep. Then she let herself go again and sobbed bitterly.

And in the next room Jon listened to her.

THE NEXT morning the Senate very briefly passed emergency regulations which gave *carte blanche* to the Million Cities Bureau of Intelligence, popularly known as MCBI, in dealing with the Chartists and suspected Chartists.

Wilmington Smith, who was above all things a politician, breathed fervent thanks to the assassin who had nearly killed him. But for that incident the Senate would have argued for weeks and finally given only a half-hearted blessing to the Reorganization Committee's recommendations.

The Chartists, the Senator believed, wouldn't last more than a week or two longer. As a striking force they were finished. A fair number of innocent people would suffer, a few innocent people would die, a fair number of guilty people would escape, a few guilty people would make capital out of the drive against their former colleagues. But on the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number, Senator Smith felt justified.

RIK AND LORNA pored excitedly over Tom Gest's plans. Both of them had a certain technical knowledge. Tom was at his post at the University, and could not join them.

Rik admitted, "It surely looks all right. This jet launching ramp takes the payload ship up to nine hundred miles. When it reaches its altitude limit the ship leaves it and carries on at Six G. That leaves

plenty of reserve for the moon trip and back. The powered ramp doesn't even have to come back, and refuel. It orbits until the ship gets back, and the two components join up again."

He frowned at the plans in front of him. "That's the one thing I'm not sure about."

"Would it take so much more fuel for the ship to come down itself without meeting the ramp?" Lorna asked.

"It's not that exactly," Rik said. "It's a question of where it can land. Tom's scheme is good, if it works. This jet ramp is clumsy, but it can land as gently and safely as a helicopter. The ship can't—not this ship, at any rate."

Lorna nodded. "I get it. It's really a political problem. We can get the ship up, but not secretly, and when it comes back—"

"When it returns," said Rik grimly, "the Senate will probably have come to a decision to blast it to bits miles up, so that it can't do any damage landing. There's a lot of problems to be solved, even if everything works exactly as Tom says. We first need to get Chartist backing."

"That'll be all right," said Lorna confidently.

"You're sure this woman you know is a Chartist?" Rik asked.

Lorna nodded.

"Even so," Rik said, "we'll need a big area on the surface somewhere before we can start. And then, assuming take-off goes off all right, the secret will be out. The ship will still have to land. Suppose they don't let it?"

"They won't have time to stop it," said Lorna.

Rik looked doubtful. "Depends on how fast they move. We can be sure it won't be at a snail's pace."

"I suppose there's no chance at all that the Senate would back this?" Lorna said. "I told Tom there wasn't, but I wonder."

Rik shook his head. "The only thing they'll accept is a *fait accompli*. I think if the ship gets back and lands on the ramp safely, we'll be able to take it from there. We'll be able to convince them that there isn't any danger in letting the ramp land. But . . ." He shook his head again and went back to the plans.

He sounded pessimistic, but Lorna wasn't deceived. She knew that for Rik the all-absorbing factor was the difficulties that had to be solved, and the fact that the whole project was dangerous and illegal. A foolproof scheme never interested him if it was foolproof when he came on the scene.

The door bell rang sharply.

Rik gathered the papers and plans together rapidly, a slight apprehension causing him to put the larger blueprints in the wrong filing case.

Lorna had never seen the man who stood in the doorway. She looked at him inquiringly.

"Miss Lorna Tenn?" the man asked.

Lorna nodded.

The stranger stepped quickly into the room. "I won't waste your time," he said. "Can you two prove you're not Chartists?"

Both Rik and Lorna managed not to look startled.

"No," said Rik simply. "Can anyone? Who are you, anyway?"

"Hendon of the MCBI," the man said.

"Who said we are Chartists?" Rik asked.

"Nobody," said Hendon. "We're just checking, that's all." He grinned. "You've got money, you don't work, and you've both been engaged in a few wild schemes. Naturally, if we really believed you were Chartists I wouldn't be talking like this. We'd have had you watched." He paused an instant, then went on quickly, "Tell me, are you two in sympathy with the Chartists generally?"

"Yes," said Rik frankly.

Hendon nodded as if the statement did not surprise him. "If you haven't joined them, why haven't you?"

"Because if you join the Chartists, you can't get out," said Rik bluntly.

Hendon nodded again. "That makes sense," he admitted. "Would you have any objections if I searched this flat now?"

"Yes," said Rik calmly. "Very serious objections. Go and get a warrant."

"Why do you object?"

Rik smiled. "Would you let me search your flat? I'll tell you this, Mr. Hendon. If I were a Chartist there certainly wouldn't be anything here for you to find. Go and get a warrant if you like." Rik waved his hand humorously in the air. He was smiling.

"You're obviously enjoying this, Mr. Tenn," Hendon said. "But let me remind you, or inform you if you don't already know, that it does nobody any good to get on the wrong side of the MCBI. Most particularly, it does nobody any good to be suspected of being a Chartists. You may not find this so amusing later," he added angrily. "Strong measures are going to be taken against the Chartists."

"That's possible," Lorna agreed. "Does that concern us, though?"

Hendon nodded. "If we'll be instructed to interrogate by any means we like—as seems likely—you two are going to be high on the list. You won't be amused then."

"Possibly not," Rik agreed. "Incidentally, Mr. Hendon, it may interest you to know that we've been recording all this."

Hendon looked startled. He had lost his temper and had said rather more than he ought to have. The announcement shook him. He tried, however, to put a bold face on it.

"You can guess what my report on you two is going to be like," he said significantly, turning to go.

"We can guess, yes," Rik said.

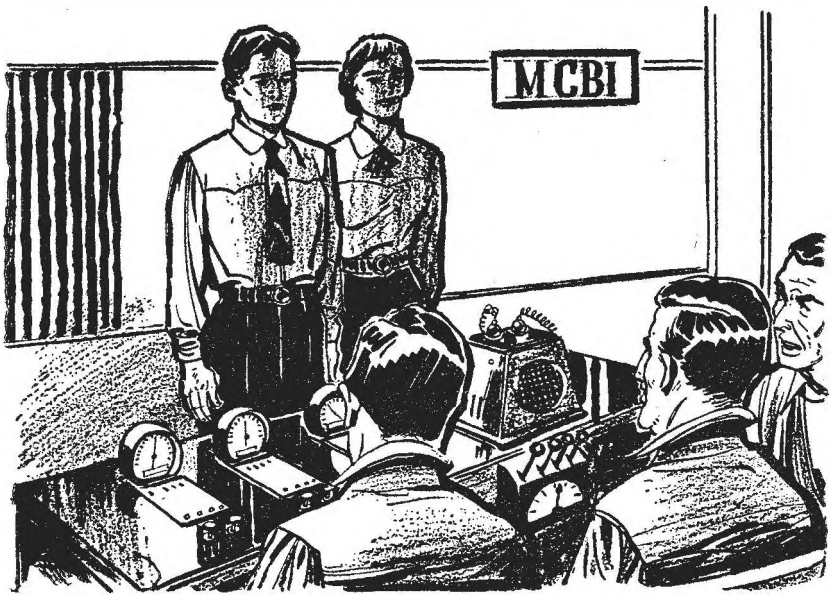
The MCBI man strode out angrily, slamming the door behind him.

Lorna looked at Rik without humor. "Do you think this means anything," she asked.

Rik shook his head. "Nothing very much. It was too easy to get Hendon's goat. He can't be much more than a glorified office boy in the MCBI. It's just as he said. They're checking on all potential Chartists, and naturally we are on the list."

The next day, however, Hendon returned with a warrant and a couple of other men from the MCBI. They accompanied Rik and Lorna to headquarters. The MCBI atmosphere was tense and unfriendly. When the brother and sister adamantly refused to submit to interrogation by lie-detector, truth serum and psychological tests, there was a suggestion of far more brutal methods in store for them.

Finally Rik and Lorna were led to a grey, plastic block three feet high and eight feet long. On it were various steel instruments, nothing else. Then in horror, and in justifiable wisdom, they submitted to the psych tests. It was fortunate that they did, for the MCBI were unable to learn anything at all. As soon as they were convinced that



neither Rik nor Lorna Tenn were Chartists, the MCBI released them.

"I know now what I'm going to do right away," Rik told his sister grimly when they finally arrived home. "I intend to join the Chartists."

Lorna shook her head. "No, not yet, Rik. They're bound to watch us for a while, and we won't be any good to the Chartists if we let our anger put us behind prison bars."

RON SMITH visited a certain friend of his every Thursday evening. There was no secret about that, and anyone who cared to take a little trouble could have found it out for himself. Also Ron's route to his friend's house and back. He always walked, and he always walked the same way.

The lights in the Million Cities never went out but there was day and there was night. The only people who worked at night were those whose occupation demanded night working—bakers, journalists, repair men, criminals—making the night dangerous. It was early in the morning when Ron made his way home.

He was walking along briskly, whistling, when half a dozen men stepped from various doorways and barred his path. The expressionlessness of their faces indicated that they all wore masks, and crude ones at that. Ron didn't have much chance to run. He shouted instead, feeling there would be people close by to hear him. He had forgotten he was in a business region, busy by day, deserted by night.

His shout stopped abruptly as one of the men kneed him viciously in the stomach.

"Tell your father," someone was saying, "that we could just as easily have killed you. We will the next time. No, we're not going to kill you now. Just"—a blow in the kidney made Ron leap convulsively in agony—"make a little demonstration for Senator Smith's benefit."

Ron's legs were kicked from under him. He was trying desperately to fight back, but he was unable to. They seemed to understand how hard to hit him in order to hurt him without allowing Ron to escape into unconsciousness. Ron's ribs ached under a rain of blows. His shoulders and back seemed to be on fire.

Suddenly, some distance away, a girl screamed. "Beat it!" said the leader briefly, and Ron was almost instantly alone.

There was a patter of light steps, and a girl was kneeling beside him. A very pretty girl of about his own age. As she lifted his head Ron saw she had the most enchanting pair of eyes he had ever beheld. She wore an off-the-shoulder sweater, and a close fitting, turban-like hat.

"Who were they? What were

they doing?" Pet Onul asked breathlessly.

"I don't know. They—were beating me up," Ron gasped, his temples pounding and a dull ache in his groin.

"They may be back then," said the girl. "I'll call the police."

Ron shook his head to clear it. "No, get me into a car, and it won't matter if they do come back."

He found that he could stand, and with the girl's help, stagger to a tubestop and climb inside the car.

"Whoever you are," he said, "thanks very much. I—"

"You don't think I'm going to leave you, do you?" Pet asked. "You can't walk. Where to?"

She set the controls for his destination, only a few streets away. The journey was long enough for them to introduce themselves, no more. Pet gave her name as Helen Rice. She had an address she could give if necessary, too. The people there, who weren't Chartists, would take messages for her without volunteering the information that she lived at a quite different address. Pet also had a perfectly good explanation for being in that street at that time of night.

"Why on earth should they do that to you?" Pet was asking, as the car came to a stop. "Have you a lot of money on you?"

"It wasn't that," said Ron, glad to delay for as long as possible the ordeal of getting out of the car and walking to his home. "It was on account of my father."

"And who's your father?" Pet asked.

"Senator Smith," said Ron proudly.

They had just arrived at their stop. "Let's get out now," Pet said. "I'll help you."

Pet assisted Ron to his door, fifty yards away, and rang the bell. The door was opened by a policeman who got them both inside, and shut the door.

"I don't think he's seriously hurt," Pet said, "But anyway, he's in good hands now." She turned to go.

"Let her go, Hunt," said Ron from the chair in which he had been deposited. "She—she had nothing to do with this."

"All the same I'd like to hear the story," said Hunt.

His colleague, Cram, joined him, and, disturbed by the noise, Senator Smith himself appeared in a dressing-gown, saw Ron reeling in the chair and rushed to support him.

"I'm all right, Pop," said Ron weakly, "and don't put your arm round my shoulder. It hurts."

Smith spun round and stared belligerently at Pet, the only person present who might conceivably be responsible for his son's injuries. Pet stared back no less belligerently. The two policemen stood back, leaving the matter to Smith.

"You tell them, Helen," Ron urged.

Pet explained what had happened and Smith's belligerence gave place to gratitude.

"We owe you a lot, Miss Rice," said Senator Smith warmly. "Perhaps we owe you Ron's life."

"You don't owe me anything," said Pet, with deliberate rudeness, and turned to the door again.

"Miss Rice," said Senator Smith, puzzled. "Miss Rice—Helen, you seem to have something against me. What is it?"

Pet turned and faced him. "It was your fault this happened to Ron," she said. "It was you who started talking about brutality and being hard and tough and frightening the Chartists into betraying each other. Why be surprised when someone fights you the way you're going to fight them?"

"Are you by any chance a Chartist yourself, Miss Rice?" asked Senator Smith quietly.

Pet turned away in disgust. "I might have expected that," she said.

"I'm sorry," said Smith. "We must get Ron to bed. Will you wait, Helen?"

"What for?" Pet demanded.

"I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful."

"You've said you're grateful, and I believe you. If I'm not to be charged with anything, goodnight."

"Helen," said Ron quietly, "where can I find you?"

Pet looked round at him, hesitated. "You can leave a message at Five thousand sixty-four Queen's Road," she said. "Goodnight."

Pet was sorry for Ron, who had been quite severely hurt, but she had to admit that the Chartists had arranged for her a very effective introduction into the Smith household.

VI

THE REIGN OF terror Senator Smith had demanded got under way very rapidly. The questioning and methods which the organizational committee authorized to secure the truth grew more vicious.

A man called Merle who publicly and very vigorously attacked the Senate for its inhumanity was the first to die under questioning. He was followed to the grave very closely by the first woman victim —a girl who led a public demonstration to an MCBI office. Her death was officially described as "unfortunate."

Only a few very stubborn—and very brave—suspects died, however. Most suspects were released after interrogation. And the most terrifying thing about them was their silence. So the MCBI's campaign expanded against the Chartists. Some suspects were released complaining bitterly of how brutally they had been treated. It turned out they'd been given only the ordinary psych-tests. These

were few. Most of the men and women released by the MCBI were silent, grim, and would say nothing afterwards.

Soon hundreds of people were being arrested every day. The number of people who had died under questioning — information the MCBI never attempted to conceal —rose to fourteen, to twenty-three, to fifty. The MCBI did not even attempt to deny that some of these victims had been wrongly accused, and were probably quite innocent. You couldn't terrify blond people by declaring a war on redheads. If you wanted to frighten a whole population, nobody could be allowed to feel quite safe—not even the innocent.

The public wouldn't have countenanced the campaign if it hadn't been so dangerous to express horror over the situation. Most of the people interrogated had simply said openly and courageously that the Chartists weren't as black as they were painted, that these measures were inhuman, that Senator Smith was a monster, and that the Million Cities had thrown off civilization and gone back to the worst days of savagery.

People quickly learned that the way to avoid MCBI interrogation was to say nothing about it, show no interest in it, and let the MCBI get on with its grim, merciless business in secret. Smith became known as Butcher Smith for a while, but not for long. Half a dozen people who used that verbal "villification" in public were arrested and interrogated. Two of them died.

"It will be over soon," Senator Smith declared reassuringly. "We are cutting out these Chartists like a cancer. The men and women who have died are almost certainly Chartists. Every day hundreds of new suspects are being reported to us by the general public."

He didn't say, though he might have done so, that few of these new suspects showed any real sign of being Chartists.

Senator Smith was sincere in his distorted, cruel, bigoted way—as sincere as an embattled politician could be. He believed that the Chartists had to be stamped out, and that his methods would be successful. But he couldn't deceive himself into thinking that he'd made any real progress so far. Only one man had actually been identified as a Chartist, and that lone conspirator had killed himself in a way which suggested that all Chartists would turn to self-destruction as a last resort.

There were others who seemed to be possibilities, but they had either revealed nothing under torture or had died with their lips sealed.

Senator Smith was uneasily aware that many innocent people had died, and that possibly quite a few guilty people had escaped,

cleared despite all the MCBI could do to establish their guilt.

Obstinately he decided his only recourse was to intensify the campaign. Without hesitation he gave the necessary orders.

"OH! SOMETHING special tonight, I see," said Liz sharply.

Pet blushed and turned away.

"Just watch what you're doing, Pet, that's all," said Liz. "When you're eighteen you think you know everything. Later on you find you didn't really know so much."

"Oh, won't you keep quiet!" said Pet resentfully.

Liz did so in hurt silence. Her comments hadn't been ill-intentioned. She had merely been showing an interest in Pet, trying her best to be friendly. But her complete, dismal failure was no surprise to her. Liz trying to be friendly sounded like an unfriendly person endeavoring to pick a fight.

"Have a good time, Pet," was all Jon said. He was relieved to see Pet dressing up and going out for an evening's entertainment. However burdensome her trouble was, she was evidently taking a night off from it.

Parents in the pre-atomic age had been traditionally conditioned to watch over their children like jailers. In the concrete and glass age it began to be not at all uncommon for parents to have no idea where their children were at any stated time, and now in the Million Cities, most eighteen-year-olds would have been ashamed to admit their parents exercised the slightest restraining influence over them. It was a regrettable trend, but inevitable when the opinion of one's contemporaries counted for more than the approval of elders.

In primitive communities age meant wisdom. In civilized communities youth was the envy of all, and young people were a privileged group.

Pet had never had much time for boys, and that was the literal truth. There had always been something else she was more interested in, and chance had never happened to throw in her path any young male with both the inclination and the ability to change her point of view.

Pet herself had done her best to keep herself from falling in love. Like most young attractive girls, she had learned how to nip undesirable associations in the bud —only she nipped them too completely and too soon. The few she hadn't nipped had failed to flower, and at eighteen she was disillusioned and firmly convinced that love was a very much overrated emotional experience.

There was a certain amount of self-deception in her attitude, of course, and she was able to deceive herself quite considerably over the affair of Ron Smith. In the first place, so long as she was

concerned only with Ron she could forget completely that her real job was the murder of Ron's father. In the second place, the fact that she had been instructed by the Chartists to act precisely as she was doing satisfied her conscience. She wasn't going out with Ron because she wanted to, but because she'd been told to. She wasn't breaking her own rules.

Ron had written just once, in care of the address she had given him. It was a simple and straightforward little note, asking her to a show and to supper afterwards. Pet had replied saying she'd be delighted, and making it clear by inference that her acceptance was purely conventional, and that if Ron really wanted to delight her he'd have to take further action.

She met him at the corner of Cue and Pee. The only open spaces in the Million Cities, apart from the surface, were at the junctions, all the way down. These were the squares, the meeting places.

As Pet arrived hundreds of other girls in their smartest clothes were waiting for hundreds of boy friends, and just as many boy friends who hadn't yet spied their beloveds were looking anxiously around them.

Pet didn't have to wait. The instant she stepped into the light Ron was at her side, looking at her with frank admiration.

"Memory did you an injustice," he said.

The gallantry sounded curiously old-fashioned, but Pet liked it.

"You look better than you did the last time I saw you, too," she said.

"Thanks very much," said Ron wryly.

In the car Ron made no passes at her, much to Pet's relief. She had been instructed to let the affair develop as far and as quickly as possible, within reason. It would be preferable if Ron's view of what was within reason could be made to coincide with hers.

They both enjoyed the show. Pet, who seldom went to shows because she didn't like to go alone, realized something of what she'd been missing.

A short car journey took them to a club Ron knew. Although the trip was short Ron managed to kiss Pet a dozen times after overcoming her initial reluctance. Pet told herself coldly, if a little breathlessly, that the enjoyment she had derived from the proceedings was purely animal and to be distrusted.

Supper, too, was a delightful experience. Pet had never been in a night club before and was disappointed to see that the girls in the cabaret were, if anything, more voluminously clad than she was herself. She spoke about this to Ron.

He laughed. "Depends where you go, Helen," he said. "I think the theory here is that the girls in the floor show shouldn't distract

the men's attention too much from the women they're with."

"That's reasonable," Pet admitted.

"Of course it is. But there's no risk in our case. Tell me about the Chartists, Helen."

It was slipped in so easily, so casually, that Pet was saved from a reaction which might have given her away by the slowness of her response. It was a second or two before she realized exactly what Ron had said, and then it was only natural for her to look dismayed.

"What would I know about the Chartists?" she asked.

"First," Ron said, "why do you wear a mask?"

The mask which Pet was wearing the Chartists had provided for her, and it was supposed to be kissproof, among other things.

Pet didn't attempt to deny that she wore a mask. It could be too easily investigated.

"I'm not really as pretty as you think," she said. "I—"

"Try again," Ron invited. "You wouldn't wear a mask to improve your looks. You'd get your face changed. And what's your real name, anyway?"

'This isn't very funny, Ron," said Pet, lowering her eyes to hide her growing alarm.

"It isn't meant to be. But listen for a minute, Helen. I can't expect you to admit anything until you know what I'm getting at. I want to join the Chartists myself."

Pet caught her breath.

"I know all about the Chartists," said Ron eagerly. "I've studied their history. But no one ever asked me to join—and I could hardly put a small ad in the paper."

Pet sat listening to him, her thoughts in a turmoil. She suspected the possibility of a trap and was fearful of saying anything. She couldn't admit to Ron that she belonged to the Chartists organization. And she was shaken and alarmed by the possible effect of this new development on her assignment?

"Let me see your real face, Helen," Ron begged.

She came to a sudden decision. "I think you're crazy," she said.

Ron shook his head impatiently. "Don't let's go through all that again," he said. "You know I'm not going to betray you. You saved my life, didn't you?" His eyes narrowed suddenly. "Or was it a plant? Was the incident only meant to—"

"Ron, I don't understand what you're talking about," she said desperately.

He refused to be diverted. "If it was a plant," he said slowly, "it was to introduce you to me. What was the point of that, I wonder? Possibly—yes, that could be it. Your real job is with my father!"

Pet desperately wished she were somewhere else. Argument was useless. Ron simply ignored her

denials and went in a straight line for the truth.

"I still want to join the Chartists," Ron said, half to himself, "but I can't let them—"

Suddenly he got up. "We can't talk here," he said. "I know a better place."

Pet got up, half frightened, half relieved. At least this was a postponement, and she was being granted time to think.

They left the club and got into a car. Pet tried to see how Ron set the controls, but as if by accident he was leaning over between her and the board. The car got under way.

"Don't talk now," he warned. "You never know."

They sat silent, then abruptly Ron's arm went around her waist and he was holding her in a firm, reassuring embrace.

"Listen, Helen, he murmured, I'd kill myself before I'd let any harm come to you through me."

Perhaps he really believed that, Pet thought. But would he feel differently when he discovered that his guesses had been correct? Nevertheless, Pet gradually began to feel better. It was nice to be in someone's arms, cosy, comfortable and exciting . . . But when Ron made an attempt to kiss her fervently on the lips she turned her head away and said firmly, "No, Ron."

He replied cheerfully. "I thought not, but there was no harm in trying."

It was a long trip. Pet had plenty of time to think, but her thinking got her nowhere.

At last they stepped out on the surface, and Pet blinked in surprise. It was night. She had only been on the surface once before at night, and the weather had been cold and unpleasant. Now the upper world was warm and silent with thousands of stars winking in the sky.

Ron looked around carefully. A white dress gleamed some hundred yards to the right. To the left there was only the moonlight and a smooth stretch of topsoil. He took Pet's arm and they walked.

"I don't agree with everything the Chartists have ever done," he said suddenly. "But in the main I think they've been right. They've done the things that needed to be done. Now, Helen, tell me the truth."

"What truth?" she asked. "I haven't understood half of what you've been saying."

"Well, if that's the way you want it," said Ron, and abruptly put his hand over her mouth.

She struggled desperately without accomplishing anything very much.

"If I let you go," he whispered in her ear, "will you take your mask off?"

She nodded. He released her, and remembering that there was a

couple quite near, she filled her lungs to scream. Before she could utter a sound Ron had his hand over her mouth again.

"After that," he said grimly, "you deserve what you get. This is going to hurt."

Pet's mask was held firmly in place by an adhesive which she could dissolve with a liquid preparation when she wanted to take it off. But Ron was in no mood to waste time begging her for the phial. He simply tore the mask off, ignoring her cry of pain, and looked into her face.

