

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

SCIENCE FICTION BY TOP WRITERS

FEATURING
NAME YOUR PLEASURE
A Novel of Hedonism
by JAMES E. GUNN

WINTER 25c



STORIES BY
ISAAC ASIMOV
MARGARET ST. CLAIR
ROBERT CRANE
WINSTON MARKS

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Amazing New Way TO A Slimmer Figure

REDUCE WITH DELICIOUS KELPIDINE CANDY PLAN!

"WE GUARANTEE YOU WILL LOSE UP TO 5 POUNDS IN 5 DAYS* 10 POUNDS IN 10 DAYS* 15 POUNDS IN 15 DAYS* 25 POUNDS IN 25 DAYS* AND KEEP IT OFF!"

*How Fast You Lose Weight Depends Upon How Quickly You Order and How Much You Are Overweight

**You Will Always Want to Keep on Eating Kelpidine Candy—and Keep on the Plan—it KEEPS Weight Off!

THIS CANDY MUST TASTE AS GOOD AS OR BETTER THAN YOUR FAVORITE CANDY OR YOUR MONEY BACK!

take off up to 10 pounds of excess weight in 10 days. (2) to taste better or as good as your favorite candy and to be the best plan you really want, or you get your money back.

Now at last science has discovered a new delightfully thrilling way to take off fat—to lose up to 25 lbs. safely! The secret is that Kelpidine Candy satisfies your craving for high calorie foods! It keeps you from overeating—the reason most doctors give for being fat! It's the best aid it will power, cut your craving for food!



NO DANGEROUS DRUGS! NO HARSH DIETS!

Here is thrilling news for fat folks! You can lose up to 25 lbs. in 25 days by simply nibbling on tasty appetite satisfying candy, whenever you are tempted to overeat.

YOUR MONEY BACK IF YOU DON'T REDUCE TO THE WEIGHT THAT MOST BECOMES YOU!

Thousands of people were amazed to find that this delicious candy plan actually takes off weight—without dangerous drugs, starvation diet, or hard-to-follow methods. Here's one way to reduce that you will want to continue with to keep off fat! The Kelpidine Candy Plan helps you curb your appetite for fattening foods, helps keep you from overeating. Now you reach for a delicious sweet candy instead of fattening foods—it kills the overpowering urge to overeat—to eat between meal-snacks. Your craving for rich, fattening foods is satisfied with this candy plan. Almost like magic you begin to enjoy this plan for reducing.

SENSATIONAL TWO-WAY GUARANTEE!

This sweet delicious Kelpidine Candy plan is guaranteed (1) to

SCIENTIFICALLY AND CLINICALLY TESTED!

That amazing ingredient in Kelpidine candy is the most remarkable discovery for fat people ever made. It's been tested by doctors in test-after-test. The results were far better than doctors ever hoped for! The results were reported in medical journals throughout the world! Doctors are invited to write for details.

HERE'S HOW TO REDUCE AND STAY SLIM!

Most people are fat because of overeating—too much high calorie fattening foods—to your amazement you will want to keep on eating this delicious candy even after you have reduced to the weight that most becomes you and you'll keep your weight off that way!

AMAZING DISCOVERY OF SCIENCE!

The Kelpidine Candy plan is the result of scientific research for years for a new discovery for something that will stop your craving for fattening food and also satisfy your appetite. This delicious candy does not turn into ugly fat, it gives you the same feeling of fullness you have after you have eaten a satisfying meal. It kills your desire to overeat—it kills your craving for bedtime snacks and for in-between meal snacks. It's so safe even a child

IT'S UNHEALTHY TO BE FAT!

Insurance companies and doctors tell everyone that too much fat shortens your life! Fat people die years sooner than people with normal weight! So be Safe! Be Fair to yourself! Start taking off fat with Kelpidine Candy today!

can take it without bad effects. With Kelpidine Candy all you taste is its deliciousness—you can't tell the difference!

KELPIDINE CANDY IS DIFFERENT!

The amazing clinical tested and proven reducing substance contained in Kelpidine Candy is prescribed by many doctors—Don't be misled by imitation products—Kelpidine Candy is the result of scientific research and is the last word in Reducing.

DON'T CUT OUT FOODS* CUT DOWN ON CALORIES!

You never starve, you always feel full with Kelpidine Candy plan—You'll never suffer hunger pangs—Your desire for high calorie fattening foods is always satisfied! With Kelpidine Candy Plan you eat the same quantity of foods—you merely cut down on the high calorie rich foods with the help of Kelpidine Candy. You eat as much as you want, your calorie intake will be less—That's the delightful amazing thing!

YOU GET A LIBERAL SUPPLY OF CANDY!

Try the liberal supply of Kelpidine Candy Plan on our 10-day no risk offer. Keep a record of your weight—if you are not pleased with your loss of weight; if you can taste any difference between this candy and your favorite candy—return for refund. Just fill out coupon and mail to AMERICAN HEALTHAIDS CO., Dpt. K235, Candy Division, 318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

You must be entirely satisfied with your loss of weight—This candy must taste as good as or better than your favorite candy—You must get rid of dangerous excess fat or your money will be refunded—Don't delay—You have nothing to lose but excess weight so mail coupon below now!



THIS CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!

WITH THIS DELICIOUS REDUCING CANDY PLAN!

Let this delicious candy plan help you control your desire for fattening food! Let it help you put a stop to the habit of overeating—A habit that's so hard to break! Kelpidine candy contains that new discovery many doctors prescribe to help curb your desire to overeat (the main cause of overweight).

\$1.00 TRIAL SAMPLE SIZE!

CUT OUT AND MAIL—NO RISK COUPON NOW!

AMERICAN HEALTHAIDS COMPANY, Dpt. K-235 Candy Division, 318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

- I enclose \$1.00, send trial sample size, postage pre-paid!
- Rush a Liberal Supply of Kelpidine Candy plan. I enclose \$3.00, send postage pre-paid. (I save up to 75c postage by sending payment with order.)
- Rush a Large Economy Supply of Kelpidine Candy. I enclose \$5.00, send postage pre-paid. (I save up to 90c postage by sending payment with order.)

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE Sent on Approval

NOW!
The Greatest
HOSPITALIZATION
VALUE
EVER OFFERED



Smiling and healthy today — In a Hospital bed tomorrow! Be ready!



Sky-high Hospital bills can wreck your life savings. Insure now!

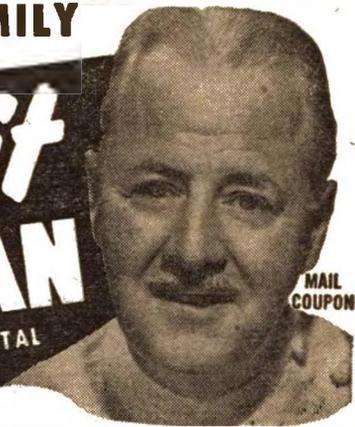


We pay benefits for as long as you stay in Hospital. NO TIME LIMIT!

PROTECTS YOU and YOUR FAMILY
IN CASE OF SICKNESS or ACCIDENT..

No Time Limit HOSPITAL PLAN

PAYS BENEFITS FOR FULL STAY IN HOSPITAL



MAIL COUPON

COSTS ONLY
Pennies a Day

WE PAY CASH DIRECT TO YOU

IN ADDITION TO WHAT YOU MAY COLLECT FROM OTHER INSURANCE
 Go to the Hospital for a day, a week, a month, a year or longer — your "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy pays Benefits just as long as you stay — *there's absolutely no time limit!* What blessed help! What's more, the "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy pays off in cash direct to you — regardless of what you may collect from any other insurance policy for the same disability, including Workmen's Compensation. This is important — it means you can carry the low cost "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy IN ADDITION to any other insurance — then collect two ways in case of Hospital confinement.



Policy Sold Only By Mail! Good Anywhere in U.S. & Possessions!
 If sickness or accident puts you in a Hospital bed — you'll look back and thank your lucky stars you were wise enough to take out the "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy.



SO SUDDEN!