"Why, you're twice as pretty as I though!" he exclaimed. "Now, Helen, are you going to behave? I'm stronger than you, you know."

She hesitated, then nodded again.

"Before I let you go," he said, "let me warn you. If you scream you'll make it more difficult for both of us. I'll have to explain what this is all about, and my statements will be investigated. Protecting you then may be well beyond my power."

He waited a second or two for the words to sink in. Then he released her. She didn't scream.

"So I was right," Ron said. "If you weren't a Chartist, you'd have screamed for help. Keeping silent would have made no sense."

Pet said nothing. If she had still been wearing her mask, she might have defied him, and if the police had appeared, their sympathies would be all with her. She could have told them a convincing lie. She might even have been able to make them dismiss Ron's accusations as wild and malicious.

But without her mask she was easily identifiable as Pet Onul, and she didn't dare risk the consequences. She had to turn the balance in her own favor, and she made a desperate effort.

"When you're a Chartist, Ron," she said, "then we can talk."

"We can talk now," he retorted, "especially as you've admitted it at last."

"I haven't admitted anything. I can't until I know you're completely sincere, that you're keeping nothing from me."

He nodded. "I guess that's so," he said mildly. "But let's get one thing clear. If the Chartists have any ideas about my father, they'd better forget them."

Pet stayed silent.

"It's funny, Helen," said Ron in wonder. "I love you. No, I don't mean that's funny. I mean I never thought it could happen so quickly."

"You don't really love me," said Pet breathlessly, "you just—"

"I do. I swear it. I'm ready to take a chance on you. Of course, I can't expect you to take a chance on me, but . . ." He stopped abruptly. "You're not married, are you?" he asked quickly.

"No."

Ron breathed again. "That's all

right then. Helen, you're going to marry me. You may not think so now, but I'm just telling you so you won't be able to doubt my sincerity later on. How do you think you'll like being Mrs. Ron Smith?"

"You're crazy," said Pet, though her heart didn't think so.

"Not so crazy. I think you're beautiful. That's a good start—you never find a girl hating you for thinking her beautiful. I'm glad you're a Chartist, because I'm going to be one and my wife should be one too. You've got brains, and that's good too, for I couldn't marry a stupid girl. You hate my father, but that doesn't matter. You're not going to marry him."

"You've got plenty of self-confidence, anyway," Pet said.

"If I don't believe in myself, who will? Listen, Helen, I'm serious. In the ordinary course of events maybe I wouldn't have told you so soon that I loved you. But since this business of the Chartists has come up, since you know I know you're a Chartist, I wanted to make it clear how I felt. I'm not going to betray you. You don't have to be frightened of me. You don't have to run. I trust you, and you can trust me."

He kissed her again.

Pet broke away. "Let's go back, Ron," she pleaded. "Don't rush me."

"One other thing, then we'll go. What's your real name?"

"I can't tell you that . . . yet."

"All right," he said mildly, "don't."

He turned and led the way back to the tubestop. So mixed up that she hardly knew what she was doing, Pet followed him.

VII

AS FAR AS appearance went, the meeting was exactly like the last. Everybody present wore the plain white overalls which concealed everything but gender.

It wasn't a handsome-looking collection of people, but there was an excellent reason for that. The simpler and more effective disguises almost always involved coarsening rather than refining. It was not only easier but more expedient to look older, uglier, fatter, stupider than one really was. The deception applied with equal force outside Chartist meetings too. People stared at men and women who were young, beautiful, slim, clever, but seldom bestowed a second glance on the more unattractive specimens of humanity.

The essential difference between this meeting and the last was that everyone present was a member of the Chartist inner circle.

It wasn't Inner Circle, with prestige and prerogative and power. The Chartists, unlike almost all other secret societies, didn't go in for mumbo-jumbo and initiation ceremonies and a multiple-rank

system. The inner circle was functional, not titular. The senior Chartists were simply the trusted members of the organization—those who knew what it was really for.

The president—a different president this time—was more friendly and informal than the one who handled the general meetings. "We have a guest tonight," he said, "and since the less we all know about him the better, I'll simply call him C." He looked round at the man on his left. "It's all yours, C," he said, and sat down.

C stood up. It would be impossible and pointless to describe him. He was of medium height and everything else about him was medium. He was like the average man, so normal, medium and average that he couldn't possibly exist. And that made complete sense, for C didn't exist—not the C Jia and the other senior Chartists saw.

"I believe you've had a hint of a change to come in the organization," he said in an average voice. "I'm here to tell you more about it. Briefly, the day of the Chartists is almost over. I don't mean that the organization is going to cease to exist. I mean it will become smaller and go completely under cover. At the first convenient opportunity, the Chartists will be officially disbanded."

He paused, but there was no hum of conversation. One reason for that unusual, almost unnatural absence of comment was that nobody knew the person next to him. Another was that this was no ordinary, random selection of human beings.

"I expect you all have your own ideas about why the present system has been used for so long," C went on. "It's an excellent system, and one that will be abandoned with the greatest reluctance. When ninety percent of all Chartists don't know what the organization is nobody else is likely to find out. And since we control the young radical core of the Million Cities, including many young scientists and technicians, we can perform, purely as a side-line, many useful services, such as stopping wars, executing dangerous criminals and giving technology a helping hand now and then.

"Incidentally, it's about time we had another spectacular scientific advance associated with our name. If any of you should hear of anything worth following up, it will be your instant duty to report it to the Inner Circle.

"Whether we should stop wars is open to question, but I don't think many of us actually have serious reservations on that score. Wars are a natural way of removing excess population, and disaster would follow any attempt to impose an enduring peace by force of arms.

"To come to the point—why we are forced to abandon this system.

We must do so because it is becoming increasingly difficult to control properly a large quasi-subversive organization while the MCBI is taking such drastic action. And that action may go on for years. Most of the ordinary members confine their activities entirely to discussion and analysis of trends. They seldom have an opportunity to act, or even to plan action. And because we can no longer keep our own junior members out of mischief, it has become absolutely necessary for us to reorganize the group."

He paused, and Jia took the chance to ask a question.

"In view of this, C," she said clearly, "is the proposed assassination of Senator Smith being abandoned?"

"No," said C. "Why should it be?"

"He's being removed as a menace to the present Chartist organization. If the organization is being disbanded, surely it's no longer necessary to commit this murder—a murder which doesn't have the full support of the movement, I'm certain."

C's expressionless face regarded her steadily. "That isn't my department," he said. "But I think I can answer your question. The change I've been discussing may take place in two months—or in ten years. We don't know. And while it is true that the removal of Smith—which, I repeat, has nothing to do with me—might not be necessary if the reorganization takes place immediately, a delay in our plans would make him a continuing and deadly menace."

Jia nodded. She had to be satisfied, though for a moment she had hoped she'd found a way out for Pet. Intellectually she admitted that from the Chartist point of view the removal of Smith was easily justifiable. And Chartist affairs should always be regarded intellectually. She still wished, nevertheless, that the case of Smith could have been dealt with without bringing Pet into it.

The president took over again. He didn't stand up. "Now another matter," he said. "I expect you're all getting concerned over the possibility of being picked up and interrogated by the MCBI."

'Getting concerned' was the understatement of the year. That the reign of terror was failing in its primary object no one knew better than the Chartists. Four of their members had been arrested, one had died and the other three had been released, completely cleared. But that didn't mean that any Chartist could face the thought of arrest with equanimity. He might be tortured to death anyway. He might be forced to kill himself. And only after all that the MCBI could do to him did he stand any chance of being released.

"Soon," the president went on, "we'll have an undetectible drug

which renders us immune to pain. We'll all be trained how to react so that our employment of the drug won't be discovered. But I'm afraid it will be several weeks before its development, testing and manufacture has been completed. Meantime, I want each of you to collect two buttons from me."

He held up two ordinary-looking black buttons. "So long as these are kept within twenty inches of each other," he said, "they're inactive. But the instant they're separated by two feet or more they begin to send out a continuous signal. If an emergency should arise that warning message will be picked up somewhere in the Million Cities—and appropriate action will be taken.

"But I want to impress on you most strongly that this signal is to be sent out only in an extreme emergency. I'm not going to tell you what action will be taken once the signal has been received. Perhaps it won't be possible to do anything. But remember—mere arrest doesn't justify using this signal. These buttons aren't being issued to ordinary members, and they're only to be used when there is real danger of betrayal—when any one of you feels the truth is going to be wrested from him by savage or other forms of torture. Is that clear?"

One by one the men and women collected a pair of buttons. Jia chose two ornamental silver buttons which would suit almost any type of garment.

The meeting was then dismissed.

Jia returned to her flat after the Chartist meeting with her usual care, and proceeded to cover her tracks with more than her usual caution. After every meeting nowadays she destroyed the clothes she had worn, so that a search of her flat at any time would reveal nothing. Masks and clothes in themselves weren't suspicious, but there was always the chance that they'd be identified.

The Chartist immunity to psychtest protected the organization rather than the individual. Direct evidence from these tests was still inadmissible in the courts, but in practice an innocent person charged with a crime generally asked for a lie-detector test. Truth drugs were more dangerous. In a lie-detector test a suspect could evade the truth to some extent, but truth serums loosened the tongue completely. And though such evidence was inadmissible in court the police or MCBI invariably accepted it unofficially, and released the prisoner without trial.

Used on Chartists the tests didn't work positively, but they might work negatively. If they failed to produce the desired information, their very failure was significant.

Hitherto that failure hadn't mattered. If there was no proof and the tests didn't help, suspects were released.

Now things were different. If the tests failed that meant that the prisoner was probably a Chartist —and the MCBI got tough.

Jia thought she had a fair chance of deceiving the psych-test technicians all the way, not only by telling them lies but by convincing them that the lies were the truth. But she had no desire to put her talents to the test. She proposed never to be questioned at all.

Just after she had completed removing all evidence that she had been out that evening, the buzzer sounded. Jia had long since gotten over all anticipation or apprehension at unexpected visits, and went to the door with nothing more than mild interest.

A woman completely unknown to her stood in the doorway, a young woman who was carelessly dressed but very self-possessed.

"Jia Hisk?" the girl asked.

Jia nodded.

When Lorn Tenn hesitated, as if unwilling to speak from the doorway, Jia stepped back and motioned her inside.

"I want to get in touch with the Chartists," said Lorna bluntly. "No, don't speak. Pretend you're stunned by the idea and can't think of anything to say. That way I can explain why I am here, and you won't need to admit anything."

She didn't pause to give Jia a chance to reply at this point. Jia, though shocked by what Lorna had said, couldn't help admiring her way of doing things.

Lorna introduced herself and mentioned Rik and Tom Gest, though not by name. It was a strange kind of communication. Both women seemed to sense that a certain amount of plain speaking was needed, and nothing more than was needed should be said. Much later, for example, when Jia was on the verge of admitting that she was a Chartist, so that complete understanding would come more quickly, and asked how Lorna had known, Lorna refused to tell her, and Jia didn't insist, though the matter was of considerable importance to her.

Lorna told Jia she had been interrogated by the MCBI, knowing Jia would have read about it, and that display of candor established a certain contact from the first.

Lorna went on, "I have access to what would, I think, be a workable, safe means of travel to the moon and the planets. Would the Chartists back such an experiment?"

"I could take steps," Jia admitted cautiously, "to find out."

She believed Lorna, and to a certain extent trusted her. Jia knew about Rik from the reports of Lorna's interrogation, and was fully aware that Lorna would expect her to know. As for the scheme itself, the amount of credence one gave to a thing like that depended largely on its source.

Lorna seemed to have the right kind of knowledge, and her very reticence was convincing.

Suddenly, when everything that needed to be said had been said, inspiration struck Jia. She considered an idea that had come into her mind ready-made, and realized that it was likely to work. It held certain dangers, of course. But any plan involving the Chartists was bound to be highly dangerous.

"Listen to me for a moment," she said.

Lorna looked at her steadily. She, too, had gained some respect for Jia from the interview. Between them there was the natural gulf that separates beautiful women who spend much of their time and effort making themselves attractive as possible, and cold, logical women who haven't much time for such artifices. But Lorna and Jia could meet on common ground when Jia showed herself to be as cold and calculating as Lorna.

"Assuming I'm a Chartist," Jia went on. "If I agreed to handle this matter myself—to see it through—I'd be finished as a Chartist. I would be identified. I'd have given myself away. In other words, whoever introduces this plan of yours would be instantly suspect—a Chartist who has been identified. Now, I don't want that. I'd like you to agree to contact someone else,—someone more obscure than I am and more—reckless, shall we say?—and never reveal to that person what you know or suspect about me."

"Why should I do this?" Lorna asked.

"Why shouldn't you?"

"The fewer people involved the better. Why introduce this girl as another factor?"

"What gives you the idea," Jia asked curiously, "that this other person is a girl?"

"You said 'that person'," said Lorna. "If it had been a man you'd simply have said 'him', without any accent."

"You're intelligent," Jia admitted. "That being so, I'm sure you'll appreciate the advantages of doing this the way I want it done instead of trying to change a very determined woman's mind."

Lorna nodded. "All right. Who's the girl?"

Jia told her about Pet Onul and exactly where and when to find her.

TOM GEST stared as Rik Tenn entered the room. He hadn't seen him since the arrest of both twins and the fact that they had been released had not allayed his misgivings. It did not seem at all unlikely that they had been freed deliberately—to lead the MCBI to another prime suspect, himself.

"Hello, Tom," said Rik easily.

Tom gulped. "Hello, Rik," he

said. "Haven't seen you for a long time."

"And you won't for a considerable time to come," Rik said. "I've got to be very careful about coming to see you. I couldn't come until I was sure no one would follow me here, and I don't intend to stay long. All I want to tell you is this. You were a friend of mine before I was arrested as a suspected Chartist, but the arrest scared you. You thought I was a dangerous person to know—so dangerous that you haven't seen Lorna or me since. Got that?"

"Yes, Rik," said Tom uncomfortably.

Rik's almost insulting candor showed—perhaps it was meant to show—exactly what Rik thought of him. Tom didn't mind so much what Rik thought of him, but it hurt him to realize that Lorna almost certainly regarded him in the same light.

"As for the space travel scheme," Rik said, "you worked on it for a while and then abandoned it. You had no intention of proceeding further with it. A set of your plans was lost, possibly stolen, but you couldn't see any reason why anyone should steal them. You had lost interest in the whole thing, and couldn't see why anyone else should be interested. Is all that clear in your mind?"

Tom nodded.

"That's all," said Rik, preparing to go. "Whatever happens stick to that and you'll be all right. Remember—"

"You mean," said Tom hopefully, "I won't be called in to give advice about spaceship construction?"

"What I've just told you," said Rik with sharp finality, "is what you'll say if you are ever questioned."

"Yes, Rik," Tom agreed submissively.

He was frightened again by the way Rik left the apartment, carefully watching the street until he was satisfied that it was safe to leave. Tom remembered the reports of what had been happening to people questioned by the MCBI, and shuddered. To go on despite those reports was courageous beyond anything Tom could imagine. It was also crazy, and if Rik could leave him out of it so much the better. Rik *had* to leave him out of it. Yet . . .

Tom sat miserably in a chair thinking of Lorna Tenn. Lorna was the girl for him, the only girl for him, and he had lost her because he lacked the courage which she shared with Rik.

AFTER RON SMITH had left her Pet Onul wasn't in the least surprised to find he was following her. She felt better, curiously enough, when she discovered this. Ron had had the better of her all evening. It was pleasant to be engaged with

him for a change in a contest she was bound to win.

She went into a woman's lavatory which had two doors, and waited just long enough for him to establish that there were two doors and go to the other one. Then Pet came out of the first door. It was laughable, almost disappointing, to find that this old trick worked and she had lost him already. She did a number of other things to make sure.

It was always easy to shake off pursuit in the Million Cities, for if one got into a car and pulled the door shut there was no possibility of anyone following—not unless he already knew where he was going.

Pet was almost home, already taking out her key, when a voice behind her said, "Pet Onul?"

Pet spun around, startled. For a moment she thought it was Ron again, even though the voice had sounded like a woman's. "Yes," she said, standing very still, her heart skipping a beat. She became convinced suddenly that she was about to receive further instructions from the Chartists.

Lorna Tenn spoke then. She didn't mention Jia Hisk. She simply said she had some information to impart which the Chartists would be ill-advised to ignore. Urgent, important information.

Normally Pet would have protested long and violently that she didn't know what Lorna was talking about. But she was tired out after her emotionally exhausting meeting with Ron Smith. She listened carefully, but not with her whole mind. She felt defeated, beaten down. Jia Hisk had identified her as a Chartist, and so had Ron. Now this woman—It was hopeless. She must be a fool, incapable of concealing anything about herself, as transparent as a pane of glass.

Pet listened and said nothing. When Lorna had said all she wanted to say she turned and walked away. Lorna was impressed, as a matter of fact, by Pet's silence. It was so easy to say nothing when nothing should be said—so impossible for most people. All Pet had admitted to was being Pet Onul.

Pet didn't go home. She went instead to a certain address to see a man known as Jones. She had readjusted her mask. Although seeing Jones was done as a last resort, he didn't remonstrate with her. He took it for granted that Pet was coming to him only because she was desperately in need of advice and assistance.

Pet told him rapidly about Ron and Lorna. She kept nothing back. Jones listened without interruption. When she had finished he said: "Can there be any connection between the two encounters?"

Pet thought for a moment. "I don't think so," she said.

"You've no idea how or when you gave yourself away?"

"None," she said. "In the case of Ron, it really wasn't my fault. He guessed without any help from me. As for this woman Lorna Tenn, I've never seen her before and know nothing about her."

Jones nodded. "You realize how this is going to affect you?" he said.

"No," said Pet uneasily.

He smiled. "Don't worry, we don't murder our members—even the careless ones. And you may not have been careless. First, you're removed from the Smith job."

A great flood of relief swept over Pet. She knew someone else would get the same assignment and that Smith would die just as surely as if she'd killed him herself. She could accept the removal from the world of so cruel a man just so long as she didn't have to bring it about by a deliberate act of her own.

Another thing startled her. This man Jones must be an important man in the Chartist organization if he had the power to decide a thing as momentous as this on his own initiative.

"Second," Jones went on, "you mustn't see Ron Smith again."

Something of her dismay must have shown on her face.

"Look at it reasonably," said Jones, not unkindly. "You know you can't possibly see him again now, don't you?"

"Yes," Pet whispered.

"I don't want to threaten you. But I have to tell you that if you do see him, you may have to be . . . removed, too. Perhaps Ron Smith as well."

Jones was gazing at her keenly.

"Remember that," he said. "Try to see the sense behind it. I don't want you to stay away from him because of that threat. I want you to stay away from him because you know you must—for your own sake, for his, and for the Chartists' sake. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Pet whispered again.

"We'll know if you disobey," said Jones simply.

Pet could only nod.

"And one other thing. Don't come to meetings, don't have anything to do with us, until we get in touch with you again—if we ever do. I won't be here any more. The meeting-places you know about will be changed."

Pet nodded once more.

"But you're still a Chartist," Jones told her. "Don't forget that. Now you'd better go."

VIII

"DAD," said Ron at the breakfast table, "suppose you found out that I was a Chartist, what would you do?"

Senator Smith stared in consternation at his son. "Ron!" he exclaimed, "you're not trying to tell me—"

"That's how you try to demoral-

ize other people," said Ron, complacently, "so you can't complain when someone does it to you. No, obviously if I'd joined them I wouldn't have said that. I'm putting a purely hypothetical question. If you found out I was a Chartist, what would you do?"

Senator Smith sighed in relief. "I don't know, son," he said. "It would be a very awkward thing to find out."

"I know it," Ron agreed. "Dad, I'm not as tough as you, and I'm damned glad of it."

Smith looked at him affectionately. "I guess I am, too, son," he said, "but I don't remember hearing anyone pushing you around."

"No," Ron said, "but what I wanted you to think about was this: that's just the kind of thing that will be happening to people like you if this drive against the Chartists succeeds. The typical young Chartist is the son or daughter of a successful man, someone who had been brought up in security, sent to a good school, encouraged to think for himself."

"What do you know about the Chartists?" Senator Smith demanded.

"A damn sight more than you, I guess," said Ron bluntly. "I'm just the kind of fellow to be a Chartist."

"But you're not, son?" said Smith anxiously.

"I said I'm not."

"No, you didn't," said Smith. "You said if you were you wouldn't ask me that question. Will you swear you're not a Chartist?"

"Yes, if you like," said Ron, "but I'm not going to make a habit of it."

"And you're not going to become one ever?"

"I'm not going to swear to that," said Ron cautiously. "I think it's quite likely I'll join them."

The Senator had meant to be on his way by this time, but he was prepared to spend all day if necessary probing this.

"Ron, that's a very dangerous and stupid thing to say. If I seriously thought—"

"Wait a minute, Dad," Ron interrupted. "I'm only giving you a slant on this. You're a politician, aren't you? People say so anyway."

The Senator allowed himself a wry grin. "Go on," he said.

"Now, the people who back you," said Ron, "are the parents of Chartists."

Smith didn't say anything.

"Worth thinking about, isn't it?" Ron said. "I'm only generalizing but I'm pretty sure I'm right. If you start attacking the Chartists with everything you've got, it'll be all right for a start and you'll get all the backing you want, just as you've done so far.

"But very soon you're going to find that the people you're interrogating and the Chartists you're discovering are the sons and daugh-

ters of people who have all the money and power in the Million Cities. Sons of senators, businessmen, newspaper editors; daughters of judges, police chiefs, company directors. You're going to run into trouble, Dad."

"Thanks for telling me," said the Senator, with sarcasm that didn't quite come off.

Ron was only nineteen but Smith respected his judgement. He had plenty of reason for doing so. Time and again Ron had said he was going to do this or wasn't going to do that, that this was going to happen, that people had better stop waiting for that to happen because it wasn't going to come off, and Ron had been right so often that the Senator often asked him what he thought of things.

Usually Ron said he didn't know. He was very good on the things he saw, but didn't pretend to be able to see everything.

"What do you think I ought to do?" the Senator asked with commendable self-restraint.

"Go easy on the Chartists," said Ron simply.

Smith shook his head. "I can't. I'm committed. Anyway . . ."

"Go on," said Ron, as Smith paused. "Let's have the anyway."

"We've got to stamp out the Chartists," said Smith, "by any means in our power."

"Save that for the Senate," Ron sighed.

"I mean it."

"I know you mean it. You don't have to be proud of it."

"What are you getting at?" Smith asked.

Ron sighed again. "You'll never stamp out the Chartists. You'll only annoy them. It's too simple. A man gets on in the world, knows all the right people, thinks all the right thoughts, brings up his son as a good citizen. Son takes for granted all the things his father worked for, and goes on from there.

"He joins the Chartists. It's some other man's son who's sound now, thinks all the right thoughts, who gets on well in the world because he's a perfect Million Cities citizen. And his daughter can't be bothered with the right thoughts, the right people, the right attitude to living—right because so many people think the same way. She joins the Chartists. And so it goes on."

"You can't be serious," said Smith.

"Think about it," Ron suggested, and left the table.

THE PARK had been closed for some time now. In a matter of weeks the first building on it would be complete. Turning the Park over to housing would only mean accommodation for a few million people, a drop in the bucket as far as the Million Cities' accommodation problem was concerned—but it was a gesture, at least.

Building upwards was impossible, of course. The structural problems of the Million Cities were almost all concerned with the foundations, not the top stratum. And the foundations already bore all of the fantastic pressure that they could sustain without collapsing. Besides, there were no materials. When another stratum was added—if it ever was—it would lie *below* the Million Cities as they were now constituted, not above. That way both space and material would be available—once the problem of stress had been solved for the hundreth time.

The closing of the Park was already an old story. There had been impassioned protest on all sides, as the Senate had known there would be. But it was all over now.

So everybody thought until from all sides the Park was invaded.

It was never discovered who organized the demonstration. The Chartists denied it. Perhaps it was a sudden mass decision, like so many in the past, when instead of smoldering and bursting into flame at one point and then spreading, a fire burst sponstaneously into flame at a dozen different points, grew rapidly and merged into one enormous blaze.

The Park was guarded by a tiny patrol at the gates. Hundreds of people brushed them aside. Two of the guards were trampled to death, but that was an accident. There was no violence, no malice.

The guards had no chance to use their weapons. They were bundled out of the way and thousands of cheering, excited people burst into the bare, empty Park.

Since the vacuum-tube system was completely automatic, it couldn't be put out of action around the Park. There had never been tubestops actually in the Park because they were foreign to that last mass of greenery, like a silk-covered sofa in the middle of an open plain. But hundreds of tube-stops faced the gates of the Park, and one after another cars slid up to them, opened their doors, disgorged their complement of excited passengers, shut themselves up again and went away to leave room for more cars.

There was shouting, laughing, cheering. It wasn't a silent, grim-faced demonstration. The Park had been placed in a tropical region, and the late afternoon sun was hot without being uncomfortable — humidity was now very low. The thousands spreading over the empty Park in waves weren't there to fight, to argue, to protest. They were there to enjoy the pleasures of the Park which they believed should never have been taken away from them.

Men threw off their coats and shirts, girls unzipped skirts and blouses to reveal playsuits, parents deftly removed young children's frocks and suits and the children

ran off happily in white rompers.

People threw themselves on the grass, ran into the pools and streams, turned, laughing, to wave to others to join them. Some threw themselves on the warm, dry ground and kissed it. Older boys climbed trees, young girls in rompers and premature brassieres played with skipping-ropes.

The flood of holiday-makers swept from all the gates, met other streams from other gates and rolled on. It would be a long time before the Park was full. It was so big that even when it had been packed with people it had always been possible to find reasonable solitude if you searched far enough. There was no transport available to the public, and only people who were going to be in the Park all day had time to penetrate far from the gates. Only people who were going to be there for days could reach the center.

Each man and woman, each child, was starved for a sight of nature. They lived in an environment where the only things they could see and touch which had not been synthesized by machines were other human beings like themselves. No animals remained, no insects, no reptiles. Nothing but man-made floors, walls, ceilings, doors, windows, tunnels, cars, furniture, clothes. Man-made food, synthesized from anything which was available. Man-made air, cleaned, washed and sterilized. Man-made light, as characterless as the pure, sterile man-made water.

And these were the rebels from man-made everything. No, not quite that. Most of them would infinitely prefer the life of the Million Cities to the savage, brief life of prehistory. But like all creatures of nature they liked to return, if only briefly, to the kind of environment in which their race had been born.

They liked to come to a place where no line was regular, where no stone was exactly like any other stone, where nothing was quite flat, quite square, quite round. They liked to see water which wasn't in a tank, a glass or a pipe. They liked to see trees, flowers, birds and furred mammals.

And they loved the sun. Strictly, they would always have the sun. The sun shone not only on the Park but on half the rest of Stratum One, and in twelve hours' time it would be shining on the other half. But the sun slanting down on artificial, regular rooftops with their lines of tubestops standing neatly in a row like iron men wasn't the same as the sun beating down on hot, grassy earth.

Pretty girls stripped to the minimum of clothing arranged themselves in poses which made them even more attractive, and young men looked at them, talked to them, kissed them, chased them, fought for them. Children played

games invented by the early Cro-Magnons. Strong men performed astonishing feats to show off their strength and their massive, glistening bodies.

The Senate buildings in one corner of the Park were given a fairly wide berth. There were more guards there, hundreds of senators and officials, and the Park's staff kept their machines and tools there. No one was looking for trouble. It wasn't that sort of demonstration. It wasn't that kind of mob.

Artists set up their canvases, photographers shot off hundreds of feet of film. It was glorious just to be back in the Park. People who had been a little tired of it, a little bored with it when it was open all day and every day, danced in sheer delight at seeing it again.

Strictly, the Park was almost as artificial as the Million Cities. The soil was only a few feet deep and was watered from below by an ingenious and complicated irrigation system. The grass was a tough variety specially mutated to stand up to the tremendous wear of thousands of feet. Squads of gardeners had until recently kept the Park looking as the Park Superintendent thought it ought to look, not as Nature would have fashioned it.

But that didn't matter too much. If it was a garden and not a wilderness, so much the better.

The gay, excited crowds spread further and further over the Park. Still the thousands of tubestops outside the gates poured out more and more people to join the hundreds of thousands already inside. By the uncanny communication of mobs everybody seemed to know what was going on. Now many of the people who burst forth from the tubestops were already in play-clothes, carrying lunch-baskets, beach balls, guitars, cameras, blankets to sit on.

And apart from that first brief resistance, swept aside by the first wave of people entering the Park, nobody did anything to stop them.

RON SMITH turned away from 5064 Queen's Road—the only address Helen had given him—without any show of emotion, but he was more troubled than he'd ever been in his life. The only couple who lived there were obviously sincere. They had no idea where Helen Rice was.

Ron was heartsick. He had never before fully realized just how much Helen meant to him. He'd told her he was going to marry her and meant it. But he'd felt in his brash, self-confident way that she would have the most to gain.

Now he knew he was lost without her.

Finding one person in the Million Cities was like looking for a particular lost coin in a vast treasury storehouse. But suddenly he thought of a way. It came to him in a flash, but he had to backtrack

several times before he could convince himself that it would have a fair chance of succeeding.

If anyone could find Helen, the MCBI could. Suppose he told the MCBI the whole truth, or nearly the whole truth, and gave them all the help he could. He backtracked again. It was a sound enough plan, but how could he get Helen away from the MCBI once they'd found her? He considered the problem from every angle.

When they came to the real Helen, if they ever did, he could still say, "No, this isn't her." But he'd have found her. He could . . .

Once more he went back. He must prevent the MCBI from calling in other people who might identify Helen — his father, the guards. That would be easy. They hadn't seen her without her mask.

The MCBI must do it — and afterwards he'd get her out of their clutches, if he had to tell his father the whole truth and make him exert pressure with the full weight of his authority behind it.

Ron found a phone and called the MCBI.

AS LORNA TENN had once shrewdly pointed out, the Million Cities didn't have a government. It had only an administration.

The invasion of the Park was unexpected and it was difficult to find anyone who wielded enough authority to deal with it. Before the invasion it had been simple enough for the Senate to order a guard to be placed there. But now that the guard had been swept aside and there were hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people inside the Park, whose responsibility was it to get them out?

There was a President, but he was no longer a man of supreme power. There were all sorts of other officials who were in Control, IREAL, and a hundred other departments. Some of them could even instruct the President concerning his duties. But they in turn, were instructed by the Senate. And the Senate was instructed by the people . . .

It was a tangle which only became a tangle in exceptional circumstances. In this case the Senate, appointed by the people, had closed the Park without attempting to gain popular approval for the act. Now the people were shouting that they didn't like it. And in essence there were only two things to do. Senator Smith, representing the Reorganization Committee, the Senate, and the people, could climb down or refuse to climb down.

And the problem was put to the Senate, and particularly Senator Smith, in those general terms.

Smith couldn't help thinking of what Ron had said. If the decision he'd had to make had been one which involved the Chartists directly, he might have tempered his answer and taken the cautious

course. What Ron had said had made a profound impression on him.

But he was faced now with the necessity of upholding authority. Smith, and the Senate, said authority must be upheld. This demonstration must be stopped. And other people, who couldn't question this decision, had to carry it out.

First, vans from the Park maintenance department, hastily equipped with public address apparatus, toured the tracks of the Park urging the demonstrators to pack up and go home. This had just about the effect that might have been expected. The most conscientious, law-abiding citizens heeded the warning and went. But since twice as many determined nature-seekers were arriving every ten minutes from the tubestops, the number of people in the Park continued to increase.

Next squads of police were detailed to stop people leaving the cars at the tubestops. A thin cordon being obviously useless, arrangements were made to shut up a few sections by concentrating the available force, and then moving on to others. Unfortunately the efficiency of the vacuum-tube system defeated this plan. All new arrivals had to do when they found the way to the Park blocked was to shut the doors again and reroute the cars to one of the unguarded sections.

The people inside found the thrill of the unsuccessful attempts to eject them even more enjoyable than the storming of the inadequately policed Park had been. Swimsuited girls beside the lakes paraded seductively and called to the harassed maintenance men and cops to come and join them. Children made rude gestures, unrebuked by their parents, as the loudspeaker vans passed.

The police tried to clear the areas round the gates. But here the crowds were thickest. They seized one or two men from the mass of cheerful humanity and marched them outside, but when they returned the crowd was thicker than before. Wisely, none of the sunbathers and nature-lovers offered violence. If six cops told them to go, they went. And when the cops had left them, they came back.

It was all great fun for everybody but the harassed policemen. Their discomfiture greatly entertained the crowds in the Park, and increased the despair of the officials.

It was never established who first gave the order for the wide-scale use of tear gas bombs. It was a drastic measure but it turned the tide. As the bombs were exploded in many sections the situation changed abruptly.

The crowds ran in all directions, shrieking, their eyes streaming. Children were separated from their

parents, wives from their husbands. A mob of sunbathers beat two policemen to death. Crowds fought to get out at the gates. The people who had penetrated farthest, miles within the Park by this time, heard the shouting and screaming in the distance and paused, wondering, frightened. Some ran back. Some ran on. Some tried to hide.

Before nightfall the Park had been cleared. Fourteen cops and two hundred and fifty-seven demonstrators were dead. Hundreds more were injured.

And that night the Million Cities seethed with anger.

JON ONUL had no way of knowing about the tragedy at the Park. El was a considerable distance away, and most of the people involved in the demonstration and the disaster which followed it lived in Cue and the adjoining sections.

Jon had something else on his mind—an all-important, very vital something.

He called on Jia determined not to take no for an answer.

"Pet's miserable," he told her. "She's been moping for days. You've got to tell me what's troubling her. You're the only one who knows." He stared at Jia as if she were personally responsible.

Jia sighed. She knew all about Pet. She'd seen her the day before, and Pet had poured out her troubles, glad to share them with a sympathetic listener. Pet had clung to a desperate hope that Jia would tell her she could see Ron again, and her misery had not been eased when Jia had confirmed what Pet already knew in her heart.

"Yes, I know why," Jia admitted to Jon. "I saw her yesterday. But if I tell you, will you believe me?"

Jon hesitated. "Yes," he said at last.

"Well, it's simple. Pet *was* worried about something else, something different. But that's all over now. It's finished."

"Then what's wrong now?"

"She's fallen in love."

Jon stared at her. "Is that any reason to act as if the world's coming to an end?"

"It is—when she can't ever see the man she's in love with."

Jon caught her arm. "Jia, I wish you'd—"

"Not again," said Jia wearily. "Use your head, Jon. You must have some idea of the situation. You know I can't talk about it, and that Pet can't talk about it. And there's nothing you can do to help."

Jon was silent for a long time. At last he said, "Yes, I guess you're right."

Jia was surprised. She'd been trying to get him to admit that he had been wrong-headed and stubborn and blind, but hadn't believed he ever would. Suddenly she felt sorry for him. There was pain in his voice, and a kind of boyish helplessness.

"Jon, just listen to me for a minute," she said quickly, not giving herself time to think about what she was saying, because she knew that if she did she wouldn't say it. "When people make a mistake, it's silly to go on pretending it wasn't a mistake. Can't we start again? I loved you, and I spent twenty years telling myself I could stop loving you. I thought I'd succeeded, but I was wrong. Why don't you—"

"No, Jia," said Jon quietly. "I can't leave Liz."

Jia saw the pain in his eyes and said no more.

Jon got to his feet and looked about him awkwardly. "I guess I have to go," he said. "There isn't any more to say, is there?"

"If you mean what you just said," Jia replied, "no. Not now or ever."

A crowd had gathered outside Senator Smith's house, and the police were powerless. They had expected a single assassin, or a group of assassins—not a multitude.

There was no possibility of using gas inside the Cities. The purity of the air was so important and so clearly understood by everyone that nobody had ever tried to sabotage the air-conditioning system. No form of gas was used in the Million Cities except under very strict supervision.

The crowd shouted and chanted: "Murderer! You killed three hundred people today!"

Senator Smith, with three policemen in the house, smiled a tight, humorless smile. Undoubtedly Ron had known what he was talking about. The mob had identified him, with all that was merciless in the battle against the Chartists—with every single one of the Reorganization Committee's harsh recommendations. He was the man who had closed the Park. He was responsible for the deaths of the three hundred men and women who had died breaking his law.

"They're trying to get in!" one of the policemen shouted.

"They will get in if they really mean it," Senator Smith said quite calmly, "and I think they mean it."

Yes, Ron had been quite right. He'd tried to move a mountain, had succeeded in moving some of it, and now the rest of it was caving in on him. He had known all along that the mob meant business. He could sense it. He was glad of one thing—Ron wasn't here. He had gone out earlier in the evening.

There was a crashing, tearing sound. More people were dying in this demonstration to avenge those who died already. The final act of the drama was brief and terrible. The rioters poured into the house, into the rooms, towards the back. The men who were with Senator Smith fired. The men behind the leaders of the mob pressed on and though many fell the crowd rushed

in and overwhelmed the policemen.

It was a pity the policemen had fired, because now the mob was inflamed. A killing rage took hold of them. Some of them had died, and in the presence of death it seemed a small thing to bear Smith down, trample and kick him, until suddenly it was obvious that there was no point in trampling and kicking him any more. Because Wilmington Smith was no longer a powerful senator. He was just another of the many who had died that day.

Then, since there was nothing more to do, the mob dispersed.

IX

FOR RIK and Lorna Tenn life went on.

A polite, suave gentleman called on them the day after Lorna had gotten in touch with the Chartists. He was vapid and garrulous, and neither Rik nor Lorna thought much of him until they realized that for all his garrulity he was successful in saying exactly what he meant to say, and not a word more. He established that they didn't want to be Chartists. He found out exactly why they were interested in Tom Gest's plans, how much they were prepared to do and what they *could* do. And he told them absolutely nothing about himself except that his name was Westerman, which was a lie.

For a day or two after that nothing happened. Then Westerman came back again and informed them they definitely weren't under observation by the MCBI. They had been interrogated more as a warning to others, apparently, than because they were really suspected of being Chartists. Either that, or the MCBI believed what the psych-tests had shown about them.

With an ease which showed the power they could demand if they liked, the Chartists made their plans and Westerman told Rik and Lorna just as much as he thought they ought to know.

Lorna had been instructed to go to Tom again and observe his behavior under stress. She found him still uneasy but a little wistful, half wishing that he were playing some part in the fruition of his own scheme but still, when he really thought about it, glad he wasn't involved.

Since it was no longer necessary to keep Tom on a tight rein, Lorna wasn't more friendly than she needed to be. She'd been told exactly what information was wanted from Tom. She got it without wasting any time, and left the young man to his uneasy reflections.

A site for the attempt was readily found. It was in Dee Stratum One, quite convenient for Lorna and Rik. There was a lot to be done, a lot they could do. The Chartists accepted them on their

own terms, as prime movers in the space experiment but allies — not actual members of the organization. Neither Rik nor Lorna did anything not directly or indirectly connected with the space project, and neither of them learned much about the Chartists except that they could get things done.

Lorna spent most of her time away from the site linking up the various parts of the project. Rik was nearly always at base, supervising the construction work. Sometimes it puzzled him that the Chartists gave them such an important part to play. He'd expected that there would be Chartist head men on the job, but all the people Rik ever saw were evasive, like Westerman, or servile and unimportant.

Rik wasn't deceived. The Chartists let him boss the show because they'd decided he was capable of it. And if he made any mistakes someone always pointed them out to him. He was a figurehead, no more.

He didn't mind. If everything he did was checked by people he never saw—well, someone had to give the orders on the spot anyway. And so long as the Chartists had no idea of making him and Lorna the scapegoats for failure—if failure should occur—he didn't mind being the nominal boss on the project.

Rik didn't believe they were being set up as scapegoats. For one thing, Rik was in charge only as far as the Chartist technicians were concerned. It wasn't as if the scheme and its nominal head were kept in the public eye. On the contrary, they were very carefully kept out of it.

What he did see very clearly, though he was neither a scientist nor an engineer, was that this job was being carried through at peak efficiency. It was being carried through more quickly and much more smoothly and skillfully than would have been the case if the Senate had taken up the scheme.

Rik's respect for the Chartists grew. He had half-feared that when he came to work with them he would find that they were a collection of crackpots, idealistic and impractical. But he quickly changed his mind in that respect.

If Tom Gest was right—if Tom's plans had no serious flaw—they were getting the best possible chance to come to glorious fruition. If no unexpected obstacle arose, the Million Cities would have space travel very, very soon.

RON SAT IN an empty house. His mother was away, staying with friends, and the police guard had been removed. As Ron had pointed out bitterly, and with a grief-stricken shrug of his shoulders, it hadn't been much good anyway.

The worst of it all was, Ron should have known exactly what would happen. His father should

have known. How obvious it all seemed—after the event. Probably the Park would stay open now.

The truth was, Senator Smith and his committee had recommended stupid, useless measures because no other course would have succeeded any better. There was no answer to the problem of the Million Cities — not if you stopped war, stopped disease, increased the span of life, and failed to find any other outlet, such as space travel.

Eventually nature would find an answer, probably sterility or a new epidemic. And what would mankind do? *Fight it?* Doctors would stop the epidemic, bring back virility.

You couldn't stop mankind from fighting. Human beings were too aggressive and pugnacious. And they were cooped up in a tiny world, a dust mote in a vast galaxy.

Ron couldn't get over the futility of his father's death. If he had been murdered by the Chartists Senator Smith would have been a martyr; his death would have meant something. But he had merely stood in front of a mob, saying, *They shall not pass* and the mob had passed —right over him.

The murder of Smith hadn't been Chartist-inspired. That had already been established. Most of the people who had invaded the house had had relatives killed or injured in the Park tragedy. Besides, the Chartists didn't work through mobs.

The phone rang. Ron let it ring for some time before he picked it up. "Oh, MCBI," he said.

Seventeen times he had been called to various MCBI offices to identify suspects, some of them bearing only the remotest resemblance to the girl who had become more important to him than life itself.

"I'll be over right away," he said, and hung up.

PET HAD THOUGHT she really didn't care what happened to her when she was suddenly called into the MCBI office. They taped the electrodes to her body, and intent, pointed questions were directed at her. It was not too unpleasant but tedious, since the MCBI kept her for several hours.

At home later, when Pet felt their interest in her was over, she pondered over the incident. She no longer had any Chartist contacts. But she felt that she must tell Jia Hisk about the MCBI interrogation. Pet admired Jia now more than ever, and trusted her implicitly.

Pet got into a car and set the buttons. Twenty minutes later Jia opened the door of her apartment.

Pet walked into the apartment and sat down on a sofa by the window. She had difficulty in speaking for a moment, but when

the words finally came she talked on for ten full minutes.

"You little fool!" Jia exclaimed. "Couldn't you see that you stepped into a trap? You gave yourself away somehow, and they knew you'd go straight to some Chartist, and tell him what you've just told me. You've been followed!"

"I'm not as silly as you think. I made sure nobody was following me."

"There are other ways. They may have put a tracer in your clothes. By doing that they could pinpoint you to within a street and even follow you by tube, without letting you know you were being followed."

Abruptly, peremptorily, the buzzer sounded.

Pet stared at Jia in horror.

THERE WAS a vast, shocking difference between the MCBI's treatment of Pet earlier, and the way they dealt with her and Jia now. Jia was given a psych-test interrogation, but it was perfunctory. No one was surprised when it proved negative, and the fact that it was negative obviously wasn't going to do Jia or Pet any good.

After the test Jia and Pet were left alone in a small room.

Pet didn't need Jia's warning glance to tell her that this was arranged simply in the hope that they'd betray themselves. Jia knew there was something else she could do. One of her silver buttons kept a small pocket on her jacket fastened tightly, the other a similar pocket on her skirt. She had only to take off her jacket and lay it down casually, as if the warmth of the room had become oppressive . . . but she couldn't do it at the moment. There was no emergency yet.

Jia had forgiven Pet for coming to see her. After all, Pet couldn't know precisely how the MCBI worked. It was a pity Pet hadn't gone about her normal pursuits for just twenty-four hours longer, though—perhaps after that length of time the MCBI would have decided it had made a mistake.

Suddenly the door was flung open again, and three men stood framed in the unsteady radiance of the corridor lights, all over six feet tall.

"Goodness!" Jia exclaimed, with cool, defiant mockery, "Are you sure you'll be able to handle us?"

"No insults," said the leader. "Wilson, you watch the other one. Allister and I'll take this one."

"Why am I honored?" Jia inquired.

There was no answer. Allister took her arm roughly.

"My name's Senter," said the leader significantly.

Jia frowned. "Is that supposed to mean anything to us?"

"It should," said Senter grimly. "I've caught fourteen Chartists so far."

Though Jia knew the MCBI

hadn't caught anything like fourteen Chartists, and had had to release most of those they had caught, she didn't dispute the man's boastful statement.

The three MCBI agents led Jia and Pet along a corridor and flung open another door. Hinges in this building couldn't last very long, Jia reflected. A vicious dig in the back cut short her reflections and sent her staggering inside.

There was nobody but Jia, Pet, and the three men in a room. In its precise center was a steel whipping-post with a whip hanging neatly from it.

"Her first," said Senter, nodding at Pet. "She'll break quicker."

Jia and Pet both protested loudly and incoherently, and there was little pretense in their protests now. The three men paid no attention. While Allister and Senter held Jia helpless, Wilson dragged Pet to the center of the room and gripped her tightly by the shoulders.

"If you want to say anything, sister," he said, "say it now. You may not be able to talk later."

Pet didn't utter a sound.

Wilson hit her on the mouth. Pet went down in a heap. Wilson seized her by the shoulder and lifted her to her feet again. She was reeling backwards under his clasp when her dress, not made for such treatment, split down the front and she pitched forward on her face.

Pet played dead, but Wilson was unimpressed. He lifted her to her feet again by what remained of her dress, and when she was level with his head, he dropped her.

She scrambled to her feet and made for the door. It was locked, of course. Wilson hit her again and she dropped across his legs.

"That's enough," said Senter. "You don't want her out before you start."

Jia found it by no means difficult to believe that people had died under this treatment. It wasn't controlled torture, involving the maximum in agony and the minimum in physical damage. Neither Senter nor Wilson cared if Pet died. They didn't have to. Senator Smith hadn't said: "Protect the innocent at all costs." He'd said: "Frighten the Chartists so that they'll break down and betray each other." The MCBI was protected. Anyone who died was charitably assumed to be a Chartist.

Jia was suddenly glad Smith was dead. She could almost wish that Pet had killed him.

The respite was over. Wilson had fastened Pet's hands high over her head, her legs apart, and was standing ready with the whip.

"If either of you want to say anything, you can do it any time," said Senter.

"What can we say?" Jia asked wearily.

"That's for you to think out. Names of other Chartists, for instance. Chartist plans. Details of

the Chartist organization. Anything like that."

"But how can we tell you what we don't know?"

"Carry on, Wilson," said Senter.

Pet's face was to the wall. None of them could see it. She might be unconscious for all they knew.

If Jia could have given the signal she would have done so, but she could stand only so much and was on the verge of collapse. The choice was taken from her, however. Before she could stagger toward Pet, Senter tore Jia's jacket completely from her and threw it in a corner.

Then he hit her under the heart, and Jia went down . . . for only the first time. She had a long way to go before she caught up with Pet.

AFTER A MOVEMENT of despairing inertia Ron Smith roused himself and picked up the phone. At least a visit to some MCBI office or other to look at a pretty girl he had never seen before would be something to do.

"Where is that girl you wanted me to identify?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter now," said the MCBI voice at the other end of the line. "We don't know whether she's the girl you knew, but she's certainly a Chartist. We're working on her now."

"But hadn't I better —" Ron began.

"As a matter of fact we haven't mentioned the Smith affair to her, or asked if she ever went under the name of Helen Rice. We don't want her to know where we got the tip. It's possible we may want to release her later."

"What's her real name?" Ron asked quickly.

"Pet Onul — daughter of an IREAL Inspector of Means in El. If we want you later, Mr. Smith, we'll get in touch with you. Thank you."