It's the sensible, practical way to protect your own bank account against the onslaught of high Hospital costs. So ACT TODAY! Do it before trouble strikes.

YOU CAN GET MATERNITY
 For slight extra cost husband and wife can have a MATERNITY RIDER attached to their regular Policy and this will entitle the couple to a liberal Benefit for childbirth confinement and care.



ACCIDENTAL DEATH, SURGERY, POLIO INCLUDED

We give you more coverage, better coverage, longer coverage at low cost. You get generous Hospital Room and Board Benefits for sickness or accident (rest homes, sanitariums and Govt. Hospitals excluded) . . . you get Cash Benefits for 73 Surgical Operations . . . Lump Cash for accidental death . . . Cash Payment for loss of eyes, hands, feet . . . special Polio Protection, etc. One Policy covers individual or entire family, birth to age 75. You'll see the low costs in the booklet we send you. DON'T TAKE CHANCES — BE PROTECTED. Send for our FREE BOOK which tells all about this remarkable insurance. **DON'T WAIT TILL IT'S TOO LATE! ACT NOW!**



HAPPY DAY!



WHO'S NEXT?

RUSH COUPON FOR VALUABLE FREE BOOK

LIFE INSURANCE CO. OF AMERICA
 Dept. 255-TG, Wilmington 99, Del.
 Please send me, without obligation, full details about your new, low cost NO TIME LIMIT HOSPITAL Plan. No agent will call.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____

POLICY BACKED BY STRONG RELIABLE COMPANY
 We do business in all 48 states and U. S. possessions. Claims are paid promptly in strict accordance with Policy provisions.

LIFE INSURANCE CO. OF AMERICA
 Wilmington 99, Delaware

Mail Coupon for **FREE BOOK**
 NO OBLIGATION
 NO AGENT WILL CALL

THRILLING Wonder STORIES

VOL. XLIV, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION WINTER ISSUE

A COMPLETE NOVEL

- NAME YOUR PLEASURE**.....James E. Gunn 10
"Let joy be unconfined," they cried, and made happiness their first and most important duty—ecstasy a basic requirement of their law

A SCIENCE FANTASY

- CRESCENDO**.....Margaret St. Clair 72
How could Floyd love his neighbor—when she kept sending him dead cats? He hated Nina's verse and her dead cats till one Hallowe'en

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Cover Painting by EMSH—Illustrating "Name Your Pleasure"

THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Published quarterly by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Copyright, 1954, by Standard Magazines, Inc. Single copies, 25c; Subscription (12 issues), \$3.50; Add 40c for Canadian, 75c for foreign and Pan-American subscriptions. Re-entered as second-class matter August 28, 1953, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication please include your postal zone number, if any. Winter, 1955 issue. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME FOR GOOD PAY JOBS IN RADIO-TELEVISION



J. E. SMITH has trained more men for Radio-Television than any other man. OUR 40th YEAR.

America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You Good Pay—Bright Future—Security

I TRAINED THESE MEN



"Started to repair sets six months after enrolling. Earned \$12 to \$15 a week in spare time."—Adam Kramnik, Jr., Sunnyside, Pennsylvania.



"Up to our necks in Radio-Television work. Four other NRI men work here. Am happy with my work."—Glen Peterson, Bradford, Ont., Canada.



"Am doing Radio and Television Servicing full time. Now have my own shop. I owe my success to N.R.I."—Curtis Stath, Ft. Madison, Iowa.



"Am with WCOB. NRI course can't be beat. No trouble passing 1st class Radio-phone license exam."—Jesse W. Parker, Meridian, Mississippi.



"By graduation, had paid for course, car, testing equipment. Can service toughest jobs."—E. J. Streitenberger, New Boston, Ohio.

AVAILABLE TO
VETERANS
UNDER G.I. BILLS

You Learn by Practicing with Parts I Send



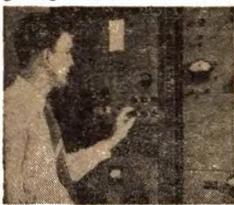
Nothing takes the place of PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE. That's why NRI training is based on LEARNING BY DOING. You use parts I furnish to build many circuits common to Radio and Television. As part of my Communications course, you build many circuits, including low power transmitter shown at left. You put it "on the air," perform procedures required of broadcast operators. With my Servicing Course you build modern Radio, etc.; use Multitester you build to make money fixing sets in spare time while training. You can stay at home, keep your job, learn Radio-TV in spare time at low cost. Mail coupon for book showing other equipment you build and keep.

The Tested Way To Better Pay!

2 FREE BOOKS SHOW HOW MAIL COUPON



Television Making Good Jobs, Prosperity—Even without Television, Radio is bigger than ever. 115 million home and auto Radios are big market for servicing. 3000 broadcasting stations use operators, technicians. Government, Aviation, Police, Ship, Micro-wave Relay, Two-way Radio Communications for buses, taxis, trucks, R. R. are growing fields. Television is moving ahead fast.



About 200 Television stations are now on the air. Hundreds of others being built. Good TV jobs opening up for Technicians, Operators, etc.



25 million homes now have Television sets. Thousands more are being sold every week. Get a job or have your own business selling, installing, servicing.

Radio-TV Needs Men of Action—Mail Coupon

Without obligating you in any way, I'll send an actual lesson to prove that my training is practical, thorough; 64-page book to show good job opportunities for you in Radio-TV. Terms for NRI training are as low as \$5 a month. Many graduates make more in two weeks than total cost of training. Mail coupon now. J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 5BQ, Washington 9, D. C. OUR 40TH YEAR.

Good for Both—FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5BQ
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.
Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book, FREE.
(No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name Age

Address

City Zone State

VETS write in date of discharge





A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

THIS month we're foregoing our usual opening remarks directing your attention to the special feature on Isaac Asimov's future history, which you'll find on Page 63. It corresponds to a similar feature we're running in the current issue of *Startling Stories* on Poul Anderson's future history, and we'll be interested to hear how you like it.

THE LOVELY GILDED RUT

by Tom Pace

Dear Editor: The only thing I can say for the Fall cover is that that will learn the chap to turn off the ignition when he ground-loops. Or is this an invasion by salamander?

The stories; well, I would have bet that no one in stf could have done a better job than Murray Leinster in rewriting Grimm's Fairy Tales . . . unless Andre Gide is better qualified for the job. Lately, I have restricted my fantasy reading to Lord Dunsany, Gavagan's Bar, and the advertising trade papers . . . that's enough for any man. But as long as you can get Leinster to write them, I will read your fantasies.

I rather liked *Invasion*. One of these off-cute deals with an expected stinger in the tail (I once knew a girl with a stinger in the tail but she used only two parts brandy to one *creme de menthe*. Where was I?) . . . not bad. The thing that gets me that green and burnt-orange hairdo. After the Italian natural look, I can take anything.

I liked Mack Reynold's *A Dream . . . Dying*. It ties in right nicely with what we've heard about "brainwashing" lately.

Trade-In is a grisly little item, but with today's emphasis on youth and strength and health, who knows? It seems that no one wants to be a silver-haired matron, or a greyed old boy sitting on a veranda with a pipe and a cup and a volume of Horace. Well, would you?

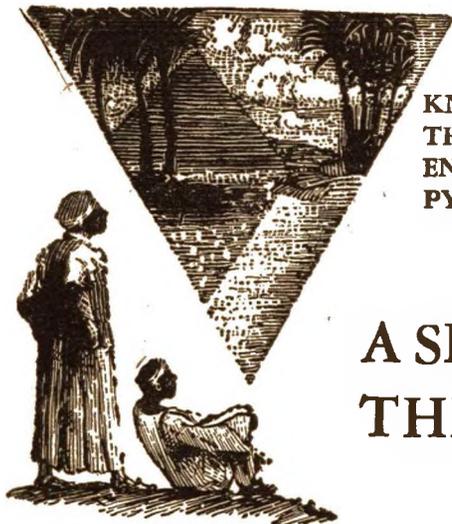
Rita Whitney had the only really readable letter in this issue, certainly including mine, and I wish to offer her my congratulations. I think her statement "Only the masculine women ever achieve anything except a good man and a flexible figure" is a considerable generalization, but it was a hell of a plain-spoken, intelligent letter for all that.