Ron stared at the phone, the idea that Pet Onul was Helen Rice slowly growing to certainty in his mind. He had no reason for the belief. He just felt that this must be the girl he was looking for. Anyway, he intended to find out.

The thought of Helen—Pet—in the hands of the MCBI sickened him. And it was only as he stood up that the full impact struck him.

He'd betrayed Pet. Betrayed her, and then left her to her fate. If he'd only done what he'd meant to do, rushed to identify or clear every suspect the MCBI produced, he could have told them with certainty that Pet wasn't Helen . . . Fool that he was, he'd been playing with fire and now the girl he loved was in deadly danger.

God, perhaps they were torturing her now. He'd been crazy ever to think of such a scheme—and crazier still to let it get out of hand. It was no use going now to the MCBI and telling them Pet wasn't the girl—they'd made it very plain they didn't want him. And he no

longer had his father to pull his chestnuts out of the fire for him.

But bitter self-recriminations were worse than useless. Perhaps Pet's father could do something. He was surprised that the MCBI had told him who Pet was, and who her father was. Perhaps they were setting a trap for him. He didn't care. If he had delivered the girl he loved to the MCBI he deserved to die under torture.

Ron went to El and consulted a directory there. He found the address of a Jon Onul, Inspector of Means, without trouble, and set out for Laburnum Grove. It was early evening. Onul should be home from work now.

The door of the house on Laburnum Grove was opened by a sharp-featured woman who looked as if she was all set to say "no" to anything he asked. So he said "Mrs. Onul?" and surprised her into saying "Yes!"

"Is your husband home, Mrs. Onul?" he asked.

"No," said Liz, making no move to invite him in.

"Then . . . I wonder if I could see a picture of your daughter, Pet?"

Liz stared at him sharply. "Why?" she demanded.

"It's a matter of life and death," said Ron desperately. "I wouldn't waste any time if I were you."

"I knew she'd get into trouble sooner or later," said Liz. She spoke calmly enough, but her face had gone deathly pale.

"Come in," she said, her voice still under control. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Ron Smith."

The name didn't mean anything to her, but she nodded slightly. Ron followed her inside. "Here," she said, and thrust a family group photograph at Ron.

At the first glance he was sure. The girl in the picture was Helen, beyond any possibility of doubt. Liz read Ron's expression and asked, "What's the matter? What trouble has she got herself into?"

"The MCBI are holding her on suspicion of being a Chartist," said Ron mechanically.

Liz Onul swayed and grasped a table-edge for support.

Jon came in then, and Ron instantly recognized someone who cared about Pet as much as he did. He introduced himself, told Jon the MCBI were interrogating Pet as a Chartist.

For an instant Jon stood as though stunned, his face drained of all color. "Is this on the level?" he asked. "You're not trying to trick me into anything?"

Ron exploded. "God, can't you see it's on the level? I love Pet. I—"

"So you're the one. Why couldn't she ever see you again?"

Ron could only stammer, "That doesn't matter now. Is there any-

thing you can do? You're an Inspector of Means—"

"And you're Senator Smith's son," Jon said with a flash of penetration. "I'm beginning to understand now."

His lips tightened, and an agonized look came into his eyes. "Let's go," he said.

"Tell me what you're going to do!" Liz demanded.

Jon hurried Ron from the house without another word. When they were outside, Jon said, "Of course Pet *is* a Chartist."

Ron was silent.

"You knew that?" Jon asked.

"I knew it."

"Are you?"

"No. Where are we going?"

"To see someone who may be able to help. And I warn you, if you ever betray this woman we're going to see, I'll kill you."

Recognizing the calm determination in Jon's voice, Ron shuddered —not because he had any intention of betraying anyone, but from guilt at the thought that his blind, reckless stupidity had resulted in tragedy for both of them.

It didn't take them long to reach Jia's flat. The door was opened, not by Jia, but by a man neither of them had seen before.

"Where's Miss Hisk?" Jon asked.

"Who wants to know?" the man inquired.

"None of your business."

"It's the MCBI's business," said the man, and flashed a card.

"I take it Miss Hisk has been arrested?" Jon asked quietly.

"Why should she be arrested?"

"I don't know. You don't seem to know anything either." He swung about, with a nod to Ron, and they turned their backs on the MCBI man.

"Maybe we should go to the MCBI office," Ron said uncertainly.

"That's exactly where we're going," said Jon.

SENTER HAD finished with Jia for the moment and Wilson was once more turning his attention to Pet. He grimaced in frustration when he saw that she had fainted.

Five minutes later orders were issued for the release of both suspects.

Senter and his companions walked out of the room, and a white-coated doctor took their place. The doctor started at the sight of them, began to say something, then changed his mind.

Jia didn't say anything either. There was nothing to say.

If their injuries had been untended Jia and Pet would have needed three weeks in bed to recover. After half-an-hour's attention by the doctor and his staff they were still stiff and sore but able to leave the MCBI office on their feet.

While the doctor was working on Pet, a secretary came in to whisper to him. He looked at Jia. "Two men are waiting for you," he said.

Jia nodded. She knew better than to ask questions. The few questions she asked the safer she would be. She had been careful not to inquire why she was being released.

It was difficult to make a guess. There must be Chartists high in the MCBI as well as elsewhere. One of them had called this office and told the local chief peremptorily to release Jia. It was a tremendous risk, of course, which was why the senior Chartist had been told to ask for help only as a last resort. No MCBI official, no matter how high, could afford to make a habit of that sort of thing.

Groomed for the public eye, the two women were ushered into a small, blank-walled room where two men were waiting.

"Ron!" Pet exclaimed, and ran to him.

Jia would have preferred her to wait until they were clear of the building at least. But it couldn't be helped. She lost no time, however, in getting them all outside and making sure that nobody was following them.

Ron looked at Pet, his face tight with concern. "I hope they didn't hurt you," he said.

Jia stared at Ron for a long moment. Then she did a cruel and perhaps unnecessary thing. She couldn't help it. She'd never met Ron, but she could put two and two together, and her anger soared.

She pulled them all into a car and set it for a twenty-minute journey. Then she made Pet show Ron what had been done to her.

And even when she saw Ron's face she experienced no remorse.

Jon's reaction was quieter, but even more intense. While Ron and Pet were completely occupied with each other he murmured quietly to Jia, "You know what I've got to do now, don't you?"

Jia nodded. She did a swift mental calculation involving several factors. "Come to my flat . . . Tuesday," she said. "And not before. If I'm not there—you'll know I have failed. And if I'm not there—you won't see me again."

Jon accepted the not entirely reassuring statement with a calm understanding which was the last thing Jia had expected.

THE TWO SHIPS which were to make the first successful spaceflight were almost ready. Take-off was scheduled to take place in four days — Tuesday. It wasn't coincidental that Jia picked that day for Jon to come and see her.

Tom Gest, the designer, knew nothing about this at all. In fact, the last time Lorna had called on him she'd dropped a hint which left him with the impression that the attempt wouldn't be made for months.

Rik and Lorna were well informed. Lorna's job was now over and she was helping Rik on the last stages.

They had learned nothing new about the Chartist organization beyond the fact that it was even more powerful than they had at first believed. It was uncanny how every time there was a hitch, a small mistake that might have betrayed them, everyone looked the other way, refused to investigate, and failed to notice significant and revealing things.

Uncanny, unless one of two difficult-to-believe possibilities was true. Either practically everybody was a Chartist, which was improbable, or a Chartist blocked every route along which a report of anything suspicious could go. Chartists high in Pocon, IREAL, MCBI, Senate?

Rik and Lorna were prepared to believe that. The only thing they found strange was that Senator Smith had been able to get the anti-Chartist drive started at all.

The Chartists either had thousands of operatives they could call upon, or a very few in very high positions.

Anyway, Rik and Lorna, busy as they were, had formed the idea that just recently—since the death of Senator Smith—the anti-Chartist drive had lost some of its force. And if Rik and Lorna suspected it, Jia knew.

There were a lot of loose ends about the release of herself and Pet, loose ends which the MCBI could follow up if it wished, provided no counter-measures were resorted to.

To begin with, Pet was Helen Rice. The MCBI had been sure of the girl's identity anyway, and the entry of Ron Smith into the affair could establish it beyond dispute. Then, Jia had endured torture which wouldn't have been necessary if any other way had been open to her. Quite obviously, then, she didn't even know who had ordered her release, or she'd have appealed to him before.

Those were only two of the half a dozen puzzling circumstances which the MCBI could have looked into. But they weren't investigating anything, apparently.

When Jia visited a man called Jones—not the Jones Pet had once seen, but another, higher, more important Jones—she was given more than a hint as to the reason.

"You don't even have to go under cover," he said. "Go to the meetings as usual. There's no need to avoid the Onuls. You see, everything will soon be under control."

"You mean, after Tuesday?"

Jones smiled. "Of course, you know about that. No, after Tuesday nothing will matter. What I meant was—you remember when Smith was to be removed, how convinced we were that his death would settle everything? Well, we were right in that respect. We didn't even have to kill him ourselves, and now that he's gone the drive against us isn't directed, and

our operatives in administration can easily divert it."

"Is it worth diverting — until Tuesday?" Jia asked. "So short a time—"

Jones smiled again. "You're the last person who should ask that. If we'd just sat back and waited until Tuesday you and Pet Onul would never have gotten out of that MCBI office alive."

Jia didn't argue. "All right," she said. "Another thing. I don't know if it's your department or not, but I've got a new recruit."

Jones echoed her words. "Is it worth it—until Tuesday?"

"I don't mean that kind of recruit."

Jones's glance became keener. "You mean he suspects?"

"He must."

"Jon Onul?"

Jia nodded.

"I leave it to you," said Jones.

Jia's surprise must have been obvious.

"Things are going to be a lot easier from now on," he explained. "No more cloak and dagger."

"I guess so," Jia agreed. "I can't imagine things being this easy. Maybe I've been a senior Chartist too long."

X

JUST BEFORE the *Chartist* took off rumors of its existence leaked out. Nobody knew for sure that a space bid was going to be made, and there was certainly no widespread suspicion that it was going to happen immediately.

But everyone heard a rumor or saw a vague newspaper report of the rumors that an unauthorized space-travel experiment was being made — somewhere, sometime. There was a rumor, too, that the ship was to be called the *Chartist* which left nobody in any doubt about the responsibility for the enterprise.

There were hastily-arranged talks on the radio about the iniquitousness of space bids, attempts which would probably accomplish nothing and might mean the death of millions.

That was the official view. Privately people were pretty evenly divided. Some parroted exactly what the radio commentators said. Others insisted they didn't know—meaning they disagreed. There had to be space travel some time, and maybe the Chartists knew what they were doing.

By late morning the official radio bulletins had taken a new line. What good was space travel going to be, anway? If a colony were set up under domes on the moon, like the Million Cities in miniature, it could take only an insignificant fraction of one percent of the population of Earth. The diameter of the moon was only one-quarter that of Earth. Like most propagandists, the men who gave out these facts rounded them off in favor of the

things they were trying to prove. Within the next twenty years the moon couldn't possibly provide accommodation for more than a small fraction of the population.

Thus an attempt was made to convince everyone that since space travel wasn't an immediate and complete answer, it shouldn't be tried at all. But the hostile, contentious phase didn't last long. Presently other opinions were aired—more favorable opinions.

Professor Jordan pointed out that once a base had been established on the moon, all danger to the Million Cities from spaceship experiments would be over. The moon, with its one-sixth gravity, its huge plains of dead rock and with no atmosphere to cause friction, was the obvious stepping-stone to Mars and Venus. Progress would be rapid. Five years after the moon trip, the first Earth ships would have landed on Mars. And Mars, Venus and the moon could almost treble the accommodation available to human beings.

Senator Bario, greatly daring, openly praised the Chartists and their activities. Nobody else dared to do what everybody knew had to be done.

Jon Onul took the day off and went to see Jia.

She was impatiently waiting for him.

"Come on, let's get out of here," she said. She was sufficiently recovered from her MCBI ordeal to move without showing any sign of strain.

"Where are we going?" Jon asked.

"Doesn't matter. Where's Pet? She isn't working yet, is she?"

"No, she's with Ron," Jon told her.

"In Cue?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"That's all right." Jia led him to a tubestop and set the buttons to take them on a long downward trip.

When the car was in the fast tunnel she leaned back and looked at Jon for several seconds without speaking. "I guess you have to know, Jon," she said.

Jon waited. Jia seemed in no hurry to begin.

"Pet doesn't know," she said at last. "Pet's one of the young restless, adventure-loving general group we've used as cover. She never was a Chartist, really. She just belonged to a big, exciting secret society. We're dropping this now. We won't need it any more."

"After the ship reaches the moon, you mean?" Jon suggested.

"It isn't going to reach the moon," said Jia. "It's going to crash."

Jon stared at her, stunned. "You mean, the Chartists have deliberately made a machine that isn't good enough, that can't get off the Earth safely. And knowing that, they're still going to let it take off and crash?"

"Not exactly, but your guess is near enough for the moment. Just do some listening for a while, Jon. Don't interrupt and don't refuse to believe every word I say, or we'll get nowhere."

Jon was still stunned. Presumably the Chartists would have taken reasonable precautions to make sure the crash was minor, with very little damage. But . . .

Suddenly he realized Jia was taking him right down to the bottom levels — and that she'd been reassured when he told her Pet was with Ron, deep down in Cue.

"Hasn't it ever struck you as strange," said Jia softly, "that Earth has been left entirely alone for thousands of years? No visitors from Rigel, Capella, Alpha Centauris, Sirius, Procyon, Arcturus . . . But maybe there aren't any living creatures on Rigel, Capella, Alpha Centauris and Arcturus? Are we going to believe that and say there's no problem?

"Long ago scientists estimated mathematically that the chances of life occurring on any planet were . . . I don't know, umpteen thousand to one against. But the answer here is that something so unlikely wouldn't have happened on Earth either. As a matter of fact, no planet which can support life of any sort—and you'd be surprised how hot or cold they've got to be before they can't—ever lacks it.

"Life either forms on the planet itself, or gets brought from somewhere else. Of course, I don't mean human life. I don't even mean insect or reptilian life or bacterial life. Sometimes it's life in so rudimentary a stage you wouldn't recognize it as life. But always there's life. And any life that ever forms moves towards intelligence. And as a species gets more intelligent it propagates. It kills off its enemies, stops killing itself and stops anything else from killing it."

"Look, is this myth, theory or fact?" Jon demanded.

"Fact."

"How do you know?"

"Well, that's difficult to say," said Jia judicially. "I've been told most of it, so I guess you'd say I couldn't *know* it. But I've talked with a man from Rigel . . . I call him a man and I say I've talked with him because it would take too long to explain what he was and how we communicated, and you wouldn't believe me anyway. Incidentally, I don't really expect you to believe all this until you've met an alien face to face.

"I'm afraid they're all aliens," she added apologetically. "There's nothing remotely like us in the galaxy. It's heads chiefly that make us different. I don't think any other species has a head containing eyes, mouth, brains and breathing inlets. A lot of species have heads with mouths and eyes, but they keep the other things in safer places. The Martians are nearest—"

"There are Martians?" Jon demanded quickly.

"Of course. And Mercurians and Venusians and Jovians and so on."

"Are the Martians intelligent?"

"Yes, they're older than we are by a good many millions of years."

"Why hasn't there been radio communication?"

"There will be some day. But the Martians don't matter at the moment as much as the Lunarians."

"Are there people on the moon?"

"Not people. Not even intelligent ceatures. And not very many of them. I'll come back to them in a minute."

Jia found she was enjoying this. She'd never had a chance before to explain the Chartist organization from scratch. Besides, talking kept her mind off what was happening up on the surface.

"Get that to begin with," she said. "Every planet above absolute zero and below the temperature of boiling rock develops life sooner or later. Some that are at absolute zero now or hotter than boiling rock are inhabited by races which evolved *before* it got so cold or so hot, races that had the brains to survive when conditions changed.

"Now can you answer my question? Why has Earth, in all these thousands of years, had no visitors from Rigel, Capella, Sirius, Procyon?"

"I presume you mean to infer Earth's had them," said Jon. He was suspending disbelief just as he suspended it when he read a story about ghosts.

"I think you can see," said Jia, "that with a galaxy packed with different races, some not even aware that they exist, some with interstellar travel, there's only two possible general situations. Either everybody takes what he can get, or nobody takes anything."

Jon nodded, still suspending disbelief.

"One of the first rocketships to set out for the moon was picked up by an alien ship. And that was the start of the Chartists."

Jon just stared.

"Oh, it was easy enough," Jia said. "They simply picked up the men and exploded the ship, so that it looked like a failure. Later they set them down on Earth, and they started the movement."

"You mean they were—possessed?"

"No," said Jia patiently. "Fortunately the men who are in any experimental spaceship are very likely to be intelligent. These were. You see, the situation is this. All of the races in the galaxy work in different ways, think in different ways. You've no idea how different. Actually, it's fairly easy for us. We can see moral issues. Some forms of life can't.

"All that can be generally agreed to is this: *Every planet belongs to the creatures who evolved on it.*" She paused an instant, then went on in the same earnest tone:

"Even that can't be agreed to by everybody. But the majority insist on it. You see?"

"You mean we're not allowed to leave Earth?"

Jia smiled. "That's exactly it. It works both ways. Every world belongs to the creatures who evolve on it. That goes for the moon, where the only living things are tiny, brainless creatures that live on sunlight. It will be millions of years before they develop what we'd call intelligence—if they ever do. But the moon's their world, and we're not allowed to take it away from them."

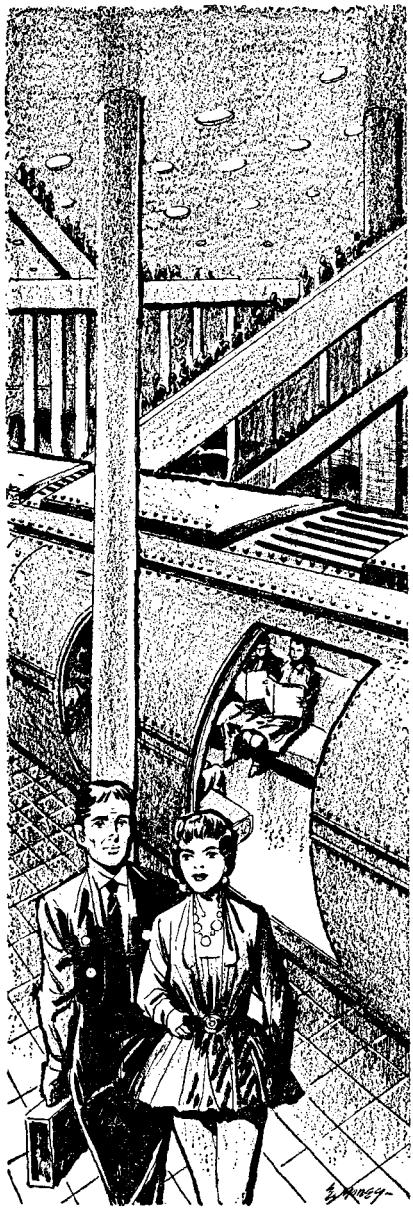
"But . . . you said an alien ship was here, waiting, when that early rocket was trying to get to the moon. What right had the people—the creatures—on it to leave their own world?"

"They were—call them the law. An independent commission if you like. One day we'll take part in the police work of the galaxy. But not for a long time yet."

"And what did they tell those men they picked up?" Jon asked.

"What I've told you. That Earth was ours, and no one would ever attempt to take it away from us. They'd see that nobody did. At the same time, every other habitable planet was inhabited, and we weren't allowed to take it from the inhabitants."

Jon didn't speak for a while, and Jia didn't interrupt his thoughts. He found he half believed what Jia



said. It did make sense. If any of it was true, probably all of it was true.

Suppose there was intelligent life in the galaxy. If it could exist on a young world like Earth, it could have existed elsewhere before the Earth was created. Why hadn't some other race overrun the galaxy?

The explanation Jia gave wasn't unreasonable.

Suddenly he burst out; "But why the secrecy? Why let ships crash and kill thousands rather than tell the truth? Why do only a tiny group of men and women possess this knowledge? Why go to such enormous lengths to convince people that space travel is impossible? Why did you let the MCBI injure you rather than tell them what you've told me?"

"That's the difficult part," said Jia. "It's another thing you either see or you don't."

They had emerged on one of the bottom strata and were wandering about, Jia staring curiously, Jon ignoring his surroundings.

All the strata were much the same until you got right down to the limit, the point beyond which human know-how couldn't go. The walls here were only ten feet high and there were pillars everywhere. The construction of the Million Cities was a marvel of engineering, but there was a limit. This was it.

"This independent commission I told you about—" Jia began.

"Don't you have a name for it?" Jon interrupted.

"No. Call it the Galactic Patrol if you like. Or anything else—it doesn't matter what you call it. Anyway, the Galactic Patrol always has the same rules to enforce, but it enforces them in a lot of different ways. It doesn't have to tell the Lunarians not to build a ship and come to Earth, because they never will. And they've never been in touch with the Venusians either. The Venusians, you see, have no interest in anything but what you might call eating, or breathing, or living, or sex—it's all the same thing to a Venusian. They'll never leave Venus. The Martians, long ago, hardly had to be told anything. They agreed with everything naturally, because it made sense, and were co-opted. They supply some of the personnel of the Galactic Patrol."

"You mean the Martians . . ." Jon stopped.

Jia grinned. "Yes, it's a blow to our pride that even in our own system we can't be top dogs, isn't it? As for the Jovians, they're different. The Patrol wasn't able to reason with them. All the Patrol could do was demonstrate that the Jovians were not going to be allowed to leave Jupiter. They understood that. They're working on super-weapons now. Fortunately they'll never have the power of the Patrol.

"You see what I'm getting at?

The Patrol could have told us, like the Jovians, that we were prisoners. In effect that's what they did tell us. But not at the end of a gun. On the other hand they couldn't trust us, like the Martians, knowing we couldn't help being ethical. So they let us work it out ourselves. The Chartist organization represent the human race to the Patrol. Now, suppose everybody knew what I've been telling you? What would happen?"

Jon tried to picture it. He waited for Jia to tell him, but she didn't say any more. "Well," he said, "I guess we'd rebel."

Jia nodded. "First we'd go to the moon. I've told you about the Lunarians. Even honest, kind-hearted, intelligent human beings couldn't see that it would be wrong to take the moon from the Lunarians. We wouldn't even admit we were doing that. We'd say there was room for both of us—and in a few years the Lunarians would be as dead as the animals, insects, reptiles and birds that used to swarm over the Earth."

"I guess that's so," Jon admitted.

"Knowing about the Patrol wouldn't make any difference. We'd try to beat the Patrol. We'd try to go to Mars. I tell you, Jon, if the Million Cities knew the truth, it wouldn't be ten years before the Patrol had to get really tough with us."

"How tough would they get?"

"As tough as they needed to be to keep us here. Then, of course, we'd feel downtrodden and victimized, and struggle furiously to break our bonds. The Patrol would have to keep grinding our faces in the dust. Every time they let us up we'd try to kick them in the teeth. And soon there wouldn't be a human being alive who would admit the Patrol was benevolent."

"Yes," said Jon slowly. "Yes, I guess that's about it."

"As it is," said Jia, "at least we run our own affairs. We Chartists pretended we were a big secret society with our heart in the right place and did a few useful things in our time so that people would never suspect what we really were, and so that . . ."

Jon turned to look at her. "So that what?"

"So that anyone who had plans to build a spaceship came to us," said Jia. "I was the one in this case, Jon. A girl came to me . . . if she'd been the inventor, if no one else had known about it, we'd probably have killed her, as we killed Cronis."

"So that was what Bill Cronis was!" Jon exclaimed.

"We always have to kill them," said Jia quietly. "Of course, if the plans are no good it doesn't matter. But usually the plans *are* good. There are about a million men today capable of drawing up practical plans for a ship to go to the moon. That's why we have to allow a crack-up every now and then. This girl was involved with too

many people. I knew we couldn't kill them all without someone guessguessing why, and besides, it was about time we had another spaceship disaster."

Jon frowned. "What are you accomplishing by all this? Just delay?"

"A great deal, we hope. If this 'accident' kills a lot of people, we'll be sorry. But if, this time, the Senate prohibits space travel absolutely—"

They felt it.

Hundreds of miles down, right at the base of the Million Cities, they felt the impact.

They stared at each other in horror. For they both knew how immense must have been the shock before anything could be felt there.

And as they stared, the lights went out.

XI

LORNA AND RIK Tenn were told just before the *Chartist* took off.

"Maybe we should have told you sooner," said Westerman, "but to be completely honest, we didn't mean to tell you at all. It takes a while before we know we can trust people with a secret so tremendous in its ramifications."

They were still stunned. They stared at the gleaming shapes of the two ships, *Chartist I* and *Chartist II,* ready for take-off.

"Let's get away from here," said Westerman. "Once that thing goes up half the Million Cities will be rushing here."

"You mean . . . all that was for nothing?" Rik exclaimed, still staring at the ships. "All that work . . ."

"Not for nothing," said Westerman patiently. "To fail. That's very important."

He led them away. Only three technicians remained with the ship. One, a volunteer, was going up with it . . .

In the car which was taking them away Rik said, "But where was the flaw? I thought—"

"Oh, there wasn't a flaw in the original plans. There wouldn't be. That's the trouble. Technically we've been past the stage of space travel for quite a while now. That's why we have to go to such trouble to convince people space travel is impossible. We built in the flaw."

"What's going to happen?" Lorna asked.

"We don't know. Don't misunderstand me. We haven't planned a crash to take place in a particular way, in a particular place. We've simply built a faulty ship."

"What's the fault?"

Westerman told him.

The three technicians at the launching site completed their preparations. The pilot hesitated for a moment, then climbed inside *Chartist I,* the payload half.

Automatic control could have been built in. But the ship was supposed to carry only one man, was

designed to carry only one man . . . and the ship might not be entirely wrecked. There had to be a pilot.

They were tiny ships, even the mother ship, *Chartist II.* Tom Gest's plans had specified a payload of just over one hundred pounds. The pilot was a small thin man, like a boy in a toy spaceship.

The assembly shop was just under the surface. A section of the roof had been demolished and replaced by a sliding roof large enough to let the two ships out. There was no ramp, no platform —only a reinforced plate below the ships for the bigger ship to blast against.

Chartist I was in position, fitted into the bigger ship like an acorn in its cup. The two technicians who remained started the motor which dragged the camouflaged roof open. Then they hurried away. There was nothing more for them to do.

When the *Chartist* took off slowly and gently there wasn't a soul to see it. But seconds later, as it emerged from its secret hangar, hundreds of people watched it soar skyward.

There were always people taking the air on Stratum One. Some of them had been close enough to turn and stare as the roof rumbled and slid back. Nobody was very close because an area of flat roof had been roped off that morning, deceptively arranged to suggest that repair work was in progress there.

They saw, those sightseers, a graceful, gleaming ship emerge from the flat roof of the Million Cities, already in flight as it appeared. They saw it flash rapidly into the sky. And within seconds the news was being relayed all over the Million Cities.

Within a few more seconds millions of people were on their way to the surface everywhere. None of them had ever seen a heavier-than-air machine actually flying. Though they all knew theoretically that it was possible, most people remained a little doubtful, not wholly convinced that planes or helicopters or rockets could fly until they could see the marvel with their own eyes.

There was no pro or con in the minds of those millions of people who hurried to Stratum One to catch a glimpse of the spaceship. They had forgotten the issues which had been debated on the radio all day. The spaceship was something to see, and that was all. They came up to see it as crowds in other ages had hurried to see public hangings, workmen digging holes, road accidents, fires, guillotine executions, arrests.

The radio warnings which were sent out immediately were no deterrent. Spectators had finished road racing by getting themselves killed at race meetings. The possibility of accident and death made the prospect even more alluring.

No one ever believes in the imminent likelihood of his own destruction.

It was possible, indeed easy, for the people of the Million Cities to cover every square inch of the concrete surface of Earth. They were in a fair way to doing just that when the *Chartist* was seen again.

The flaw in the construction, just one of a thousand possible flaws, concerned the launching of *I* from *II*.

It never took place.

The mother ship took the little payload ship up to 900 miles. There the ships were to part, *Chartist I* to go on to the moon and back, *Chartist II* to orbit until its return. Tom Gest hadn't shirked his responsibility, he had done all he could to make the whole effort safe. His plans allowed for a slow take-off which would do no harm and a gentle landing which would scarcely jar the outside shell of the Million Cities. It added enormously to the difficulty of the enterprise to have *Chartist I* return to link up with the mother ship out in space, but it was safer to take that risk.

All went perfectly until the moment when *Chartist I* should have gone on under her own power. The pilot set the right controls and closed the right switches, knowing in advance exactly what was going to happen.

Chartist I came half out of her shell and spun over on her side. Stabilizers screamed. Slowly the two ships heeled over, linked by an umbilical cord which refused to be severed. They hung in space like an airship with a broken back.

The pilot could do nothing now.

On Stratum One no one could see the ships, though every now and then someone thought he did, and shouted and pointed excitedly.

At last the ships really did become visible, coming down.

The crowds scattered and tried to run for safety, realizing when it was too late that they were going to have an altogether too good view of the end of the *Chartist*. Thousands were trampled to death in the stampede which followed. Thousands more reached the tubestops and had to wait, swaying with impatience and horror, for the cars to return for them.

Behind them, the silver streak of the *Chartist* flashed diagonally across the blue sky. The trapped men and women turned from it and beat frantically on the closed tubestop doors.

Then a couple of men crazy with fear battered down the doors of a tubestop, and were instantly swept by the rush of air into the black pit. Worse than that, the automatic control immediately shut off that whole section at the first inrush of air, and nobody could escape from that part of the roof.

People who observed the silver ship disappear over the horizon relaxed and even cursed the ill-for-

tune which had caused them to miss the rest of the show. People who saw that the ship was going to crash many miles away, but still in sight, gave up all idea of leaving the roof and climbed instead to the top of the tubestops to get a better view.

Only people who saw the disaster clearly and thought they were in the direct line of the falling ship continued to beat frantically on tubestop doors.

There were desperate battles for the cars. A few men got away in a car to themselves, and other cars became the center of a battlefield, the first arrivals holding off the men, women and children who were tardily trying to get in, slashing at them with pocket-knives and kicking their legs from under them. Cars stood waiting, empty, while the savage conflict raged.

So many people crammed themselves into one car that the ramp surrounding it collapsed and the car dropped into the dark tunnel directly underneath. Another whole section of tubestops went out of action. The survivors went on fighting madly for possession of cars, killing their antagonists if they couldn't get rid of them in any other way, and then sitting in useless cars jabbing wildly at dead controls.

Then it was too late to run. Men and women looked up and saw the ship coming straight for them. They screamed—and still fought each other for life.

The ship struck.

The chemical fuel which both ships used was supposed to be harmless, immune to impact. But it all went up—the whole supply of the *Chartist I*, and a little more than half the supply of the *Chartist II*.

The explosion was cataclysmic. Miles away people who had been standing excitedly on top of tubestops were blasted a hundred yards through the air. There were no hills to break the force of the explosion. Over an area of a hundred square miles the world suddenly went dark.

But bad as it was, the situation on the surface, wasn't as terrible in its widespread, unparalleled destructiveness as the situation below it. People who live in a honeycomb can't afford to drop an explosive object on top of it.

THE LIGHT came on again almost at once. Jia and Jon were still staring at each other.

Jon recovered first. "Let's go up," he said, "and see what's going on."

They got into a car and set it for Stratum One, knowing that it would take them a long time to get there. Jia switched on the radio. There was silence.

"And this was done deliberately," said Jon.

There was no bitterness in his

voice, no anger—merely a stunned acceptance. Jia felt she had to defend the Chartists.

"If human beings fought the Galactic Patrol," she said, "and we believe that's what they'd do if they knew—it might mean the end of the human race."

"Someone came to you with plans for a spaceship," said Jon, his voice still drained of all emotion, "and you Chartists made a ship to crash and kill hundreds, thousands, maybe millions of people."

Jia said nothing this time.

She was sick too—sick at the thought of her personal responsibility for what had happened.

But what else could the Chartists do?

You couldn't keep human beings in a prison if they knew it was a prison. Pretend the Million Cities were wonderful, that the planets had nothing to offer, that space travel was dangerous and not worth while, and very few people rebelled. Tell everybody that space travel was not only possible but easy, and that there were thousands of planets in the galaxy on which human beings could very comfortably settle, and it wouldn't matter what else you told them. Men would still go out and fight for what they wanted, Patrol or no Patrol.

Human beings were a brash, conceited race. They had always thought their own town was better than any other town, their own State better than any other State, their own country better than any other country, their own color better than any other color, and their own species better than any other species. They would never accept the right of the semi-conscious, unintelligent, defenseless moon dwellers to keep their own little world—a world which human beings wanted, needed.

But they had to accept it. The Million Cities of Earth couldn't argue with the advanced races of the galaxy any more than Pithecanthropus could argue with the Million Cities.

The final thing which made revelation impossible was—democracy. Democracy as practised in the Million Cities meant one vote for a man of IQ 40 and one vote for a man of IQ 160.

The Senate said: *Every couple can't have a child.* The people said: *Every couple is going to have a child.* The Senate said: *The Park is closed.* The people said: *The Park is open again.* The Senate said: *You must.* The people said: *We will not.*

If the truth were known, Senate and Chartists would be at one. But the Senate would say: *Don't do this,* and the people would say: *We will.*

The car stopped suddenly, without having got anywhere. It stopped where it was, in a fast vertical tube.

"Must be serious," said Jon. "I've never known it do that before."

The radio burst into life. "The Chartist spaceship crashed on El. No details are available yet, but it is feared that Strata One to Seventeen may be affected. Further news will be given as it becomes available."

That was all.

"One to Seventeen!" Jia murmured. "That could involve—anything up to seven million people . . . eight . . ."

She saw that Jon wasn't listening. And immediately she realized why. She hadn't forgotten that Jon lived in El Stratum Seventeen. She just hadn't related it to the announcement.

The car started again. Jia, not Jon, reset the controls for Stratum Seventeen.

When they stepped out there was nothing out of the ordinary to see. There was no damage, and everything was normal.

But Jon frowned when he looked about him, and jumped back into the car again to look at the control setting. Then he came out again, still frowning.

"This isn't the right place?" said Jia quickly. "Maybe the automatic control's out of order. It's had a bad shake-up—"

"And maybe," said Jon, "it set us down here because it couldn't take us any further."

They had to ask someone before they found they were on Stratum Twenty. There was nothing they could do. People were hurrying past them, frightened.

Jon and Jia went back into the car and turned the radio on again.

"Do not attempt to get into the area El Strata One to Nineteen," a voice was saying. "Strata One to Nineteen are almost completely destroyed. Stratum Twenty is being cleared. There is some danger of air pressure collapsing Stratum Twenty as it has already collapsed Eighteen and Nineteen."

"We'd better move." said Jia.

Jon nodded dully.

They went down to Twenty-five. Each stratum was not one but several levels.

The new danger was one which the Million Cities almost never had to face. Air pressure at the surface was fourteen to fifteen pounds per square inch—the pressure which was maintained throughout the Million Cities. Nowhere was air pressure any greater, for there was no air well between any strata.

Now, as the news item they had heard had inferred but not yet stated, there was a great hole in El. Air from outside had penetrated as far as Stratum Nineteen, which was so many miles down that the air pressure must be enormous, hundreds of pounds to the square inch.

The radio spoke again. "Do not use the vacuum tubes at all," the speaker ordered. "Anyone who is

now on a journey should route his car to the nearest tubestop. The automatic control is being cut five minutes from now. I repeat, get out of the tube system. Shut-off in five minutes."

Jon and Jia didn't have to move. Their car was motionless in a tubestop with the door open.

"Why are they doing that?" Jia asked.

"Because," said Jon grimly, "the automatic control at the moment has not only millions of cars to cope with, but thousands of tubes filled with air. All the tubes around El One to Nineteen have been automatically blocked. But all that normally has to be blocked is an air pressure of fourteen pounds per square inch. I don't know how the tube system's coping with hundreds of pounds pressure. I don't see how it can."

He looked at Jia with a strange expression in which there was a certain humorless amusement.

"I wonder," he said, "if the Chartists have just destroyed the Million Cities—and all the people in them?"

XII

THE CRASH was not so severe as Jon feared and the designers of the Million Cities took credit for this.

Presence of air in any tube automatically caused the sealing of that tube. And, as Jon had said, a pressure of only fourteen pounds per square inch was all that normally had to be withstood. But the designers had allowed for emergencies, such as a crack right through to the core of the Earth. Reinforcing the normal seals was a secondary system which came into operation in an emergency such as this.

Between Strata Twenty and Twenty-one there was a specially tough barrier. Actually, Twenty had survived, but if it hadn't, the crack would have been unlikely to go below it.

Nobody in the damaged sections survived. Though Jon and Jia didn't mention it, both knew already that Liz must be dead—unless she'd happened to be out, in some other section, when the crash occurred.

All that evening the tube system was at a standstill. The total of known casualties mounted: at least four million; six million; seven million, plus sightseers who had died on the surface; eight million plus; probably not more than nine million in all.

"You've killed nine million people, Jia," said Jon Onul, and his voice was no longer lifeless. There was anger in it—and bitterness.

"If we're right," said Jia, her voice steady, "we'd still be justified. We'd be justified if half the population of the Million Cities dies. If we're wrong, it's an unforgivable crime to kill one man."

Jon tightened his lips and refused to meet her gaze.

At about eleven o'clock, following a radio announcement, the cars started again. Everything which could be done had been done, it was stated. There could be no more rescue work. No hope should be entertained that anyone in the damaged area was still alive. It had been sealed off, but search parties had descended into the devastated area from Stratum One.

There was nothing for the rescue crews to do. There were no injured people except those on Stratum One who had been injured by blast.

All the people in El One to Nineteen, with the exception of a small section at the north and two larger sections to the east and south, had been killed outright.

The Chartists now knew the price. Nine million people—to delay space travel for a few more years, or, with luck, get it outlawed altogether.

Nine million people . . . rather than tell the Million Cities the truth. Nine million people . . . in the hope that the Chartists' view of the situation was right.

Nine million people . . . to prevent the human race from making a jailbreak.

PET AND RON didn't even know of the disaster until late in the evening. They had been in the Park, which hadn't been closed again—far enough in to hear nothing about the launching of the *Chartist,* and see nothing of the frantic rush to the surface. They had felt no shock.

When they returned they heard the story before they were even out of the Park. Ron was able to get details.

"Your mother and father . . .?" he began, then bit his lip and cursed himself for reminding her.

"Not Jon," said Pet, with relief. "Not my father. He was going to see Jia Hisk, further down. He'll be safe. My mother . . ."

"I'm sorry," said Ron lamely.

"So am I, and yet . . . " Pet paused, and then said the cruellest thing anyone had ever said of Liz, cruel because it was so simple and sincere: "Jon can be happy now."

Lorna and Rik, after the first shock, were quite sure the Chartists were right.

"What will happen to the Chartist organization now?" Rik asked Westerman.

"It's finished," Westerman said. "We called the ship the *Chartist* to finish it. The organization will be declared disbanded, and no action will be taken against ex-members. Our supporters in high positions will see to that."

"But it won't really be finished," said Lorna.

"It'll never be finished—not until people grow up enough to take the truth."

Not very far away, in El, Tom Gest sat silent for a long time, not moving. At last he sighed and rose. He was curiously calm. All the jerkiness had gone out of his movements. He mixed himself a drink.

Tom wasn't a chemist, but he knew enough to mix himself a drink which would put him to sleep.

Forever.

He didn't hesitate before downing it. Escape was so easy . . . he wondered why he had never thought of it before.

He had plenty of time to relax and make himself comfortable.

SMALL DISASTERS lead to anger, fury, blood lust. Men and women feel that someone must pay. Big disasters are met with a strange calm. Vengeance doesn't seem to matter.

There were no hysterical outbursts against the Chartists, even from those who had suffered most. It was generally accepted that the Chartists had acted in good faith . . . and since the organization in disbanding itself left no doubt in anyone's mind that it really had been disbanded, there were no reprisals.

Space travel experiments were officially banned. All research on this and allied problems had to be done under strict supervision.

So the Chartists achieved their end. It would be a little longer before the Million Cities had recovered sufficiently from the Chartist disaster to make any serious plans to tackle the problem of space travel once more.

JON DIDN'T see Jia for a long time. He knew Pet was seeing her, but he never asked Pet about her. And Pet, who didn't know the whole story but was aware that there was something she didn't understand, seldom mentioned Jon to Jia or Jia to Jon.

At one time Pet would have devoted all her energies to seeking out the truth. But she had changed. She found the dissolution of the Chartists a delightful release. She didn't want to join any more secret societies, or be entrusted with any more important missions.

What mattered far more was that she was in love, and the man she was in love with was in love with her. Very soon, her emotional needs were satisfied in this very natural way.

Ron and Pet weren't getting married yet. Jon had said they should wait at least until Ron was twenty-one, and Ron, who got on very well with his future father-in-law, raised no objections.

Suddenly one day, when he was in the office, a blinding shocking thought struck Jon. He might lose

Jia again. After all, he must stop thinking in terms of millions of people and think of her.

He found her at her flat, waiting for him.

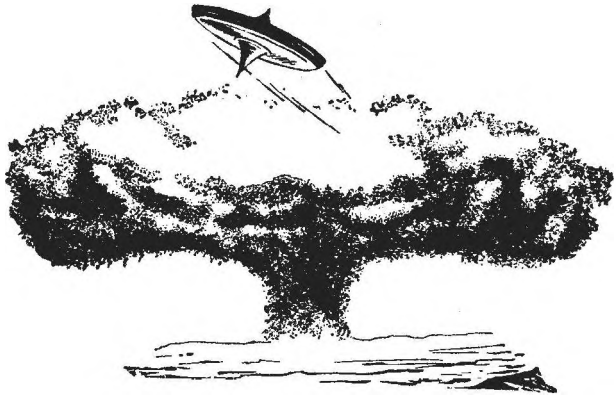
"Jia . . ." he said, and stopped. She was still the most beautiful woman he had ever known, and it came to him abruptly that he had no right to judge her—to judge any human being in the Million Cities.

"Jia . . ." he said again.

"Yes," she said, meeting his gaze unflinchingly.

"Life must go on," he said.

"Yes, Jon," she said. "We must pick up the pieces—always and as best we can—and go on."

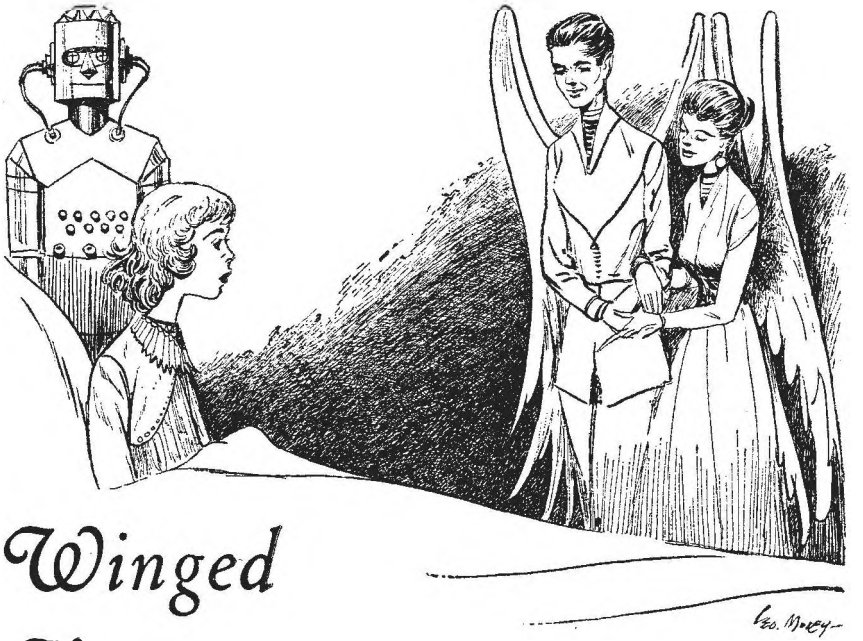


An Unusual Complete Novel — in the Next Issue

THE MAN WITH ABSOLUTE MOTION

A stranger man never lived . . . and he was needed desperately by a Universe at the brink of Galactic war

By NOEL LOOMIS



Winged Visitors

A lively and satirically beguiling science fantasy by a gifted French writer.

by ALOIS PIRINGER

MRS. MACCALLUM couldn't forgive Professor Wintrop's harsh criticism of her son's work. "It was his fault" she told everybody. If it had not been for him my brilliant young son would not have disappeared."

It was an amazing story.

Lenny MacCallum, born in 2345, was one of the most brilliant students ever to be graduated from the University of World-Center III. After securing his degree in 2367 he concentrated on archeology to the exclusion of all else. He managed to decipher stone inscriptions, discovered in Inca ruins on the Mid-Andes Plateau and in the Valley of Cuzco at the end of the twenty-

fourth century. Nobody had been able to translate these before.

When Lenny published his first version of the astounding South American Indian texts everybody was excited, even people who generally didn't care for "sensational" scholarship. The texts convinced a great many hitherto skeptical people that the ancient Incas had in many respects attained an even higher degree of civilization than the post-atomic world.

Lenny MacCallum was showered with prizes and congratulations. He married Esther Laughton, a highly accomplished biologist, and an extremely pretty girl, and was sitting on the top of the academic world when Professor Wintrop turned malicious and wrote in the "World Scientific News-Review" that he didn't believe there was one word of truth in any of Lenny's translations and that the unfortunate young man was quite obviously a poet, and nothing more.

A few scientists still trusted and believed in Lenny, but most of them submitted docilely to Professor Wintrop's authority. Possibly Lenny had gone a little too far. He had written that the "Uncles," as he called them, had known that the Biblical Flood was coming and had left the Earth to travel to Venus, a planet nearer to the sun and less dangerous to live on.

"We are quite obviously the descendants of decadent people, who were not considered worthy to survive," Lenny wrote, "or of embryos who would perish if they were taken for a long ride through space."

"Lenny is taking *us* for a ride," Professor Wintrop retorted with heat. "This isn't science, but poetry—and very bad poetry at that."

Mrs. MacCallum loved her son. But as she was a specialist in infant-psychology and did not understand archaeology, she was utterly unable to judge the merits of her son's work.

One morning, when Mrs. MacCallum came home after her night-service, the message-box in her parlor blinked. She switched it on.

As early as the year 2000 people had stopped writing letters to one another. They talked to a kind of robot-telephone. It transmitted their voice to a record in the message-box—directly to the home of the person with whom they wanted to communicate. The correspondent could hear the message at his own convenience, while he was doing whatever he liked, without opening envelopes or worrying about mail thieves. Every message-box had a special switching system, responsive only to the fingerprints of its owner, precisely as do many of the newer model combination safes.

"Mother darling," Lenny's voice said from the box. "You must not worry about the articles.

We're going to prove, Esther and I, that everything I asserted was true, and that Professor Wintrop has done me a great injustice. Esther and I are going on a long trip. We need to confirm certain facts, and I'm afraid it will take a long time. It will be quite impossible for either of us to communicate with you before at least seven years. We've arranged for our savings at the bank to be transferred to your account—if you do not hear from us by the end of ten years. But I'm sure we'll be back long before that. Kiss little Eve for me, please. Goodbye Mother, darling and don't worry."

That was all.

Mrs. MacCallum turned the switch back, and the message-box repeated the identical words. She re-adjusted the machine's sound track, so that the letter could be recorded permanently on a small metal disk. Then she sat down and heard the message a third time. It was startling, incredible, frightening. Why must Lenny and Esther disappear? And what was this business about bank-accounts?

Immediately she put a call through to her son's bungalow.

The Phone-Roboter answered. "Nobody in. House empty. Nobody in. House empty."

"Heaven help me," said Mrs. MacCallum, and this was a very depressing expression, coming from a specialist in infant-psychology.