Concerning the "lovely gilded rut" (I have a comment, but it's double entendre) Mrs. Whitney referred to; have many fans beside myself considered how beautifully the advertising industry has pandered to this alleged feminine gold-plated taste for the *status quo*? And talk of brain-washing . . . there is no better example of the fact that continual insistence that an untruth is true will make it accepted as absolute truth. Half the girls in this country, to be conservative, are convinced that all their problems will end as soon as they achieve a 36-inch bust. The way to do this, of course, would be to avoid hampering the natural development of said bust. But that don't sell fabric, so advertising blandly implies that a sort of forced-growth process, implemented by using their dainty Brassbound Special, will cause them to grow to such proportions that admirers of theatrical talent will beat a path to their door. After a few adolescent years of this treatment, their muscles give up the struggle and begin to imitate wet linen cord; whereupon they turn in the Brassbound model and buy either a Cantilever Miracle Worker or a Mati Hari Foam Rubber delight, depending on whether they put their faith in engineering or in deception.

Or: Detroit can and occasionally does build damned good engines, excellent power trains, transmissions, etc. But since the sales and advertising departments hold full sway there, too, they have somehow convinced the American public that weight means safety and road-holding ability, justifying the addition of a quarter- or half-ton of useless sheet steel to the automobile; ignoring the elementary physics which holds that for a given curved path and a given speed, the greater weight will have the greatest centrifugal force tending to throw said weight off that curve; ignoring the fact that in a collision said sheet metal, no matter what its weight, is going to crumble like tissue on Christmas morning and allow sad things to happen to the customers. But if they live through it, they'll be back to buy another Marshmallow Eight.

Anyway, you get the point. Do American women actually control all the buying choice (I'm not arguing about buying power!) in this country, and are American women really stupid enough to believe all the total reversions of truth served up to them by the manufacturers' ballyhoo boys? I don't think so. I think it's more that the blue-eyed lads

(Continued on page 8)



**KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS**

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

This Sealed Book—FREE

Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you *A Sealed Book* of explanation without obligation. This *Sealed Book* tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.

The ROSICRUCIANS
SAN JOSE (AMORC) CALIFORNIA



AMENHOTEP IV.
Founder of Egypt's
Mystery Schools

Use this
coupon for
FREE
copy of book

SCRIBE K.Y.Y.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
San Jose, California

Please send free copy of *Sealed Book* which I shall read as directed.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....

of Madison Avenue have sold themselves and their bosses a bill of goods, and we're suffering from it; that most of the success of modern advertising is in spite of, not because of, the material, and because there just isn't much choice. If no one sells anything but Marshmallow Eights, and you haven't the dough for a Rolls or a Ferrari, you drive a Marshmallow Eight.

Enough of this. I have a formation to make. If that sounds like a risqué statement, be advised that a formation is a military gathering for the purpose of selecting the honored few who will cut grass around the Orderly Room today. I must go defend my country with a swingblade . . . thought the days of chivalry were over, and here I am armed with a sword again . . . slightly modified, Model M1.—4709A Gateway Terr., Arbutus, Md.

How about the cover this time? It's taken directly from James Gunn's lead story. By the way, your letter last time drew lots of comment. Here's some:

PUZZLED

by Carol M. Pifer

Dear Editor: I am not trying to ridicule anyone, but I was a little puzzled by the letter from Mr. Tom Pace. Mr. Pace seems to consider himself as an agnostic, but then continues on a collision course of refutation. I was left with the distinct impression he is more of an atheist. Even though an agnostic does not accept the idea of a Divine God smiling benevolently from above, neither does he state "Religion is false because there is no God." He merely stands by with neatly folded hands repeating his stand. "Prove to me there is a God, and I will believe; prove there is no God and I will not believe. Till then, I am not going to assert myself as theist or atheist."

After years of reading letters, I have at last gotten mad enough to answer.—4924 South Ave., Youngstown, Ohio.

Miss Pifer disagrees—and so does the writer of the following letter:

YOU CAN'T DISMISS RELIGION

by Thomas O'Dell

Dear Sirs: Bravo to Mr. Tom Pace! Religion as a social force has failed! Yes, and while we're at it, let's eradicate Christ from the history books. After all, He made such a tremendous impact on history that it just wouldn't do to let it get around. Tom, your idea of religion having failed isn't new. The people in France around 1789 thought so, too. They even went so far as to overthrow every vestige of religion, and they liberated their reasons and intellects from that awful tyrant the Church. Of course, we'll overlook the fact that the people took an ugly, naked hag of a woman and placed her on the main altar of the cathedral and offered mock sacrifice to her, and that later a terrible Reign of Terror seized the City of Freed Intellectuals.

I've always thought that religion, from its earliest beginnings, was man's attempt to alleviate an innate desire to recognize a Being greater than himself, and by offering sacrifice, to keep in that 'Being's' good graces. I also thought that it was an attempt to explain things that Science couldn't account for and that it was more sophisticatedly called Philosophy, or Science to the fans. Why or how, I ask, could a fan's objections to or for religion be expressed in terms of special interest to him?

Tom, your idea of religion having failed as a social force is ridiculous. Your picture of man using his mind and reason alone to perfect himself is nuts! Individually many people are lazy. Many men even today devote themselves so completely to asinine pleasures that their minds are for the most part dormant. And how many men will blindly follow reason and not be influenced by their emotions? Man needs a guide, something or someone to give him the real answers to the questions: What is man? What is God? Why are we here? I suggest you start digging your cave.

And your views of conflict. I suppose the conflict of good and evil has no meaning for you. Sure, some people escape into religion just as they escape into science-fiction; and who are you to deprive them of it? I do believe that irreligion is an extremely harmful social force, because it's unnatural, it suppresses the innate desire to recognize a greater Being, someone who does not care about our petty affairs.

So you can't dismiss God or Religion because it's convenient to do so, or write it off as having failed. Long after you're gone, and not missed, religion will continue to play the important role it has; of protecting man's innate rights when despots abuse them, and offering consolation when all else has failed, including your sterile Utopias.—8230 Wisconsin, Detroit 4, Mich.

However there's at least one sympathetic voice in all this hue and cry. Here's a man who has something to say about . . .

THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP

by Val Walker

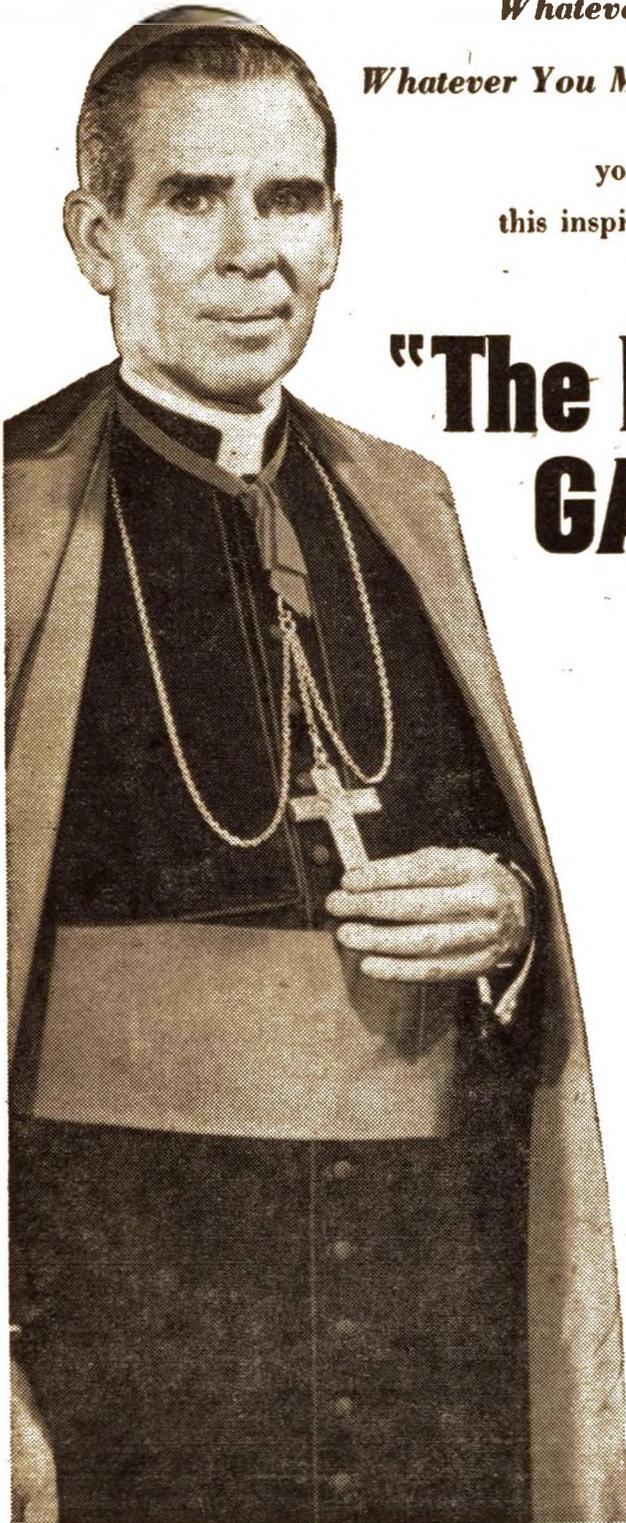
Dear Editor: The Fall TWS has average stories, average illos, average advertisements etc. The only story possibly breaking above average was Murray Leinster's *The Amateur Alchemist*. That one might rate an A.

Trade-In was the best of the short stories, and about the only other story that might be above average.

Now for the letter column, the only portion of the mag solidly above average, every issue.

The outstanding letter was, of course, from Tom Pace. I enjoyed the point Tom made concerning our society making decisions as a group. I agree with Tom, in that it isn't a particularly outstanding way to live. Unfortunately however it is, I believe an effect of a complex social structure or civilization. Even many primitive people make their decisions in a group. Naturally then it is not their high degree of civilization that

(Continued on page 111)

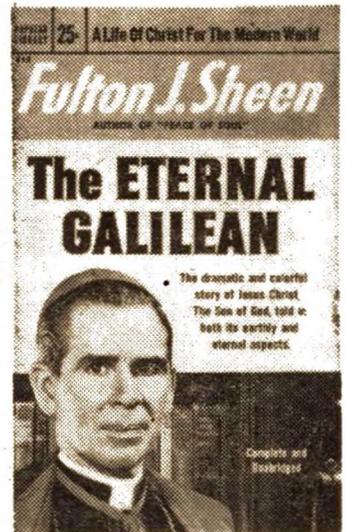


*Whatever Your Faith May Be ...
Whatever You May Want Out Of Life ...*

you can't afford to miss reading
this inspiring guide to rich, full living

"The ETERNAL GALILEAN"

by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen



**A POPULAR LIBRARY
Pocket-Size Book 25c**

On Sale at All Newsstands

Name Your

"Let joy be unconfined," they cried, and made happiness their first duty . . . ecstasy a requirement of the law!

I

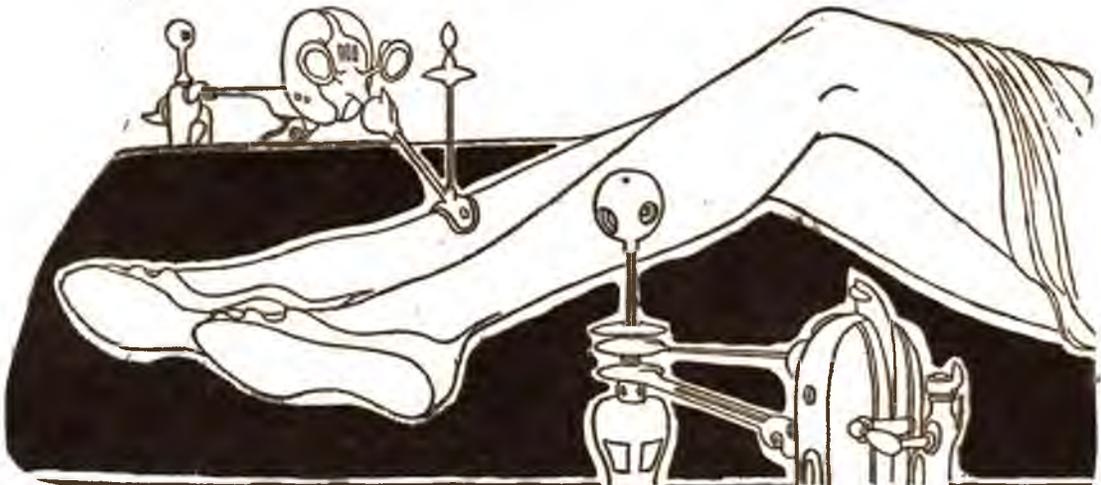
THE HEDONIST

THE day began as more than eight thousand days had begun before.

"Wake up," the pillow murmured sweetly in the Hedonist's ear. "The sun is shining. It's a beautiful day. Wake up. Be happy!"

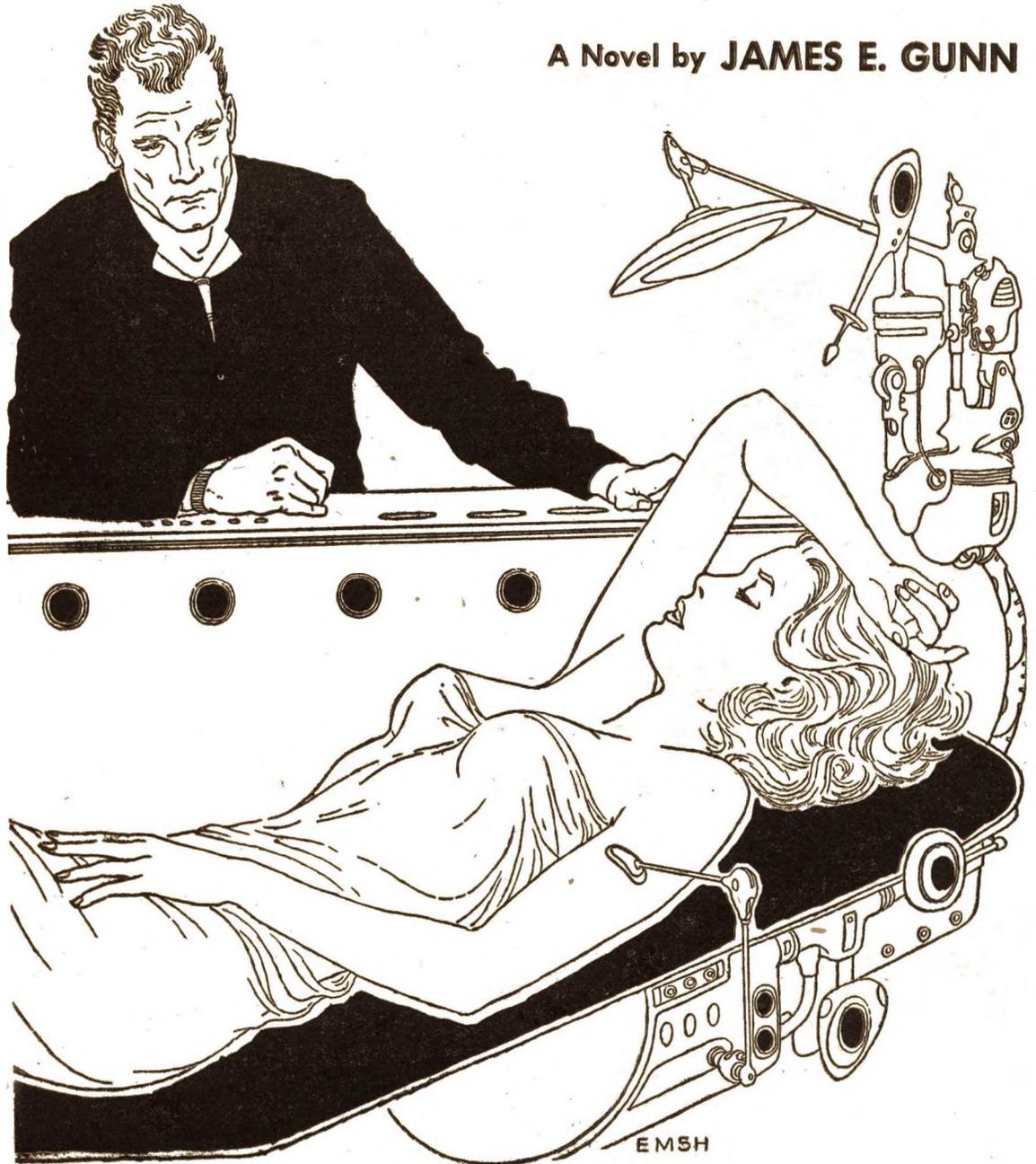
The Hedonist rolled over and punched the pillow into silence. He pried one eye open and peered out the long, low window that formed one wall of his cottage. The smog billowed against it grayly like a fat, long-haired cat rolling at the Earth's feet, needle claws sheathed