Hardly able to control her agitation, she went to Eve's bedroom. Eve was twenty years younger then Lenny, but since women had the right to give birth to only one child every ten years, a twenty-year age difference was quite normal between brothers and sisters.

The child was sleeping soundly, her dark curls spread on the pillow, around her rosy face. The message-box in the corner of the room blinked. Mrs. MacCallum was unable to respond, as it was fixed on the child's fingerprints.

"Hello, darling," she said softly, "I think there's a letter for you."

Eve sat up slowly, smiled and whistled the appropriate tune. The message-box moved slowly over to her bed. She put her fingers on the switch, and almost immediately the box returned to the corner of the room and Esther's voice was heard.

"Eve, I'm sorry but I won't be able to teach you biology any longer. My friend Harriet has promised, however, to take my place. Lenny and I are taking a long trip. When we come back in about seven years, you'll be the very first person who'll know. So long, darling, and continue to study biology. It's very important. Lenny sends you his love."

Eve yawned. "I'm six now," she said. "Six and seven makes thirteen. I'll be quite grown by that time!"

"Harriet is to give you lessons?"

Mrs. MacCallum's voice rose so sharply the question seemed like a demand. Mrs. MacCallum believed in Education Program OX 46—and it did not recommend biology at six. "You needn't learn biology now," she insisted. "You don't have to."

"I like biology," the girl replied, and her mouth looked just as sulky as Lenny's did sometimes. "I know you always want me to follow OX Forty-six. But I've asked for a special testing and they said I could follow BY Fifty-two, which permits biology at five."

Mrs. MacCallum shook her head. She was desperate. First her son's strange message, and now her small daughter wanting to follow an education-program the mother couldn't approve of.

Nobody saw Esther or Lenny depart. The Security Police questioned several people. But their evidence was in no way conclusive. As everybody wore flying mantles and as the head was hidden under the wings for protection against the wind, it was difficult to recognize a man or woman in flight.

Mrs. MacCallum flew straight to Lenny's bungalow. It had been made secure against intruders by the fingerprint-system, which meant, of course, that nobody but Esther or Lenny could open it. However, it looked as spic-and-span as it always did, and she could even see the cleaning-roboter drawing the curtains when she tried to peep through the air-holes. It would have been only natural to assume that the couple had merely gone on a week-end trip, if it had not been for the records.

Mrs. MacCallum had the experts examine the two recorded messages. They agreed that the voices were authentic. The analysis also proved that no compulsion had been exerted. The couple had been perfectly free to speak their minds.

"Definitely no indication of suicidal intent here," one of the experts took great pains to point out.

But where could they go for seven years? And apparently they had nothing but their flying-mantles. They had taken no money. They had put, each of them, the exact amount of their final week's wages in their bank accounts with instructions as to its disposition if they weren't back in ten years.

People rarely disappeared in 2371. There was no sensible reason to do so. For centuries peace and liberty had been spread all over the world, and Science stood guardian against disease, physical and psychological pain.

"It's entirely Professor Wintrop's fault," said Mrs. MacCallum, "because he was deliberately malicious."

But nobody wanted to listen to

her, as Professor Wintrop was a distinguished scientist, while Lenny MacCallum . . . was only a poet. Professor Wintrop had been very emphatic about it and generally Professor Wintrop knew what he was talking about.

THE YEARS passed. Mrs. MacCallum underwent two operations, one on her face, and later another on her ankles.

After the two operations and a treatment with U 235 atomic pills —a very old remedy but still the most efficient—her health improved. She was over fifty now.

Yet she refused to have another child when Eve was ten. Her daughter Wallis—spaced between Lenny and Eve, had been burnt by an overheated Roboter when she was three. Her son had disappeared with his young wife, perhaps forever. And of late Mrs. MacCallum had been having difficulty with Eve.

Eve was tested every year and each time her education-program had to be changed, as the tests showed contradictory talents. Actually, Eve didn't learn much in school. But she liked to play with the incredible museum pieces she found in odd shops—sewing-machines, typewriters, phonographs.

When Eve was thirteen she had a strange dream. Two white-clad visitors entered her room, smiled at her, and sat near her bedside.

"What a lovely girl you've become," said the taller visitor. "My baby sister is a lady now."

"Have you continued your biology lessons?" the other visitor asked.

"No," answered Eve quickly, "but I never heard of dream-people or ghosts or anyone like you interested in biology."

"You aren't dreaming about us. And we're not ghosts. We're really here. We are Esther and Lenny," the young man said.

Eve sat up in bed. It was a very dark night and she couldn't see them distinctly. The window panes might as well have been shades and there was only a little light coming from the Watch-Roboters glowing nosepiece.

"I know I'm dreaming," thought Eve. "If somebody who isn't a member of the family really *had* entered my room, Watching-Robby would have shrieked three times and then he'd have *pulverized* them."

She sank back on her pillow, a smile on her face. "Since I'm dreaming, why don't you make something happen—something funny or surprising? Make an orange tree grow out of the wallpaper or change my old Watching-Robby into a little barking dog."

One of the visitors switched the light on. Eve could see both of them more distinctly now. They were tall—so tall that the male, visitor's head nearly touched the

ceiling. Both had long, beautiful wings, covered with little curls that looked almost like feathers. One of them had Lenny's face and the other, Esther's.

"Why didn't you continue with your biology?" the visitor who looked like Esther asked.

"It was so boring. And my tests proved I wouldn't be good at it, you see. Not really good."

"Didn't you get my message?"

"What message are you referring to?"

"Esther's message," the visitor who resembled Lenny said a little impatiently. "I talked to mother a few hours before my departure, and Esther talked to you."

"Yes, of course," Eve said, quite happy now. This was no different from other dreams, so far as logic went. It had the special logic of all dreams. "You are my brother, Lenny, and you are my sister, Esther, and you are dead. You've gone to . . . heaven?"

"No, not exactly," Lenny said. "We are both more alive than ever."

"You can't explain it to her," Esther said, "as she hasn't studied biology. Eve will never understand."

"No, darling, she will. I didn't study biology either, and I immediately understood when I deciphered the inscriptions in Peru."

Eve yawned. She was very sleepy. It was the first time she'd ever felt sleepy in a dream.

The visitors bent understandingly over her bed. "You'll sleep now, and we'll come again tomorrow. We dare not appear when it is light and people are about. For if they saw us—"

"They'd like you," Eve said.

"No, they fear us. People hate and sometimes kill when they do not understand."

"I don't understand either. But I'd neither hate nor kill you."

"We'll talk about that tomorrow," Esther said, "we really can't stay any longer. But we'll be back tomorrow and we'll explain everything. Only, I want you to look in your old biology records. See what you can learn about the axolot. Then you'll understand."

"About what?" asked Eve.

"The axolot."

One of the visitors floated to the ancient typewriter on the table, and Eve heard typing.

Then they were gone.

In the morning, when she woke, Eve had nearly forgotten her dream. And then she saw a piece of paper in the typewriter. One word was typed on it: A X O-L O T.

Eve couldn't believe it and yet there was the strange word in clear, bold type—a word she couldn't remember ever having heard before.

Eve went to the cabinet where the records were kept and asked the recording roboter to describe an axolot.

The information came after a while, in the hoarse voice of a dusty, never-used and badly-kept old record.

"Axolot. Embryo of salamander. Able to procreate. Never metamorphoses its infantile self into a salamander, except under especially favorable conditions."

"I'm silly," thought Eve. "Why do I bother about a dream? I must have walked in my sleep—all the way to the typewriter."

She went to the feeding-roboter, had her breakfast-pills. Soon it was time to put on her flying-mantle and rush to school.

The next night the visitors came again. Eve had been sleeping for only an hour or two, when a soft sound awoke her. It was the noise of the wings.

Eve was an average girl of the twenty-fourth century. She had not always paid strict attention to her dream-psychology lessons, but she did know that it was possible that, walking in her dream, she had typed the word "axolot" herself. The word might even have been buried in her subconscious for years and years—ever since her biology lessons. She also knew it was very difficult to dream of anything unknown beforehand.

But she liked the dream, and so said, "I listened to the axolot-record. I know now that an axolot is the embryo of a salamander. It is able to have babies, and an axolot and his children never become salamanders except in favorable conditions. Now, what has all this to do with you?"

"We told you last night that we are not illusionary people," Esther said. "We are real human beings."

"Of course." Eve nodded. "Would you like a tonic pill?"

"No, thank you. We eat fresh fruit and nothing else. It is much better for us."

The visitor who resembled Lenny came closer. "Listen, Eve. You know that I'm an archeologist and that I once deciphered ancient inscriptions."

"Of course." Eve didn't have to go back very far in her memory to recall conversations with her mother. "You were writing poetry and there was a Professor—what was his name? Wintrop, I suppose . . ."

"No, Eve. Professor Wintrop no longer angers me." He didn't even know that the Flood which the Bible describes really occurred. It rained for forty days and forty nights.

Eve nodded. "Yes, most people believe that now. They found the Ark, or what was left of it, a few hundred years ago."

"Yes, Eve, but all that took place in the Mediterranean Basin. In the New World, something quite different happened. You know how the Egyptians and the Incas buried their dead?"

"In pyramids," Eve said in-

stantly. "But what has it to do with—"

"The pyramids were not burial vaults as we believed for centuries," Lenny said, cutting her short. "The pyramids were *breeding cells.* I discovered no bodies at all in the burial mounds Professor Wintrop thought to be Inca graves. There were only desiccated fragments of human skin, and cartilage. Men—the men you know and all of us know—are very much like axolots. They can undergo metamorphosis when they are in appropriate surroundings. It hasn't happened for many thousands of years now, but just before the Flood temperature and life conditions altered. All warm-blooded animals underwent such a change. Don't you remember the winged lions, horses, and dragons on ancient monuments?"

"Yes, but they are only symbols," Eve said.

"If you'd continued your biology lessons," Esther said, shaking her head reproachfully, "you'd know about Julian Huxley's great discovery. It was made far back in the twentieth century, and since then, unfortunately, only scholars are familiar with it."

"I didn't learn anything at all about Julian Huxley." Eve said.

"Of course not, because you didn't continue to study biology—particularly with—well, never mind. Just listen carefully Eve, and perhaps you'll understand. Julian Huxley discovered that human kidneys are structurally identical with the kidneys of embryonic apes. When the ape embryo passes a certain stage of development —the similarity vanishes."

Eve sighed and shook her head.

"Sorry, Esther," Lenny said. "She'll never understand. We'd better type it out for her, and then she can show it to Professor Wintrop."

Esther nodded. "You're right, dear," she said. She floated to the typewriter and sat down.

Lenny switched off the light. Eve heard a quick, regular tapping, and she soon fell asleep.

The next morning a few typed pages rested on the table. Eve read them with astonishment.

"Before the Flood men lived fairly short lives—from thirty to fifty years in their original physical form. After they had been instructed in all they needed to know, they entered the pyramids to sleep. They awoke seven years later. Their skins burst open, and they emerged from their cocoon-like envelopes of shriveled flesh, taller, healthier and lighter than before. They spread their wings, and were able to fly as well as all the highly-developed animals whose natural habitat is both the land and the air.

"I managed to duplicate all of the necessary experimental conditions, simply by studying the ancient inscriptions. This knowledge

has been lost to mankind for thousands of years. The later, middle-Dynasty Egyptians must have had a vague memory of it. But by putting *dead* men and women in the pyramids they of course ignored what had to be done first.

"It wasn't easy, and I'm convinced I could never have succeeded without Esther's assistance. Her biological knowledge was invaluable to me. . . . Recall for a moment the strange aspect of many ancient statues—only the head emerging and the body in a tight envelope resembling a cocoon. Professor Wintrop, it was a cocoon. And what emerged was something strangely beautiful—a kind of human butterfly.

"When the Flood came, these transformed men and women left the Earth and flew to Venus. We have already contacted the inhabitants of Venus, and we know now why modern man, even with his atomic-powered space-ships has never succeeded in landing on Venus.

The people there, our winged cousins, refused to permit it. They feared that man in his present state of knowledge would alter the great beauty of their way of life. For the wings are not only physical. They embrace psychic factors as well. We can see in the darkness. We are able to transmit and receive the thoughts of other people like ourselves. But we can also contact less evolved minds.

Now the bars against men can be lowered—if their courage is great enough under the stars. Men and women of courage, who seek to enrich their lives, are welcome to follow us. Where our bungalow stood you'll now find the hollow trunk of a tree. The bungalow was destroyed by us when we left our cocoons. You will find on the tree trunk a little, dark patch where the bark has been removed. Those of you who want to follow us must remember to put their fingers on the dark patch. The dark patch will lead to a new world of light and grace and beauty. Our civilization is a fingerprint-civilization, precisely as this one is. With our fingerprints we open and shut our houses and safes and make our roboters work. But we also know how to read fingerprints.

"If you would like to know why we do not present ourselves to a medical research center to be examined and seen by everyone —I have only this to say. Most men and women are so constituted that they will have to stay axolots until the end of their days. We do not want to disturb and frighten anyone. Besides, we know that what even ordinarily well-meaning men and women do not understand they hate and try to destroy."

It was signed, LENNY MACCALLUM.

Eve told her mother about the

winged visitors and gave her the typed message. Mrs. MacCallum read it, asked a few silly questions and then turned it over to Professor Wintrop. He read it through twice, but he was only amused by it. He chuckled as he handed it to an assistant, a young man named Jack Wright, who did not laugh.

Soon afterwards Wright disappeared.

Many other people disappeared that same year from World-Center III.

The authorities examined the tree trunk. A biologist, a police officer and a minister put their fingers on the dark patch where there was no bark. But nothing happened.

Now, in the year 2400, the story of the winged visitors at the typewriter has become a legend. Nursery-roboters sometimes tell it to the children, when the psychologists allow it.

And all over the world—but at infrequent intervals—men and women continue to disappear.

The Missing Pages

From the Immortal Science Fiction Novel by

H. G. WELLS

In his article, "The Wonders of H. G. Wells," which appeared in the April issue of SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION, *Sam Moskowitz referred to a mystery which had eluded and baffled the more scholarly-disposed admirers of Wells for years. No less a science fiction authority than P. Schuyler Miller—well-known for both his stories and discerning SF book reviews—can recall how as a boy he was startled to read in "Ridpath's Library of Universal Literature" a brief excerpt from Wells' "Time Machine" (It was originally entitled "Man of the Future") which did not appear in any known edition of the novel. The missing pages are buried deep in library files, but we've had so many letters from readers requesting that we locate and publish them—if possible—that we've made the effort. Here they are! They evoke, we think, a magic uniquely Wellsian. A real collector's item, it appeared serially in the English magazine, the* New Review, *for the years 1894—1895.*

THE TIME MACHINE

XIII

The Further Vision

I *HAVE already told you of the sickness and confusion that comes with time travelling. And this time I was not seated properly in the saddle, but sideways and in an unstable fashion. For an indefinite time I clung to the machine as it swayed and vibrated, quite unheeding how I went, and when I brought myself to look at the dials again I was amazed to find where I had arrived. One dial records days,* another thousands of days, another millions of days, and another thousands of millions. *Now, instead of reversing the levers I had pulled them over so as to go forward with them, and when I came to look at these indicators I found that the thousands hand was sweeping round as fast as the sec-*

onds hands of a watch—into futurity.

Very cautiously, for I remembered my former headlong fall, I began to reverse my motion. Slower and slower went the circling hands until the thousands one seemed motionless and the daily one was no longer a mere mist upon its scale. Still slower, until the grey haze around me became distincter and dim outlines of an undulating waste grew visible.

I stopped. I was on a bleak moorland, covered with a sparse vegetation, and grey with a thin hoarfrost. The time was midday, the orange sun, shorn of its effulgence, brooded near the meridian in a sky of drabby grey. Only a few black bushes broke the monotony of the scene. The great buildings of the decadent men among whom, it seemed to me, I had been so recently, had vanished and left no trace: not a mound even marked their position. Hill and valley, sea and river—all, under the wear and work of the rain and frost, had melted into new forms. No doubt, too, the rain and snow had long since washed out the Morlock tunnels.

A nipping breeze stung my hands and face. So far as I could see there were neither hills, nor trees, nor rivers: only an uneven stretch of cheerless plateau.

Then suddenly a dark bulk rose out of the moor, something that gleamed like a serrated row of iron plates, and vanished almost immediately in a depression. And then I became aware of a number of faint-grey things, coloured to almost the exact tint of the frost-bitten soil, which were browsing here and there upon its scanty grass, and running to and fro. I saw one jump with a sudden start, and then my eye detected perhaps a score of them.

At first I thought they were rabbits, or some small breed of kangaroo. Then, as one came hopping near me, I perceived that it belonged to neither of these groups. It was plantigrade, its hind legs rather the longer; it was tailless, and covered with a straight greyish hair that thickened about the head into a Skye terrier's mane. As I had understood that in the Golden Age man had killed out almost all the other animals, sparing only a few of the more ornamental, I was naturally curious about the creatures. They did not seem afraid of me, but browsed on, much as rabbits would do in a place unfrequented by men; and it occurred to me that I might perhaps secure a specimen.

I got off the machine, and picked up a big stone. I had scarcely done so when one of the little creatures came within easy range. I was so lucky as to hit it on the head, and it rolled over at once and lay motionless. I ran to it at once. It remained still, almost as if it were killed. I was surprised

to see that the thing had five feeble digits to both its fore and hind feet—the fore feet, indeed, were almost as human as the fore feet of a frog. It had, moreover, a roundish head, with a projecting forehead and forward-looking eyes, obscured by its lank hair. A disagreeable apprehension flashed across my mind.

As I knelt down and seized my capture, intending to examine its teeth and other anatomical points which might show human characteristics, the metallic-looking object, to which I have already alluded, reappeared above a ridge in the moor, coming towards me and making a strange clattering sound as it came. Forthwith the grey animals about me began to answer with a short, weak yelping —as if of terror—and bolted off in a direction opposite to that from which this new creature approached. They must have hidden in burrows or behind bushes and tussocks, for in a moment not one of them was visible.

I rose to my feet, and stared at this grotesque monster. I can only describe it by comparing it to a centipede. It stood about three feet high, and had a long segmented body, perhaps thirty feet long, with curiously overlapping greenish-black plates. It seemed to crawl upon a multitude of feet, looping its body as it advanced. Its blunt round head, with a polygonal arrangement of black eye spots, carried two flexible, writhing, horn-like antennae.

It was coming along, I should judge, at a pace of about eight or ten miles an hour, and it left me little time for thinking. Leaving my grey animal, or grey man, whichever it was, on the ground, I set off for the machine. Halfway I paused, regretting that abandonment, but a glance over my shoulder destroyed any such regret.

When I gained the machine the monster was scarce fifty yards away. It was certainly not a vertebrated animal. It had no snout, and its mouth was fringed with jointed dark-coloured plates. But I did not care for a nearer view.

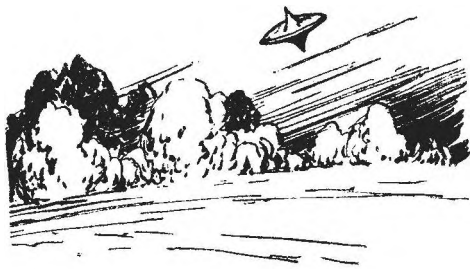
I traversed one day and stopped again, hoping to find the colossus gone and some vestige of my victim; but, I should judge, the giant centipede did not trouble itself about bones. At any rate both had vanished. The faintly human touch of these little creatures perplexed me greatly. If you come to think, there is no reason why a degenerate humanity should not come at last to differentiate into as many species as the descendants of the mud fish who fathered all the land vertebrates.

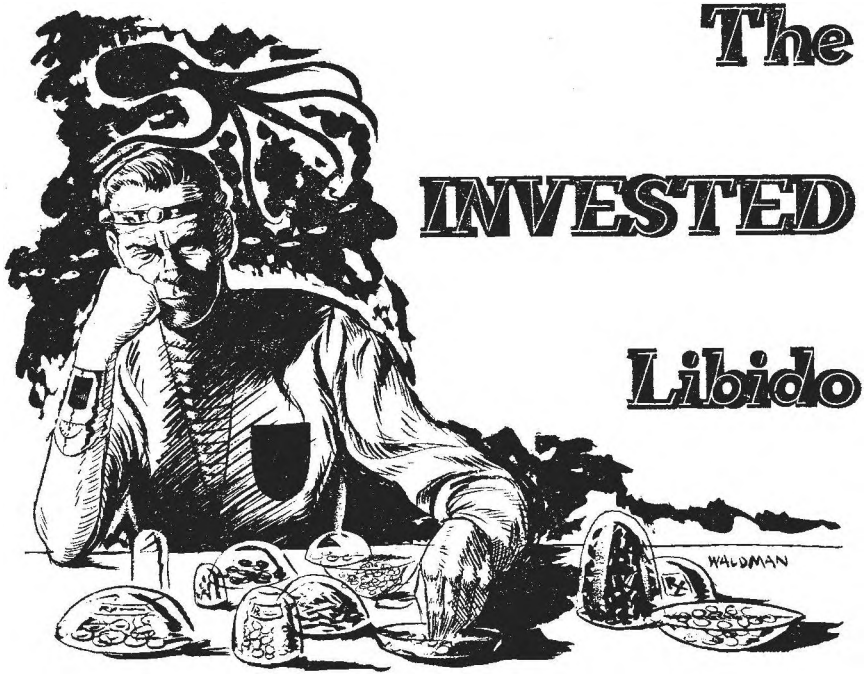
I saw no more of any insect colossus, as to my thinking the segmented creature must have been. Evidently the physiological difficulty that at present keeps all the insects small had been sur-

mounted at last, and this division of the animal kingdom had arrived at the long awaited supremacy which its enormous energy and vitality deserve.

I made several attempts to kill or capture another of the greyish vermin, but none of my missiles were so successful as my first; and, after perhaps a dozen disappointing throws, that left my arm aching, I felt a gust of irritation at my folly in coming so far into futurity without weapons or equipment. I resolved to run on for one glimpse of the still remoter future—one peep into the deeper abysm of time—and then to return to you and my own epoch.

Once more I remounted the machine, and once more the world grew hazy and grey.





The Martian drug and Wilmer's elastic libido were all right in themselves. But when they combined they produced an intolerable odor.

by MARGARET ST. CLAIR

DENTAUTASEN has a rather dubious reputation even in Martian psycho-pharmacology. Conservative medical opinion frowns on its use except in the desperate cases, for people who already feel so bad that any change one can produce in them is an improvement. The drug's action is drastic and unpredictable. But, Mars being Mars, there are no restrictions on its exportation from the planet. And the short-sighted skullduggery Mars runs to has been known

to result in its being substituted for senta beans, which it somewhat resembles.

It was the irony of fate, perhaps, that Wilmer Bellows, who was loaded to the gills with psychiatric drugs already, should have bought a bottle of it thinking it was a simple cathartic.

Wilmer's psycho-therapist was on vacation, or Wilmer would have asked him about the syrup before taking it. As it was, Wilmer swallowed a tablespoonful of the syrup, took four neuroquel tablets and a deutapromazine capsule, and got into bed. He got out again immediately. He had forgotten to practice libidinal investment with his machine.

The therapist had diagnosed Wilmer's difficulty, which he referred to as "depersonalization", as proceeding from Wilmer's lack of libidinal investment in Wilmer's own self. What Wilmer experienced was a feeling of being entirely detached from his person and personality.

His ego seemed to hover impersonally over his body and watch it, clockwork-wise, going through its daily tricks; he would look at his hand and wonder whose hand it was, or speculate numbly as to who the person was who sat in Wilmer's chair. It was a horrid feeling, though only intermittent, and Wilmer had spent a lot of time and money trying to get rid of it. He had not had much success.

The machine for practicing libidinal investment was something like a stroboscope. Discs rotated, slots shot in and out across them, lights flashed. Wilmer looked in at the eyehole and tried to feel libidinally involved with himself.

After fifteen minutes of eyestrain, he was ready for bed. He got between the sheets. The neuroquel and the deutapromazine made him sleepy; the dentautasen opposed their action. Wilmer felt feverish. When he got to sleep, he dreamed about Dr. Adams, his therapist.

He woke, however, feeling much better. He had none of the hideous moments of depersonalization while he was shaving, his breakfast tasted pretty good. He decided he would visit the city aquarium after breakfast. Looking at marine life was one of the few things he enjoyed.

It was a fine sunny day. He *did* feel better. Maybe the therapy was beginning to help at last. He walked toward the aquarium feeling positively benevolent toward life. It wasn't such a bad world, after all—if only they'd put muzzles on those god-damned big snakes on the street corners.

Snakes? Wilmer stopped walking so suddenly that the man behind him bumped into him. What was the matter with him? Was he going psycho? And yet for a mo-

ment he'd had the definite impression that big snakes had been gliding effortlessly along the curbing. He hadn't been particularly afraid of them.

He was sweating. He looked about himself wildly. For a moment his ego seemed to hover bee-like in the air above him—above the little girl with the pink parasol, above the brown paper parcel the brisk old lady was carrying, above the wide furry dog who was irrigating a lamp post. He was all of them, he was none of them. Who was he?

His eye fell on a manure bun in the street, relic of one of the horse-drawn carriages that were currently fashionable. No. No. Not it. He wasn't, he wouldn't. He recalled himself into his body desperately. He was Wilmer Bellows, that's who he was. Wilmer Bellows. He made the rest of the distance to the aquarium almost at a run.

The echoing, wet-smelling building soothed him. Early as it was, there were quite a few people looking into the greenish light of the cases, and that soothed him too.

He looked at a case with sea horses, sea stars, and a lobster. He looked at a case with sea roses and sea anemones. He looked at a case with a flat fish and two ugly, poisonous Scorpaena. He looked at a case wi—

Suddenly the hovering depersonalization descended on him crashingly. Descended? No, he was being sucked up into it. He was being drawn up a varnished staircase into a hideous vacuum, a spiral of emptiness.

He had to stop somewhere, he couldn't go on. The little girl, the parcel, the dog, the manure bun? He must be one of them, he must be somebody, he—

His eyes were fixed wildly on the glass of the tank before him. His hand had gone to the knot of his tie. He didn't know who he was any longer, but he was aware of sweat pouring down his back. If he had had enough ego left for prayer, he would have prayed.

Lib—invest—if he could lov—There was a sort of click and a feeling of pressure released in his ears.

He drew a long, shaky breath. A weak smile of gratitude spread over his face. He knew who he was at last, at last he loved himself. It was the squid in the tank before him. He loved the squid. Because he *was* the squid.

The green water slid over his back. He sucked in deliciously salty water, pushed it on out, and jetted backward silkily. A frond of tentacles moved to his beak and then away again. He jetted backward exuberantly once more.

How much of his new sensations was hallucinatory and how much was a genuine empathy can-

not be decided. The action of dentautasen is very obscure. Wilmer, at any rate, was happy. He had never felt this good before.

He hung over the tank lovingly. Though he felt that he *was* the squid, some physical limitations remained. He could feel identified with it only when he could see it. He knew intuitively that he would feel depersonalized again when he was no longer near his "self".

The keeper fed him around four. The food was delicious; he was angry at the keeper, though, because he was so stingy with it.

The aquarium closed at five-thirty. Wilmer left reluctantly, with many a backward glance. On the way home he realized that somebody, probably a sort of Wilmer, was hungry. He stopped at a hash house on the corner and had two bowls of clam chowder. As he spooned it up, he wondered whether enough fresh water was coming into his tank.

When he got back to his apartment, he stood for a long time in the middle of the living room, thinking. Of water, of the taste of salt, of sun. At last he roused himself to undress. In the bathroom he took his usual assortment of psychiatric drugs. And the syrup of senta beans.

He woke about two in the morning, feeling utterly miserable. His head hurt, his throat ached, the air in the room was hot and dry. Worst of all was his longing for his absent person. He knew now who he was—Wilmer Bellows, who was a squid in a tank at the municipal aquarium. He wanted to get back to himself.

He started to dress. Then he checked himself. He couldn't possibly get into the aquarium building at this hour. If he tried, he'd only set off a burglar alarm. But he wouldn't go through another night like this one. Tomorrow he'd hide in the aquarium when it came closing time.

He sluiced his face and neck with water, and lay down on the chesterfield in the living room. He turned and twitched until daybreak. Then he took a long cold shower. For breakfast, he unzipped a plastic package of sardines.

Once he was back in the aquarium, his malaise disappeared. He seemed in fine shape, with his tank properly aerated and plenty of clean salt water bubbling in. Glub-glub. Life was good.

As the day progressed, Wilmer began to fear that he had attracted the attention of the guard. He'd tried to stay away from his tank, but it hadn't been easy, when he was so deeply attracted to himself. All the same, he managed to hide at closing time, dodging adroitly from the visiphone booth to the men's room and back to another visi booth,

and when the building was quiet, he came tiptoeing out again.

He shone his flashlight on himself. Yes, he was fine. Well, now. They might have a little snack.

He would have liked to feed him some fish meal, but he was afraid that if he went into the passages behind the tanks he'd get caught. He had to settle for some seaweed crackers and a thermos of clam broth. He didn't know when he'd enjoyed a feed so much.

The night wore on. Wilmer grew sleepy. He leaned up against the glass of his tank in drowsy contentment, dreaming softly of rock pools and gentle tides. When the nightwatchman made his third round, at one-fifteen, Wilmer was asleep on his feet.

The watchman saw him, of course. He hesitated. He was a big man, and Wilmer was slight; he could probably have overpowered him easily. On the other hand, an aquarium is a poor place for a scuffle. And something in the pose of the man by the squid tank alarmed the watchman. It didn't seem natural.

The watchman went to his office and vizzed the cops. He added that he thought it would be a good idea if they brought a doctor along.

Wilmer awoke from his dreams of pelagic bliss to find himself impaled on the beams of three flashlights. Before he had time to get alarmed and jet backward, the fourth man stepped forward and spoke.

"My name is Dr. Roebuck," he said in a deep, therapeutic voice. "I assume that you have some good reason for being where you are now. Perhaps you would like to share that reason with me."

Wilmer's hesitation was brief. Years of psychotherapy had accustomed him to unburdening himself to the medical profession. "Come over by the sea horses," he said. "I don't want the others to hear."

Briefly—since his throat was sore—he explained the situation to Dr. Roebuck. "So now I'm a squid," he ended.

"Um." Dr. Roebuck rubbed his nose. He had had some psychiatric training, and Wilmer did not seem particularly crazy to him. Besides, he was aware that a patient who is aggressive, anxious, and disoriented may actually be in better psychological shape than a person who is quiet and cooperative. Wilmer wasn't anxious or aggressive, but he was certainly disoriented.

"When's your doctor coming back?" he asked.

"Week from next Friday."

"Well, we might wait until then. You can't stay here, though. Could you afford a few days in a nursing home?"

Wilmer made a sort of gobbling noise.

"What's the matter?" asked Roebuck.

"Don't know. Air's dry. Throat hurts."

"Let me look at it."

With one of the cops' flashlights, Roebuck examined Wilmer's throat. "Good lord," he said after a moment. "Good lord."

"Matter?"

"Why, you've got—" it had been a long time since Roebuck had taken his course in comparative anatomy. Still, there was no mistaking it. "Why, man, you've got gills!"

"Have?" Wilmer asked uncertainly.

"Yes. Well, I don't suppose that makes much difference. Can you afford a nursing home?"

"Got 'nuff money. Can't go."

"Why not?"

"Live *here*. In tank."

"Nonsense," answered Roebuck, who could be stern on occasion. "You can't stay here."

" . . . not?"

"Because it would annoy the other fish."

Against the cogency of this argument, Wilmer was helpless. He submitted to being led out to the police 'copter and flown to the Restwell Nursing Home. Roebuck saw him into a bathtub of salty water, and promised to come back next day.

Wilmer was still in the bath next morning.

"Where am I?" he asked as Roebuck came in.

"Why, in the Restwell Nursing Home." Roebuck sat down on the corner of the tub.

"No, no. Where am I?"

"Oh. Still in a tank at the Municipal Aquarium, I suppose."

"I want back."

"Impossible."

Wilmer began to weep. As he wept, he kept ducking his neck under the water to hydrate his gills.

"Let me look at those gills," said Roebuck, after the third duck. "H'um. They're more prominent than they were."

". . . I want my squid."

"You can't have it. I'm sorry. You'll just have to put up with this until Dr. Adams gets back."

"So long to wait," said Wilmer wistfully. "Want squid."

He continued to ask for his squid on Roebuck's next two visits, but on the fourth day the doctor found him sitting up in a chair, wearing a faded pink bathrobe.

"Out of the water, I see," said Roebuck. "How are you feeling today?"

"Okay," Wilmer answered in a high-pitched, listless voice. "Joints hurt, though." There was the hint of a lisp in his speech.

"Joints? Could be caused by staying in the water so long.

"Move over by the light. . . . You know, this is most unusual.

Your gills seem to be going away." Roebuck frowned.

"Gillth?" Wilmer giggled. "What are you talking about, you funny man? Jointh hurt. And boneth. Fix it, Mither Man."

Roebuck frowned a little longer. Then, on a hunch, he ordered a series of skeletal x-rays. They showed an unusually large amount of cartilage for an adult skeleton, and a pelvis that was definitely gynecoid.

Roebuck was astonished. He knew how powerful psychosomatic effects can be; he would not have found it inconceivable that Wilmer's libidinal identification with the squid would finally have resulted in Wilmer's becoming completely aquaticized. But now the man's gills were atrophying, and his skeleton was becoming that of an immature female! It wasn't reasonable. Some remarkable psychic changes must be taking place.

What was happening, of course, was that Wilmer's libidio, balked of its primary object, the squid, was ranging back over the other objects it had almost identified with, trying to find a stable one. It was an unconscious process, and Wilmer couldn't have told Roebuck about it even if the doctor had asked him. Roebuck didn't ask him.

On Roebuck's next visit, Wilmer wasn't talking at all. His skin had become a flat, lusterless tan, and he crunkled when he moved. That phase lasted for two days, and then Wilmer took to standing on one leg and barking. The barking phase was succeeded by . . .

The trouble with these surrogate libidinal identifications, as Wilmer realized on a sub-sub-unconscious plane, was that each of the objects had existed in relation to somebody else. The little girl had had her mama and her pink parasol. The furry dog had had its owner and the lamp post. Even the brown paper parcel had been carried by the old lady. But the manure bun—

Only the manure bun had been orbed, isolated, alone, splendidly itself.

On the day of Roebuck's final visit, the day before Adams was due back, Wilmer did not bark or crunkle or lisp. He merely sat in the armchair, spread-out, shiny and corpulent, exhaling a faintly ammoniacal smell that Roebuck, who had had a city boyhood, could not identify.

Early next morning Roebuck got Adams on the visiphone. They had a long conversation about Wilmer. Both of them were a little on the defensive about the way the case had turned out. Adams called at the Restwell Home, but he couldn't get Wilmer to speak to him. The psycho-therapist was just as much baffled by the symptomatology as Roebuck was.

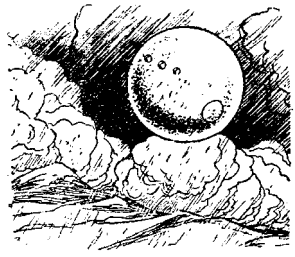
Wilmer stayed on at the nursing home for a few days, both doctors watching him. There were no more changes. He had reached his nadir, his point of no return. There is nothing ahead for a man who has made a libidinal identification with a manure bun. Absolutely nothing.

When it became plain that nothing more was going to happen, he was removed to a state institution. He is still there. He still just sits, spread-out, shiny and corpulent, giving off an obsolete smell.

Whether he is happy or not is a question for philosophers. On the one hand, he has invested his libido in a thoroughly unworthy object. On the other hand, he has unquestionably invested it in *something*.

After Wilmer's commitment, his apartment was cleaned out and redecorated. The building superintendent was a frugal-minded woman who disliked wasting things. She latched on to the bottle of Syrup of Senta Beans.

She took the syrup for a couple of nights and then, since she couldn't see it had any effect, threw the bottle into the garbage reducer. She does not connect the "grand old Martian remedy" with the disembodied voices she has begun to hear.



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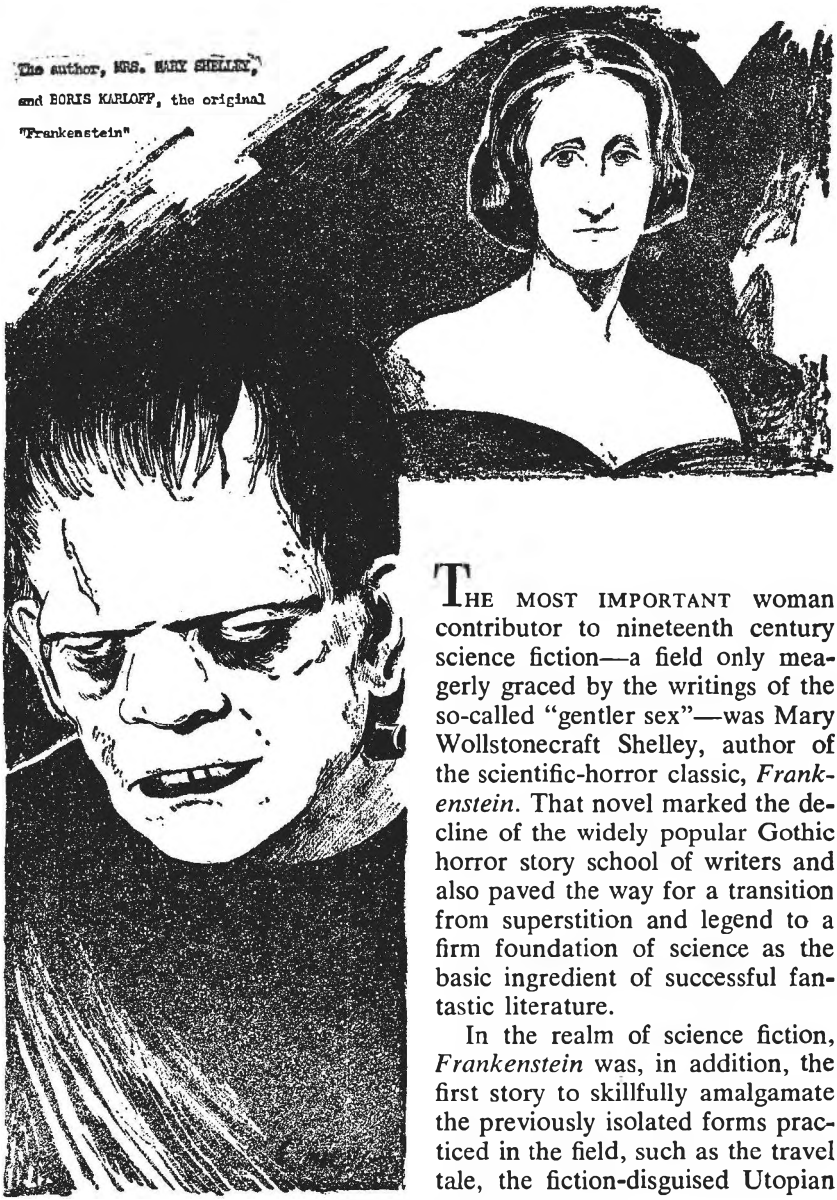


The author, MRS. MARY SHELLEY, and BORIS KARLOFF, the original "Frankenstein"

THE MOST IMPORTANT woman contributor to nineteenth century science fiction—a field only meagerly graced by the writings of the so-called "gentler sex"—was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, author of the scientific-horror classic, *Frankenstein*. That novel marked the decline of the widely popular Gothic horror story school of writers and also paved the way for a transition from superstition and legend to a firm foundation of science as the basic ingredient of successful fantastic literature.

In the realm of science fiction, *Frankenstein* was, in addition, the first story to skillfully amalgamate the previously isolated forms practiced in the field, such as the travel tale, the fiction-disguised Utopian

THE SONS OF *Frankenstein*

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

An entertaining discussion of a first novel by a great poet's gifted young bride . . . a science fiction classic which has chilled more readers than "Dracula," or "The Fall of the House of Usher."

prophecy, and the almost factual science story, thus influencing a chain of distinguished authors from Edgar Allan Poe, to Nathaniel Hawthorne, to Fitz-James O'Brien, to Jules Verne to Ambrose Bierce and so on to the greatest science fiction writer of them all, H. G. Wells, and through Wells the whole vast field of modern science fiction which we enjoy today.

The earliest approach to science fiction was the Travel Tale, and in that particular realm Homer's *Odyssey* has never been surpassed. In an era when the "entire world" was thought to be geographically confined to the Mediterranean basin, and when all that was known of the stars had been fitted neatly into the fabrications of Greek mythology, a pack donkey or a sailing ship was every bit as good a device as a space ship for locating strange and bizarre civilizations and boldly seeking out fantastic adventures on the rim of the world.

Authors took full advantage of the microscopic knowledge of the

Earth's surface and the miniscule scientific information of the period to send their fancies roving at will. The ancient authors and titles of dozens of scroll-inscribed adventures are known, even today, and there is no telling how many more may have been erased by the slow passage of time.

Nearly as old as the Travel Tale is the still very much alive, creatively imaginative form of science fiction known as the Future Utopia. Such stories were usually pure fabrications, carefully voicing the author's discontent with the state of the world in which he found himself, and taking the reader on a tour of an ideally constructed civilization closer to his heart's desire.

Some of these stories were exceedingly satiric in tone and though they often incorporated elements of the Travel Tale, were differentiated sharply by the fact that intellectual concepts, rather than a desire to entertain, dominated the thinking of almost all Utopian-minded writers. Outstanding Utopias are *The Republic* and *Critias* by Plato, *Utopia* by Thomas More, *The New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon and *Oceana* by James Harrington.

The third major category, in which an extrapolation upon the physical sciences and the social sciences is very much in evidence, was the last type to arrive on the scene. Previous to 1800, science stories received scant attention, the two major examples of fiction stressing scientific theory being *Somnium: or the Astronomy of the Moon* by Johannes Kepler, first published in 1634 and *Voyage to the Moon* by Cyrano de Bergerac, first published in 1657.

The old Travel Tale was primarily looked upon as a literature of escape. The prophetic Utopia was a literature of political and social reform through philosophical as well as material change, and the science story was a kind of experiment in public education through sugar-coated science on a fireside journal plane. Before Mary Shelley, these three forms tended to be very sharply differentiated. *Frankenstein* proved that it was possible to blend and enrich them with a single compelling purpose in mind—to turn out a work of fiction that was entertaining as well as thought-provoking.

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus was first published in three volumes by Lackington, Huges, Harding, Mayor & Jones; Finsbury Square, London, on March 11, 1818. At the time the novel appeared, Mary Shelley was twenty, but she began writing the story sometime during May, 1816, when she was only eighteen.

The work was an instant sensation. Though horrified by its subject matter, the critical journals of the day unanimously lauded the excellence of its writing and

the forthrightness of its execution. THE EDINBURGH MAGAZINE AND LITERARY MISCELLANY for March, 1818, said in part: "There never was a wilder story imagined; yet, like most of the fiction of this age, it has an air of reality attached to it, by being connected to the favorite projects and passions of the times."

BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE for March, 1818, said: "Upon the whole, the work impresses us with the high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression. We shall be delighted to hear that he had aspired to *paullo majora;* and in the meantime, congratulate our readers upon a novel which excites new reflections and untried sources of emotion."

Published anonymously, the work was universally believed to be that of a man, the most informed guesses attributing it to Percy Bysshe Shelley, probably because he had written an introduction to the volume. The appearance of a second novel by Mary Shelley in 1823, a non-fantasy titled *Valperga,* helped to dispel these misconceptions. In BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE for March, 1823, a reviewer confessed: *"Frankenstein,* at the time of its appearance, we certainly did not suspect to be the work of a female hand. The name of Shelley was whispered, and we did not hesitate to attribute the book to *Mr.* Shelley himself. Soon, however, we were set right. We learned that *Frankenstein* was written by *Mrs.* Shelley; and then we most undoubtedly said to ourselves, 'For a man it was excellent, but for a woman it was wonderful.' "

What sort of upbringing could inspire a teen-age girl to write a novel that even today is generally regarded as the single greatest novel in the horror story tradition ever written? Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life is even more fantastic than her monstrous creation. Born August 30, 1797 at the Polygon, Somers Town, England, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died only ten days after her birth. Her father, William Godwin, has been referred to as a second-rate Samuel Johnson with proper table manners. In his day he was widely heralded as the head of a movement of free thinkers.

Though trained for the clergy he believed firmly in free love, atheism and anarchy. He believed that the proper use of logic and reason could solve all of man's problems. He was opposed to the intrusion of emotions into the fabric of the orderly life, and denounced the age's obsession with selfish materialism and accumulation of wealth.

The works which established Godwin's reputation were *The Inquiry Concerning Political Justice,* published in 1793, and *Things As They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams,* which first ap-

peared in 1794. *Things As They Are* was fiction and of the Gothic school for all of its directness of writing, even though it carried a pronounced social message. It was Godwin's intent to expose the abuses that can arise from concentration of too much power in the hands of a few and the ordeals encountered by Caleb Williams, persecuted by a wealthy man against whom he has gained evidence of murder, forthrightly and savagely illustrates that point.

In most of his thinking, Godwin was an uncompromising critic of things as they were. He also wrote a novel of science-fantasy entitled *St. Leon, A Tale of the 16th Century,* which appeared in 1799. This novel is a fable of immortality, wherein the lead character, St. Leon, brews and drinks an elixir of life and wanders, deathless, throughout the world, inadvertently bringing sorrow and tribulation to everyone he encounters.

The theme, derived from the legend of The Wandering Jew, was hoary with age even when Godwin wrote it, but introducing an alchemical means rather than a supernatural one of extending life was new to the Gothic tale and a harbinger of the definite break that his daughter, Mary, was to make with the Gothic tradition in her novel *Frankenstein.* Critics generally credit this work with specifically influencing the writing of three famous Gothic novels: *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Robert Maturin; *St. Irvynne* by Percy Bysshe Shelley and *Strange Story* by Lord Bulwer Lytton.

Mary's mother had been every bit as determined a free thinker as her husband. Having lived for several years as the mistress of an American named Gilbert Imlay, she eventually found herself cast off with an illegitimate child. She met Godwin in 1796 and married him in March, 1797. They kept their marriage a secret for years, fearing ridicule as hypocrites.

Mrs. Godwin was also a prominent author in her own right. Before her marriage she had published a pamphlet entitled *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters,* a novel called *Mary* and an illustrated edition of *Original Stories from Real Life.* She became most renowned for her book *The Rights of Women.* The title is self-explanatory.

Through the fame of her father, the young girl met many literary figures who visited the household, not the least of whom was Charles Lamb and most important, the great poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was first introduced to Mary on May 5, 1814. Shelley, though only twenty-two at the time, was already famous, as having established a reputation for poetry that was described as the essence of sweetness, beauty and spirituality. A youthful atheist, he shared many of Godwin's views.

Though still married to his first wife, Harriet Westbrook, Shelley induced Mary to run off with him on July 28, 1814, accompanied by her liberal-minded half-sister, Claire.

After Shelley's wife committed suicide—she had been offered a domestic position with her husband and his mistress—the union with Mary was legalized and the stage was set for the writing of *Frankenstein.* This came about through the close friendship of Shelley with Lord Byron.

Since the three were prone to read ghost stories to one another, together with a friend of Byron's, an Italian physician named John William Polidari, it was decided to have a contest in which Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and John William Polidari would compete to see who could write the most paralyzing novel of horror.

All but Mary Shelley proceeded to begin work on their novels. Both Percy Shelley and Lord Byron lost interest before going too far and the fragment that Byron completed was tacked on to the end of his poem, *Mazeppa.* Doctor Polidari doggedly kept at it and eventually finished a novel about a female "Peeping Tom" who was punished for what she saw by being consigned to a tomb in Capulet. This novel was published and enjoyed a small sale because of the public's impression that it was written by Lord Byron.