Illustrated by EMSH



Pleasure

A Novel by **JAMES E. GUNN**



EMSH

for the moment but ready to flash out and slash if the impulse struck.

So much for realism.

The Hedonist suppressed the thought automatically and sat up. Another day, another pleasure.

He glanced at the pillow beside his and the brown hair flung across it like a silk scarf. He sighed. It was time for that to end, too.

He flipped back the covers and brought his hand down smartly against the youthfully rounded bottom. It smacked satisfactorily. Beth turned over and sat up in one startled movement.

"What's the matter?" she spluttered.

His pajama tops were several sizes too big for her. They drifted down around her like a scarlet tent. She yawned and lifted her arms to rub her eyes. When she dropped them to her sides, the jacket bared one creamy shoulder and threatened to slide even farther.

A smile drifted across the Hedonist's lips. Sleep was so precious when you were young. There was never enough of it. There was never enough of anything. As you grew older you were more easily satisfied. He sighed again. That was a pity, too.

Sleepily, Beth caught the slipping jacket before it left her shoulders completely. "What's happened?" she said in the middle of a yawn.

"Time to get up," the Hedonist said gently. And, even gentler, "Time to go home."

"Home?" she said. She was suddenly awake.

"I'm certifying you today. You can get married whenever you and your fiancé can agree upon a date."

"But—" she began and stopped.

With the skill of long experience, the Hedonist studied her face without revealing his interest. Beth's face, normally calm, was troubled. Even troubled, it was the most beautiful face in his ward. He had taken her under instruction with a joy that was not entirely professional. But so young, so young.

His memory, unbidden, offered him the date: February 23, 2035. A Thursday. He remembered it well. Three months ago she had been nineteen years old. He had presided at her birth; now he had prepared her for marriage. Through the nineteen years between he had guarded her happiness. It didn't sit well beside his fifty-three years.

"You still want to get married, don't you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she said, her dark eyes steady on his face.

"Then you have my blessing. I have done my best."

"I know," she said evenly.

"The man you're betrothed to—he's from another ward?"

"You know that," she said.

Yes, he knew. He knew everything that went on in the ward: the problems, the worries, the troubles, the sorrows. He knew everybody: their emotional quotients and what to expect from them and when, and how to treat them. Sometimes he even knew their thoughts.

In this ward, he was—in a very real sense divine. In his knowledge and his power over the lives and happiness of a thousand people, he was a god. But a god can know too much. Knowledge is a burden, and responsibility multiplied a thousand times is enough to bow the shoulders of an Atlas.

But the girl beside him was deep; he could sense that much, even if he couldn't touch bottom.

Touch bottom! The smile that flickered across his face was almost wry. He had touched that one for the last time.

"You must be gentle with him," the Hedonist said. "He may not have had your advantages."

She touched her soft lower lip with her teeth. "I will," she said softly. "If—I mean—when we get married, we'll come back here. If he needs treatment, I'll send him to you—"

The Hedonist shook his head. "That isn't wise. Girls are more adaptable than men. You could adjust to another

hedonist, but your husband would have trouble. You must move to his ward."

She was silent, looking at him through a silken veil that had drifted down across her forehead.

"Remember," he said with an uneasiness he could not pin down, "your duty—your only duty—is happiness."

"Yes, Hedonist," she said obediently.

"Good-by, Beth," he said. "Be happy!"

H HE SWUNG his legs over the edge of the bed and walked the three steps to the necessary with cautious dignity.

FROM THE DICTIONARY OF HEDONISM

hedonics (he-don'iks), *n.*: SEE -ICS. Psychomedical science dealing with the nature and pursuit of happiness.

hedonism (he-don'izim), *n.*: 1 *Ethics*. The doctrine that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life and that moral duty is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure-seeking instincts.

hedonist (-ist), *n.*: 1 One who lives in accordance with hedonism; *i.e.*, for pleasure. 2. (Since 2005) A practitioner of hedonics.

It wasn't because he was fat, exactly, but fifty-three years had thickened him a little around the middle, and there is nothing aesthetic about a middle-aged man's naked back.

Besides, the Hedonist could sense that Beth was watching him.

The necessary door slid shut, and he was alone in the three-by-four foot cubicle. Fifteen minutes later he was ready for the new day and its demands upon him. His beard had been depilated; warm, detergent sprays had cleansed him; hot sprays had rinsed him; icy needles had jabbed his body into tingling awareness. Hot air blasts had dried him. And he was reluctant to leave the

comfortable little room.

Womb-symbol? the Hedonist wondered.

He pressed the bottom button on the right. The lights shifted. One wall was suddenly a full-length mirror. The Hedonist looked at himself and frowned. He was not so thick after all. There was no fat on him; he was tall and well-muscled. His close-cropped hair was still black, unfrosted. His firm, definite face was unlined. He looked no older than an athletic thirty.

The last geriatric treatment had been even more successful than usual.

And yet there was something wrong. He had counted six distinct feelings of unpleasure since waking. And there was no reason for any of them.

Quickly, skillfully, he counted his blessings. In a golden age, he held one of the most responsible and rewarding positions possible. He knew his work; he did it well; he liked it. There wasn't the smallest reason for him to be unhappy. And yet he sighed.

As he accepted new underclothes from the dispenser and stuffed the transparent wrapper into the disposal, he told himself that the difference between Beth's age and his was obvious and irremediable. What did he want? A wife?

Nonsense! There was logic behind the Inconstancy clause of the Hedonic Oath. "As a hedonist, I shall not love nor wed nor father, but I shall keep myself intact for the proper performance of my duties. . . ."

A hedonist could not permit himself to become emotionally involved with one person. To the extent of that involvement, his available empathetic energy was diminished, and his carefully cultivated insight was impaired. The ward would suffer. His dependents would feel slighted. They would stop bringing their problems to him; and even if they still came, the delicate relationship so vital to his work would be destroyed.

Publilius Syrus said it over two thousand years before: "A god could hardly

love and be wise."

And yet— The Hedonist sighed. After ten years of the Institute's rigorous, specialized training and twenty-three years of practice, he still didn't understand the roots of his own unpleasures.

How could he hope to treat the unpleasures of his dependents?

"Happiness is indivisible," he told himself sternly and concentrated on the devaluation of the desire.

By the time he had finished the hedonic exercise, his feeling for Beth was no different in kind or intensity than for any other girl in his ward. He felt once more—as he had felt so rapturously long ago—the exquisite beauty of hedonics.

When he came out of the necessary, Beth was gone. He felt a quick, cold sense of loss.

The bed had been lowered into the floor. It would have fresh sheets on it, he knew; Beth was a thoughtful girl. His desk and chair had swung out from one wall; from the wall opposite had come the comfortable diagnostic chair. The room had returned to its spacious daytime dimensions of twelve by twelve.

Devaluation and substitution soon took care of his absurd disappointment, and he realized, as he sublimated the emotion into professional enthusiasm, that he had forgotten to cut the cord cleanly and finally. It was always a delicate operation; he dreaded it. But it was vital to the therapy, and he had never actually forgotten it before.

The relationship between a hedonist and his patient is an unparalleled intimacy; transference is inevitable. And if the hedonist has his problem, the patient's problems are even more serious. And he does not have the hedonist's technical equipment and training for handling them.

It was the hedonist's duty to break off the relationship cleanly when the therapy was finished.

He made a mental note to call Beth back.

II

OH, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING!

HABIT is a technique for simplifying existence, for saving time and the energy of decision. It is a pleasure tool.

As a creature of habit, the Hedonist had a standing order for breakfast. He pressed the top button on the wall beside the table. A panel slid up into the wall. His breakfast was in the cubicle behind it. It sat on a tray in covered plastic dishes. He drew the tray out upon the table and broke the plastic tab that held the lid on the juice glass. He drank the juice quickly; it was cold and good and acid, as usual.

It had been a good batch; Monsanto was proud of it, and they had a right to be.

The next dish steamed aromatically. The plankton cakes had a delicate shrimpy flavor the Hedonist always enjoyed. They were especially good fried in the new high-fat chlorella oil. He ate them slowly, savoring each bite.

While he ate, he flicked on the news. He punched the highly compressed channel; the words came rattling from the wall like the rare, accidental hail on his plastic roof. The film was compressed only a little, but the time-compression on the speech sometimes went as high as seventy percent without audible distortion. He understood it as easily as ordinary speech, and there was little enough time, anyway, for everything that had to be done.

The Hedonic Index, which had registered only 85% at dawn (the depressing effect of the morning smog, the Hedonist thought), had already risen to an acceptable 93% (breakfast), and was expected to go higher as the 0737 shower cleared the air.

In the corner of the picture, the time was listed as 0736. The Hedonist stopped eating and lifted his head to listen. Over the announcer's voice came a slow, growing spatter of rain on the roof. The Hedonist nodded with satisfaction.

Right on time. Through the window, he could see the smog melting away. That was the kind of efficiency that made government a solid, unobtrusive foundation for a nation's happiness.

The Hedonist remembered when some thought it hedonics' proudest achievement: "They made the rains run on time." Now it was a commonplace.

There would be sunshine all day, although the weather bureau had scheduled a brief shower for 1916, just at sunset, to clear the air once more. The temperature would be held steady at 85 degrees until dusk, when it would be allowed to drop to 70.

Interplanetary Authority announced the completion of a new ship in the yards adjoining the Old City port. (It gleamed like a jewel, the Hedonist thought, with the sunlight breaking through the clouds to sparkle in the diamond-drops of water the rain had left.) The ship would be launched shortly when the emigration complement was filled. At the end of the three months trip was Venus.

The Hedonist smiled. *Shortly.* The ship would wait a long time there in the yards. How do you recruit emigrants from the promised land? Where do you find people who will trade peace and plenty and happiness for toil, starvation, and misery? Asylums, maybe, if there were any asylums left. But there weren't. There were few people left who were that crazy.

"The ship," the announcer said, "has been named the Asylum."

THE Hedonist started and relaxed, smiling. Someone had a sense of humor. Strangely enough, it was a rarity these days. Well, if that could be attributed to hedonics, it was a small price to pay for the tears that had vanished, too.

The culturing of a new mutation had increased chlorella production by 50%. The protein content of the new crop was high. Chlorelloaf would be on the menu in most wards for several days. Plank-

ton would be more plentiful soon. The scooper fleet reported a layer of zooplankton which promised to be almost inexhaustible. Catch was already within the thousands of tons.

The Hedonist uncapped the Kafi and hoped the boats didn't syphon the sea clear of life. Alga was all right and the synthetics were efficient and often quite delicious, but the subtle flavor of once-living protein could not be cultured or brewed. On the other hand, he reflected, he could be thankful that he liked fish; some people didn't, and they had only the synthetics and the algae or an extensive re-education therapy.

The latest Teleflush Index, in millions of gallons, place the sensie LIFE CAN BE ECSTASY 11.7 ahead of ONE MAN'S HAPPINESS. . . .

The Hedonist stopped listening, instantly, completely, and lifted the Kafi cup to his lips. He had no time for the sensies and less inclination. Perhaps they had a certain therapeutic value in some cases, but he considered them on the dangerous lower peak of imaginary gratification. They were daydreams made effortless.

He had suggested as much in a memorandum to the Council, but no doubt they were too busy for such minor matters.

The Hedonist shuddered and almost dropped the cup. For a month now, the Kafi had been bitter and acrid. Something had gone wrong in the last synthesis. He supposed the stock had been too great to dump, but he hoped that Dupont would do better next time.

He braced himself and drank it down without taking a breath. It was the only stimulant he allowed himself, and he had a vague premonition he would need it before the day was over.

"The Hedonic Index," the announcer said with infectious joy, "has reached 95%."

The Hedonist switched him off and shoved the soiled dishes into the cubicle and drew down the cover. The lunch menu flashed on, but he turned it off. He

couldn't stand thinking about lunch so soon after eating. He would select something a little later when he wasn't so full, he told himself, but he knew he would be too busy. He would forget and be forced to accept the standard meal. Well, that was good enough, and he would be happy with it.

The wall square started blinking at him. A cheerful voice said, "Message for you. Message for you. Message—"

The Hedonist hit the "Accept" button hastily. The square steadied and filled itself with letters, black on white:

TO: Hedonist, Ward 483

FROM: HEDONIC COUNCIL, Area 1

You will report to Room 2943, Hedonic Council building, Area 1, at 1634 for annual examination. Be prompt! Be happy!

Y*OU will report*, the Hedonist repeated to himself as he brushed the message away with the automatic acknowledgement. The form was standard, and the message was clear enough. But his last examination had been less than six months ago. They wouldn't be recalling him so soon—would they?

There was something ominous about it. A sudden shiver ran down his spine. His adrenals began discharging their secretions into his bloodstream; in response, his heart beat quickened, the blood sugar level rose, the coagulability . . .

The sensations weren't completely unpleasant. They stimulated him to a condition of awareness and excitation he hadn't experienced in years. But they were also dangerous.

Happiness is basic. Without that, all else is ashes.

The Hedonist suppressed it. He breathed deeply, sitting quietly relaxed. He damped his heartbeat, soothed his adrenals. The Council wanted to discuss his memorandum on the sensies, he told himself calmly.

He suppressed the small voice that asked, "How could they forget that your last examination was so recent?"

When the adrenaline was satisfactorily dissipated, he slipped on a short-sleeved shirt and a comfortable pair of tan shorts and glanced down at the day's schedule. According to the microfilm memorandum projected on the desk, he had nothing listed after 1630. He picked up the stylus and scribbled across the desk: 1634-2943 HCB-a.e.

He read it once, hesitated, and went back to underline the last two letters. He had no reason to be afraid of the examination; he had passed them all easily. There was no reason to let anxiety ruin his day. And with that underlineation the worry vanished. He placed an order for a cab at 1615 and turned to the day's business.

Sara Walling. The Hedonist punched her number on the square of buttons under the edge of the desk. Her case history appeared in front of him, projected onto the desk in numbers, letters, and symbols, a meaningful, condensed description of twenty-seven years of a woman's life. The Hedonist nodded and wiped it away. His memory had been correct, but it was just as well not to depend on something fallible when a person's happiness was at stake.

It was 0800. The milky square on the outside of his door read: COME IN AND BE HAPPY. The door opened. Sara Walling stood there, her dark, thin face unhappy.

The Hedonist was up to greet her in one fluid motion that took him effortlessly the three steps to the door. He put his arm around her and caressed her fondly. "Joy, Sara! Come in, darling," he said gently. "Tell me all about it."