Mary Shelley, for days could not even think of an idea. Finally, after listening in on a philosophical discussion between her husband and Lord Byron regarding the nature of life, she experienced a vivid dream in which she saw a scientific student create artificial life in a laboratory. She realized she had her story and proceeded to write it.

The theme of the story is by now almost universally familiar. A young scientist, Victor Frankenstein, pieces together a human-like creature from parts obtained from slaughterhouses and graveyards and infuses it with life through scientific means. When he sees his monstrous creation begin to move, he becomes frightened by his accomplishment and flees.

The monster wanders away, eventually is embittered by the fear and persecution he is subjected to because of his appearance and finally searches out the young Frankenstein from whom he exacts a promise to make a female companion for him. The monster promises he will then go with her to some far-off place, forever beyond the sight of man.

Nearing success in creating a female, Frankenstein is filled with doubts as to the wisdom of his project, and wrestles with his conscience: *"But now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to*

think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps of the existence of the whole human race."

Frankenstein compulsively destroys the uncompleted body of the female he has been constructing. The monster, who observes this action, waits his chance for revenge, which he obtains by murdering Frankenstein's fiancée on her wedding night. Goaded by sorrow, Frankenstein dedicates his life to searching out and destroying the monster. But after years of chasing a seeming phantom, Frankenstein dies aboard the cabin of a ship in the far north, without fulfilling his purpose.

The monster enters the cabin through a window and, when confronted by a friend of Frankenstein's, expresses supreme remorse at the tragedy he has brought into the life of his creator. When he leaves, he promises to destroy himself, thereby ending his own personal agony as well as fulfilling Frankenstein's desire for vengeance.

This oblivion was purely rhetorical. Frankenstein's monster was destined for immortality. Some 140 years later a number of editions of *Frankenstein* are still in print and PYRAMID BOOKS has recently reissued it as a pocket book. Though the style and writing techniques are dated, the story still retains a grandiose element of horror, as well as many almost poetic passages which sustain its life as a literary work.

Beyond its appeal as a work of literary art in the realm of scientific horror, *Frankenstein* has a visual shock appeal surpassed by few stories, both as a play and moving picture. Five years after its first appearance as a book, *Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein* appeared on the London stage. The play was a smash hit and the same year found two other companies presenting serious versions with another three offering burlesques of the story.

A part of the original success of *Presumption* as a play was attributed to the superior acting ability of T. P. Cooke, an outstanding performer of the early part of the nineteenth century, whose name became synonymous with the role of Frankenstein's monster. At least fifteen versions of Mary Shelley's famous book have been produced as plays in England, France and the United States, two of the versions within the past thirty years.

The moving picture history of the book bids fair to outdo that of the stage in number of versions and far outdistances it as a money making medium. Boris Karloff catapulted to a fame that has far eclipsed that of T. P. Cooke in the role of the monster when the film *Frankenstein* was first released in 1932. Its success was nothing short of fabulous and it was followed by *The Bride of Frankenstein.*

The first two films on the Frankenstein theme were strongly rooted upon incidents in Mary Shelley's book, but the clamor for more film sequels necessitated writing original stories as vehicles and there followed at spasmodic intervals the lesser known sequels, *Son of Frankenstein* and *Ghost of Frankenstein.* As with the play, burlesques began to appear on the screen and we had *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *House of Frankenstein.* There was also the strange takeoff on juvenile delinquency, *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein.*

The Curse of Frankenstein, a recent release, returns to the original story pattern.

Forrest J. Ackerman, possibly the world's leading authority on fantasy films, reports that *Blood of Frankenstein, Frankenstein's Castle, Revenge of Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein 1960* will all appear at neighborhood houses shortly. He also reports that the title, *Frankenstein From Space,* has been registered and that a series of thirty-one television plays entitled *Tales of Frankenstein* has been scheduled.

When Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein,* the high tide of the Gothic novel was already abating and would soon be credited with helping to usher in the romantic period in British literature which was to follow. What Mary Shelley did was salvage the supernormal and horror aspect of that literature, which is best epitomized by Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk,* Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* and perpetuate their thrills by applying the light of scientific rationality, which was already dissolving the mystical superstitions of the masses.

The superiority of her method is attested by the fact that the appeal of the three great landmarks in Gothic fiction mentioned above has faded. Even the fast-moving, sex-charged *Monk* is revived only as a collector's item, whereas the comparatively more dated and slower presentation, *Frankenstein,* is still popularly read.

Mary Shelley, wrote a good many other novels, short stories and non-fiction works, which have been obscured by the fame of *Frankenstein.* Of greatest interest to readers of science fiction is her very long novel, *The Last Man,* which was first published by Colburn in London, in three volumes, during 1826. A similar edition appeared the same year in Paris.

By this time Mary Shelley's life had undergone great change. Her husband, Percy Shelley, drowned in a small boat with several friends on July 8th, 1822. Mary had lost four of five children and now only one son, Percy Florence, survived. Shelley's love had been anything but torrid towards the last and he had been involved in at least one

other blatant affair. Mary, holding tight to the memory of what had been good in her marriage, fanned into enduring constancy the flame of her love for Percy Bysshe as a beacon to his memory.

She never remarried, though other worthy suitors desired her, including John Howard Payne, who wrote the song "Home Sweet Home." One of the lead characters in her book, *The Last Man,* is unquestionably Percy Bysshe Shelley —another is Lord Byron—and this volume describes many of the European scenes she visited with him.

Biographers have poetically described the wanderings of Verney in *The Last Man* as an allegorical symbol of the twenty-nine years that Mary Shelley was to spend as a lost spirit in a world become a desert, now that her husband was gone. Perhaps this was so. Perhaps as women tend to forget the pain of childbirth they also gloss over the sordid in a romantic attachment.

The action of *The Last Man* begins in the year 2092, when a plague strikes Constantinople. It quickly spreads and a small group of survivors assemble in Paris where they debate trivialities until a recurrence of the invisible death kills all except one man, who wanders down through Italy and finally sets sail in a skiff to scour the coastlines of the Earth for survivors. Though laid in the future, its primary innovation is passenger balloon service.

The Last Man, while it enjoyed a fair sale in a number of countries, was not a good book for Mary's reputation. The critics were hard on it. To a man they condemned its longwinded tediousness, its almost terrifying descriptions of the deadly disease slowly decimating the populations of the earth until only one man, Verney, is left amid a world desolate of humanity and sardonic in the vibrant green of a new spring. Their criticisms degenerated into personal, satiric jibes at Mary Shelley that hurt her reputation so badly that her publisher took on her next novel only after she agreed to a considerably reduced advance.

Yet *The Last Man* is now generally regarded as the second best of her works. While admittedly pedestrian in pace and excessively wordy, it possesses a beauty of phraseology that is often poetic, finely drawn characterization and her relation of the final agonies induced by the plague represents a masterpiece of horror in literature.

This story proves that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley had an abiding interest in concepts which we today label as science fiction. It is true that *The Last Man* theme was old when she wrote it, a particularly popular novel, *The Last Man* or *Omegarus and Syderia: A Romance In Futurity,* having been published by Dutton, London, in

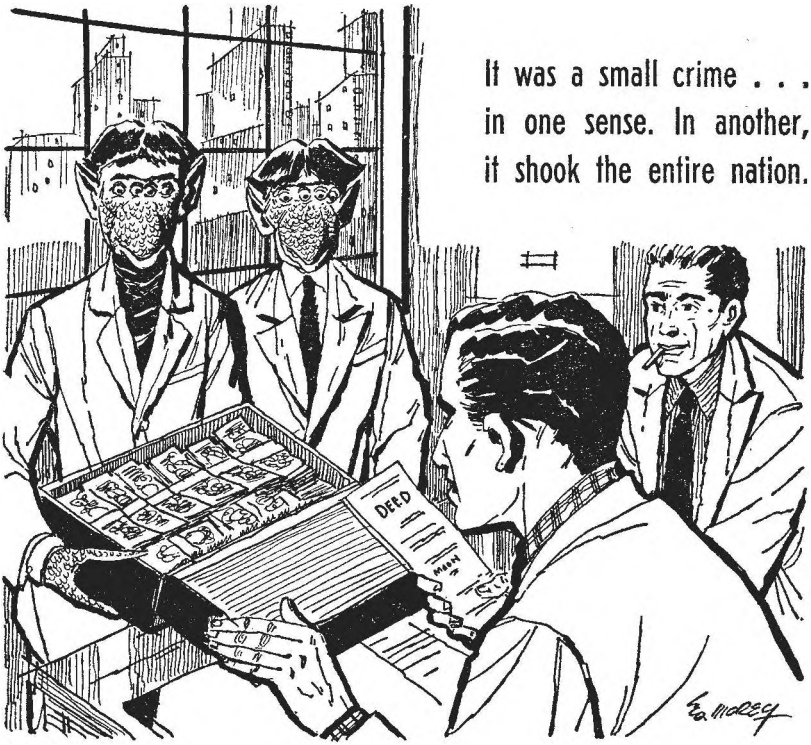
two volumes in 1805, nor is her novel destined to become the classic presentation of the theme. Nevertheless it eliminated the possibility that her youthful venture into science fiction in *Frankenstein* was a mere coincidence.

Mary Shelley also wrote a number of short stories, most of which were collected into a volume called *Tales and Stories,* edited by Richard Garnett and published by William Patterson & Co., London, in 1891. Two of the stories in this book are fantasy. The first of these, *Transformation,* originally published in the annual *Keepsake* for 1831, tells of a young wastrel, who, fleeing from the problems of his excesses, meets, floating into shore atop a sea chest, "a misshapen dwarf with squinting eyes, distorted features and body deformed, till it became a horror to behold." This dwarf, who has supernatural powers, offers to swap the sea chest filled with jewels for the use of the young man's body for a short time.

The young man, after some thought, agrees to the proposal. When the strange creature does not return at the allotted time, the young man, now in the dwarf's grotesque frame, goes searching and finds this creature wooing his girl. Convinced that the dwarf will not keep his promise, he engages himself in combat, is run through, stabs his antagonist in return and awakes to find himself once again in his own body.

The second tale, *The Mortal Immortal,* originally published in the *Keepsake* for 1834, appears to have been inspired by William Godwin's book, *St. Leon,* and deals with an alchemist's helper, who, by chance drinks an elixir of immortality. The problems which he encounters when he later marries and his wife grows old while he remains young are excellently related. At the tale's end, his wife has died and he plans a venture — not revealed—which may cause his death. If the theme had not been done so many, many times since in just the same way and if surprise endings had not come into vogue, this story might be rated, even currently, as above average.

What we know of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley through her letters, is today preserved and read primarily for the light it sheds on her famous husband and only secondarily because she authored the great horror novel *Frankenstein.* Yet, the future students of the history of science fiction may be grateful that, because of this fortuitous circumstance, the motivating factors are apparent in the life of the woman who wrote the novel which truly began an unbroken chain of science fiction development — a chain which produced more prominent literary heirs than the moving pictures are likely to provide sequels to her inspired work, *Frankenstein.*



PETTY LARCENY

by LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

DEAR EDNA,

I'm writing this to tell you things look pretty good, and I'll be back soon, and you can start getting your trousseau ready. Good news, huh baby? I'd like to get married in a hurry and take off on a long honeymoon, for reasons I'll explain. Kind of get things ready, will you? Blackie and I will be holing up for awhile, so I can't

give you a date, and I may have to arrive unexpectedly.

We made a big haul—real big—and we've been pinching ourselves about it ever since. It's had some funny results, though, as you'll know if you've been reading the papers. We might have to lay low in Mexico for a few months after we're married, but I don't think you'll mind when you hear what happened.

We were moving across the country, pulling that old gag where Blackie trips over something in a store and breaks his arm. A lot of these small storekeepers don't carry insurance, and they'll jump at a fast settlement rather than risk a law suit, and we were doing pretty well. So when we came to a little Wisconsin resort town, we decided to take a short vacation and then hit the local storekeeper on our way out.

We checked in at a motel, and had a swim, and then we wandered over to one of the night spots for a beer. This night spot has an outdoor cafe right on the lake, and it was a hot night, and the place was crowded. There wasn't such a thing as a vacant table, and we looked a long time before we saw a table with two vacant chairs. We had to make a run for them, because a lot of other people were standing around, but we made it. We came up behind the fellow that was sitting at this table, and as we moved around him to sit down, I said, "Are these chairs taken?"

He said, "Sssertainly not. Pleassse join me."

Knock me down with a corn plaster, if it wasn't an alien, trilling voice and hissing s's and all. I'd seen plenty of them from a distance—they've been coming in quantities lately, you know—but I'd never had a chance to talk with one. Blackie and I leaned back and looked him over, and he didn't seem to mind in the least. In fact, he was staring just as hard at us.

I think it wouldn't be so bad if only they didn't think they had to look *human*. Even a classy tailored suit tends to look sloppy when you order it five sizes too large and conceal an extra pair of arms under it. The wigs help, of course—they keep the illusion going if you look at one from behind—but from the front they're just hopeless. I've heard that some of them wear false noses. This one didn't, so there was just the row of eyes across where the forehead should have been, and the beak down around the chin, and everything in between just scaly blankness.

I told myself we looked just as odd to him, and after a few drinks we got used to each other. So that's how Blackie and I came to be making small talk with an alien.

It started out as a cloudy night,

but the sky cleared up, after a time, and the moon came out, and made a right pretty reflection in the lake. I won't pretend I was thinking of you, though, with that alien sitting there beside me. I don't think you would have liked that.

The moon was only half there, of course, and the alien stared at it for awhile, and finally he said, "It isss an odd ssshape."

"I suppose you have five moons going around your planet," Blackie said.

"No," he said. "We have none. The phenomena isss entirely new to me." He sat looking kind of vacantly at the heavens, and the moon in particular. "Hasss it alwaysss had that odd ssshape?"

Blackie winked at me. "Oh, no," he said. "That's only since they started selling it. You can just see the part that's left." Blackie always has business on his mind. "Care to make a small investment?" he said.

"In the moon? Isss it expensssive?"

"Not very. How large a slice would you like?"

The alien looked at Blackie, and then at me. I managed to keep my face straight.

"I will have to dissscussssss thisss with my brother," he said. All the aliens call each other brother, you know.

"Do that," Blackie said. "Where can I get in touch with you?"

"In touch? You refer to—we ressside at the Balmy Beach Resssort."

"I'll give you a call in the morning from our Madison office," Blackie said. "Who do I ask for?"

"The name isss Sssim."

We introduced ourselves—not our right names, of course—and the alien bowed like an opera tenor, and walked away—if the way they scoot around could be called walking.

"Sim for simple," Blackie said.

"You don't honestly think you're going to sell him real estate on the moon," I said. "He isn't that simple."

Blackie grinned. "I read an article about the aliens by some doctor, or psychoanalyst, or some such thing. He says they discovered space travel by accident, and they're really a race of morons. They're so stupid, in fact, that no one can figure how they manage to fly those ships."

"But you notice that they do fly them," I said. "And why would they buy part of the moon from us? They can get up there and take it, any old time, and we can't get near it."

"Sim for simple," Blackie said. "All it costs us is a trip to Madison and a phone call. And you'll notice he was too stupid to know anything about the phases of the moon."

When he put it that way, I couldn't very well put up a kick.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, and all that sort of thing. We drove down to Madison in the morning, and bought ourselves an option on the rent of an office with a five buck deposit, and then Blackie called the alien. He came out of the phone booth grinning.

"He's interested," he said. "He'll be at our office at ten tomorrow morning. Now we got work to do."

We put in a busy day. We got a sign painter to paint SURPLUS PROPERTY DISPOSAL UNIT NO. 437 on the door of the office. We rented some office furniture, hired ourselves a secretary on a day-to-day basis, and Blackie went out for a long conference with a not-too-reputable printer. He had a lot of junk printed up—phony deeds, and purchase agreements, and receipts, and the like. Blackie has a flair for that sort of thing.

He sent me out to get some maps of the moon. Believe me, I had a time. That isn't the sort of thing you pick up at the corner filling station. I finally got the library to make me some enlarged photographs of pictures.

By evening things were pretty well organized, and the next morning the aliens arrived right on schedule and the secretary showed them into the inner office. You could see by the expression on her face she was wondering what the hell was going on. And by the way, she was a tough old dame about fifty, so you got no cause to be jealous.

The aliens had a couple of things bothering them. During the night they'd taken a run up to the moon to look the property over, and they were kind of upset to find that the whole moon was there. Sim had thought that people were buying chunks and toting them away, which would account for the odd shape he'd seen from Earth. Blackie soothed everything over by telling them we were just lighting up the part that hadn't been sold yet, but that led to a new complication. They didn't want to buy just part of the moon. They wanted the whole thing.

That was possible, Blackie told them. But of course it would be necessary to buy back the parts that had already been sold, which might be expensive. Sim said, in effect, hang the expense. They wanted the whole moon. Very well, Blackie said. If they would be back at one o'clock with the cash, he'd see what could be done. The price? I won't mention it, baby, except to say that when Blackie started quoting figures I nearly passed out.

We exchanged bows, and the aliens left.

"We can't get away with this," I told Blackie. "It's too much money. They'll raise hell when they find they've been took."

"Nuts," Blackie said. "They've

made a fortune with those rare metals they've been peddling here on Earth. This much money is just petty larceny to them. They can afford to laugh it off. It'll be a good, cheap education for them."

Sure enough, the aliens were back at one o'clock, and Blackie sold them the moon. All of it. He passed over a fistful of impressive-looking papers, and they passed over a suitcase full of money. Blackie made their deed effective at midnight on the sixteenth, which gave us three days to make a sudden disappearance.

We congratulated them on their purchase, and they thanked us for our courteous service, and Blackie got out a bottle and we drank toasts to each other. I sat there with my hands sweating waiting for them to go, and they didn't seem to be in any hurry at all.

"What doesss thisss mean," Sim said finally, "Sssurplusss Property Disspossal Unit."

I could see Blackie's eyes light up. "Just what it says," he told him. "We dispose of all kinds of property. Could we interest you in anything else?"

"Yesss, it isss quite possssible that we might like sssomething elssse."

Blackie sat there behind the desk, drawing dollar signs on a pad of paper, and the aliens waited for him to say something. I was too nervous to open my mouth, from wondering what the aliens might be thinking. Those faces of theirs are just about the ultimate in dead-pans.

"I'm afraid the property is pretty well scattered," Blackie said. "It would take a great deal of time to show it to you."

"Not at all," Sim said, once he understood what Blackie meant. "We would be glad to furnisssh the transsportasssion."

Which is how Blackie and I got a ride in one of their space ships. I won't brag about it. I was sick from the minute we took off. It didn't affect Blackie. He was all over the thing, but he said afterwards that he couldn't make head nor tail of it.

Anyway, we went along with them, with Blackie keeping that suitcase clamped under one arm. Our first stop was New York, and Blackie started things off by selling them the Brooklyn Bridge.

It took some selling. They had a tough time understanding just what the thing was for, and after that, I suppose, figuring out what good it might be to them. They stalked along the bridge, looking it over, and a police patrol car stopped to see what was up, and since the official policy is to be friendly to aliens, the police cooperated by keeping the crowds back, which lent an official atmosphere to our expedition.

They finally got it across to us that it was the river that bothered them. I thought at the time that

they were afraid the river would dry up and make the bridge worthless. Right now I don't know what they thought. Blackie solved the problem in a hurry by adding ten grand to the purchase price, and throwing in the East River, and they snapped it up. They also bought the Empire State Building, and then we went down to Washington and sold the Washington Monument. Blackie tried to interest them in the Capitol Building, but they wouldn't have any part of that.

We were tempted, by then, to take them around the world and dispose of Buckingham Palace, and the Eiffel Tower, and the Taj Mahal, and a lot of other famous things, but I said nix, and Blackie agreed with me. What we had already sold added up to enough money to last us the rest of our lives, and if we sold them too much stuff it might get the thing out of the petty larceny class and cause a lot of trouble.

So we told them it was getting late, and we'd show them some more stuff in the morning. Back to Madison we went. It was late evening, by then, and we went up to the office, and Blackie gave them another stack of official-looking papers, and they gave us two more suitcases full of money.

And the aliens were all set to take legal possession of the moon, and Brooklyn Bridge along with the East River, and the Empire State Building, and Washington Monument at midnight of the sixteenth, Eastern Standard Time. Or so they thought.

"It hasss indeed been a pleasssure," Sim said.

"The pleasure was all ours," Blackie told him.

We had another drink together, and another series of bows, and they left promising to be back promptly at ten A.M. for another shopping tour. We left right after them, leaving a bonus for the secretary and instructions to get rid of the aliens and close down the office. We headed straight west, sold our car in Minneapolis and bought another one, and on the sixteenth—yesterday—we were holed up here in Colorado.

I still couldn't figure out how the aliens could be so stupid, but Blackie said they were just morons, and they didn't even know how to fly their space ships, since they'd taken us to New York by way of Mexico City. I said the important thing was that they'd gotten us there, and in nothing flat, too, and we let the matter rest.

We were just getting up this morning when we got the news on the eight o'clock newscast, how Brooklyn Bridge, and the Empire State Building, and the Washington Monument all disappeared last night between midnight and one A.M. The people who were around those things had some odd

stories to tell, and I don't quite understand how the aliens managed it. People using the bridge got off, and those wanting to use it couldn't get on, and then—presto, the bridge was gone.

Same thing about the buildings. We didn't hear anything about the East River, so I guess it's still there. Maybe that was a little too much for the aliens, or maybe they were satisfied with the water that was under the bridge. Or maybe they're coming back for it later.

We didn't hear anything about the moon, either. It was cloudy around here, last night, but you'd think it wasn't cloudy everywhere, and if the moon was gone someone would miss it. That's been kind of bothering us. I think maybe the aliens found the bridge, and the Empire State Building, and the Washington Monument enough work for one night, and they let the moon go until later. We'd like to know, but we figure it would be too dangerous to start calling the papers and the observatories to ask if the moon is still there.

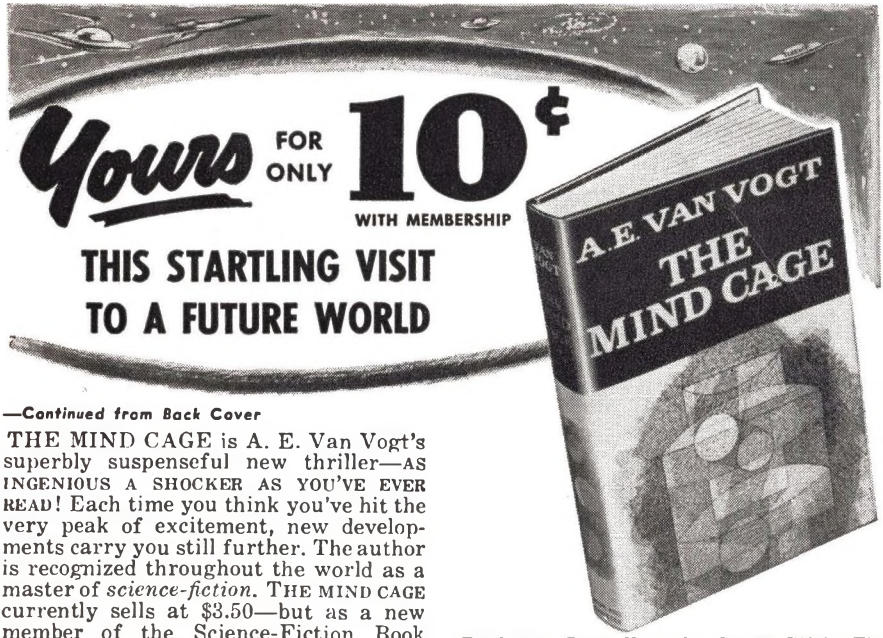
Right now it's only four in the afternoon, but Blackie is already standing outside waiting, for the moon to come up. I kind of think he'll be disappointed.

Sooner or later someone is bound to blame the aliens about this, so I hope you won't mind a few months in Mexico. And we might even have to go on to Brazil.

But you can blow the works on that trousseau, baby, and I'll be seeing you.

Loads of Love,

Spike



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