When she was sitting in the diagnostic chair, the Hedonist sat down at the desk and, cocking his head sympathetically, divided his attention between Sara and the desk-top readings.

At twenty-seven, she was a lean, sal-low girl, an inch under average height at five feet nine. Her features weren't bad, but it was obvious that she was one of the least attractive girls in the

ward. She was unmarried, and she had no lover. That was her problem. Or so she thought. The Hedonist knew, with a flash of guilt, that he had failed her.

From the readings flashed from the chair to his desk, the Hedonist put together another story, just as valid. Muscular contractions, pulse, blood pressure, breathing, volume of limb, but chiefly the electrical resistance of the body—often called the psychogalvanic reflex—gave him a running account of her emotional state. Balanced against her recorded emotional quotient, it was obvious what had happened.

The marriage aspect was only the culmination of several physiological and psychological tendencies which were themselves aggravated by the marriage aspect. It was a vicious, cyclic tangle. He would have believed it impossible except that the constantly increasing demands on his time made periodic review of every dependent an ideal he was unable to realize. But now there was no time to be lost in the long but not hopeless task of untangling this girl's life.

"You have someone in mind, of course," he said.

"Yes," she admitted.

"Has he gone with you to the premarital cottage?"

"Once," she snapped.

"I see," the Hedonist said. It was a misfortune all the way around. He suppressed his sympathy; the diagnosis was complete. "Have you any ideas for increasing your happiness?"

She hesitated. "Can't you make him love me?" she said quickly, hopefully. "Then I'd be happy and he'd be happy—"

"Is he unhappy now?" the Hedonist interrupted quietly.

"No-o-o," she sighed.

"Then I can't make him do anything," he pointed out. "You know that. The fact that your desires don't coincide with his is no grounds for compulsion. You're the one who's unhappy. You're

the one who needs therapy."

"But that's the only thing that will make me happy!" she wailed.

The Hedonist shook his head slowly, pityingly. "We can't force life into the patterns we draw for it, and if we let our happiness depend on circumstances we doom ourselves to sorrow and despair. Happiness begins at home—inside. Didn't we teach you that?"

"I was taught," she groaned, her teeth clenched, "but it's so hard to learn, so hard to do."

"Have you tried the hedonic techniques?" the Hedonist asked. "Have you practiced suppression? Devaluation? Substitution?"

"I've tried," she moaned. "I've tried so hard. But it's no use. It's too—" She broke suddenly. The Hedonist was ready for it. He caught her against his shoulder and let her cry until the sobs had dwindled into sniffles.

"How long has it been," he asked gently, "since you've had a diagnosis?"

"I don't remember," she said in a muffled voice.

"A year," he said firmly. "You can afford a nickel every week. We're going to bring up your blood pressure, increase your thyroid, tone up your body generally—"

"Will that help?" she asked weakly.

"Life is swell when you feel well," the Hedonist quoted. "Even the ancients knew that. Humanity is a tangled thing. You haven't felt well. You've been depressed, moody. That has reacted on your relationships with other people. That, in turn, has increased your depression and created psychosomatic conditions. The spiral continues downward. Now we're going to start it back up."

Her thanks were almost incoherent.

"I'm certifying you for minor plastic surgery," the Hedonist added. He studied her drab, gray skirt and blouse. "And we're going to get you out of those clothes and into something bright and revealing. Don't worry now. You're in my hands. You're going to be happy."

As he watched her leave, there was a shadow of wistfulness in his eyes. She was happy already. He wished his own problems could be solved as easily. He thought of Beth—then irritably forced his attention back to the therapy schedule.

The next patient was a man. He had a knife in his hand. "You filthy kinsey!" he screamed and launched himself across the floor.

III

A DAY AT SCHOOL

FOR a fraction of a second, the Hedonist sat in his chair, frozen, watching the revelatory contortions of the man's face as he came close. For all his seeming speed, he approached with incredible slowness. The Hedonist had time for a dozen observations, a hundred thoughts.

He identified the man: Gomer Berns, 62, recently married, a newcomer to the ward. He identified the flashing knife—an antique table instrument, honed down. He speculated about the expression and its probable motivation—

And he was out of his chair, moving with blurred speed, his hand catching the wrist of the hand that held the knife. As he caught it, he twisted. Something snapped, brittly. The knife clattered to the floor. Berns sprawled across the desk, unconscious.

The Hedonist bent to inspect Berns. He heard a faint whirring noise, but as he stooped to listen, it stopped. He frowned and continued his examination. The wrist was broken; geriatrics was not so successful with the bones. Outside of that, Berns was in good condition. He had fainted from the pain.

The Hedonist straightened up. His pulse was swift and dynamic. The world seemed sharp and vivid around him. He felt immensely competent, immensely strong, immensely alive. There was no task too great for him. He thought

again of Beth. She would have shared his excitement so completely . . .

He caught himself with a sharp thought. The exhilaration was being paid for by Berns. His emotion was antisocial. He suppressed it quickly.

Effortlessly, he scooped up the body and propped it into the diagnostic chair. The chair straightened out into a table. The Hedonist touched the under side of the edge toward him. The shadowy X-ray of the broken wrist was projected onto the wall.

A slim, metal arm raised a horizontal half-cylinder over the edge of the table. It picked up the wrist. Gently, firmly, it drew the broken bones apart and fitted them back into position as the Hedonist watched the wall picture. A tiny hypodermic jet penetrated the skin above the break. On the wall, the line between the broken bones grew cloudy. A nozzle spun a short, tight plastic cocoon around the wrist. As the table tilted itself back into a chair, the arm retreated back into the chair's base.

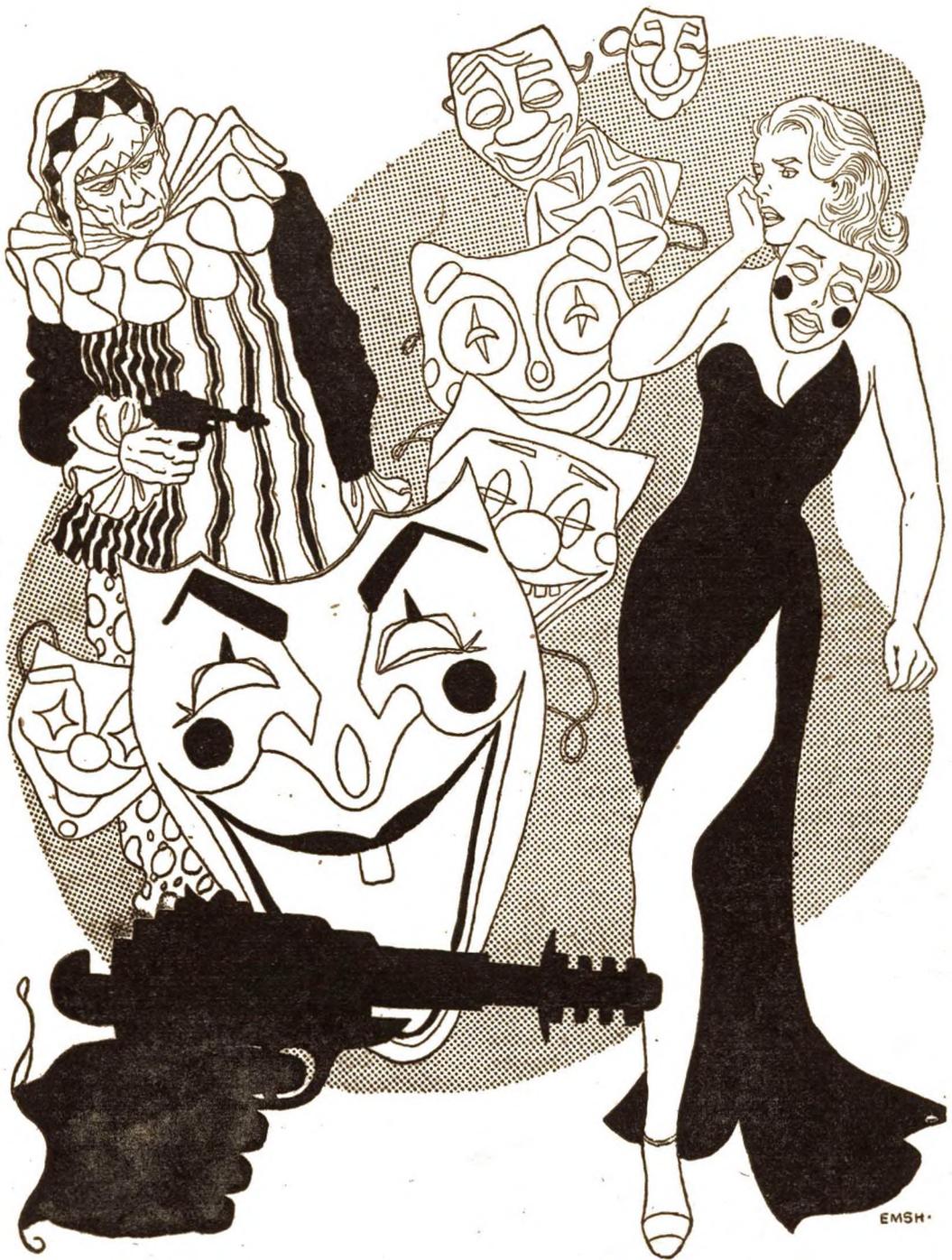
The Hedonist glanced at his watch. Berns would have to wait. The case was serious. It demanded time—a lot of it—and the Hedonist didn't have the time to spare. In five minutes he was due at the school.

He touched the desk. Berns' head twitched a little as a hypodermic forced the anaesthetic through the skin into the spinal column. Berns would have to sleep here until he got back.

Outside, the Hedonist looked back. The milky square on the door said:

THE HEDONIST IS OUT
IN REAL EMERGENCY
PUNCH WARD SCHOOL
(RRR 1764)

THE Hedonist walked through his ward in the warm, clear springtime, enjoying the pleasant heat of the sunshine on his head and back, feeling a brief moment of contentment. The ward was a field of vari-colored mushrooms set in a green meadow; each of the bubble houses had its small lawn.



EMSH

"... out of the corner of his eye, the Hedonist caught a flicker of movement. The walls of the booth fell through the floor. Behind the walls was the motley of clowns. A dozen black subduers were pointed toward them. . ."

In the thirty-by-thirty vacant lot, the long-nosed house-blower was spraying plastic over a flat-topped balloon. Eliot Digby lolled lazily in the cab, glancing occasionally at the unwavering dials. As the Hedonist passed, Eliot looked up and waved happily. The Hedonist smiled. By next week the new house would be ready for the Wayne couple. He would marry them the same day.

Basic School was a cluster of mushroomrooms in a bigger patch of green. When the Hedonist walked through the broad front door, the pretty ward nurse was waiting for him. The Hedonist smiled at her, thinking that the instruction of the boys was in capable hands.

"Joy," said the Hedonist.

"Joy," echoed the Nurse, but she looked anything but joyful. "We've had more trouble about the dispensers in the necessary."

"The neo-heroin?"

The Nurse nodded.

"How many children have bought it?"

A frown slipped down over his face.

"None," she said quickly. "I put a recorder on the dispenser, just as you said, and only one syrette has been purchased. That was by the salesman himself. But he was here this morning complaining that someone was sabotaging his sales. He said he was going to take it to the council."

The Hedonist shrugged. "If that's all—"

"But the Council has approved the manufacture and distribution," she went on anxiously. "And half the profits have been allocated to the Council. The Council has asked all the wards to cooperate, and we've been doing just the opposite—"

"The Council—the Council," the Hedonist chided. "The Council isn't some unfeeling, pre-hedonic bureau to be afraid of; it's made up of trained men, hedonists, bent only on increasing the available happiness. But it's not infallible. In this turn toward delusion, it has made a mistake. At the next Congress, the mistake will be corrected."

He was about to move on when he turned back and asked, casually, "Did you recognize the salesman?"

She beat her forehead in despair. "I couldn't think of his name. But I'll remember it."

The Hedonist smiled; a poor memory was her greatest sorrow. "Remember: anxiety is the thief of happiness." He patted her fondly and turned toward the first class.

THE morning's lessons here like a fairy tale turned upside down.

To the little ones, he said, ". . . And so the world lived happily ever after."

As he left the room, one little girl pressed against his leg and lifted up her shining face. "I love you, Hedonist," she whispered.

"I love you," he said quietly and smoothed her blond hair.

TO THE beginners, he said, "What is the greatest good?"

The class answered in unison: "Pleasure!"

"What is the basic freedom?"

"The freedom to be happy!"

"Be happy, then," the Hedonist said.

As he left the room, they were singing the familiar sixth stanza to the old folksong, "Turkey in the Straw":

*"Sugar in the gourd and honey in
the horn,*

*I never was so happy since the hour
I was born."*

TO THE secondary class, he said, "Who can tell me what I am?"

One boy held up his hand eagerly. "You're our Hedonist."

"And what is a hedonist?"

"He's the man who keeps us happy."

"Once I would have been called many things," the Hedonist said softly. "Doctor, teacher, psychiatrist, priest, philosopher, wardheeler, God-surrogate, father-image, lover symbol. But none of these did what I can do. Your definition is the best: I am the guardian of your happiness."

TO THE intermediate class, he threw questions swiftly. "What are feelings?"

The answers ran around the room consecutively:

"Feelings are unique and unspecific."

"They can't be analyzed; when we try, they disappear."

"They can apply to any mental process."

"There are only two: pleasure and unpleasure."

The Hedonist began again. "What are emotions?"

"Emotions are specific; they are connected with a particular tendency to action."

"They are the result of blocked conations; conations are our striving to get the things we want."

"Our feelings are directly conditioned by the success or failure of our conations."

"And the moral of this," the Hedonist concluded, "is that we should want the right things—the things we can get. That is the royal road to happiness."

TO THE advanced class, he said, "Once upon a time does not always begin a happy story. It can describe the real world we left behind us."

Violent, painful desire, doomed to frustration. A rapidly diminishing area of possible satisfaction. Inevitable, daily tragedy.

Want more! Be more! The pre-hedonic world puffed stale air into the balloon of desire; people were overpaid to increase demand. Buy! Own! Enjoy! And slyly the frustrations waited with their pins in hand: laws, social pressures, economics, physical impossibilities.

Illusions. "There's plenty of room at the top; only the bottom is crowded." Fallacy. Dangerous, deadly.

"Teach me to earn so that I may buy so that I may ease this torment of desire." And no one could be found to say, "Teach me to live so that I may be happy."

Poor, tortured world! World of trag-

edy, doomed to periodic violence, priding itself on being free.

Free. Free to make each other miserable. Free to drive each other to insanity and crime. Free to kill in mass and individual slaughters. Free to develop such stress diseases as stomach cramps, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, duodenal ulcers, hypertension, heart disease, ulcerative colitis, and diabetes. Free to fret themselves into an early grave.

In 1950, thirty-three men out of every one hundred thousand in the United States committed suicide. That was freedom.

"The function of government is, and of right ought to be, the preservation and promotion of the temporal happiness of its citizens," the Hedonist quoted.

The girl stood up, straight as a young elm. "The Declaration of Hedonism. December 31, 2003."

"What was the April Fool Amendment?"

"The Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution came about three months later. It made hedonism the law of the land."

IV

HAPPINESS IS PRACTICAL

AS THE Hedonist followed the winding walk to the Graduate School, the Nurse caught up with him.

"I've thought of the name," she panted happily. "It's Berns. Gomer Berns. . ."

The Hedonist carried the implications with him through the rest of his morning's duties. He stood in front of the Hedonic Mural and turned it over slowly with part of his mind while he went through the discussion with the Graduate students.

Hedonics hadn't happened overnight. The philosophical consideration went back more than two thousand years. The Greeks asked themselves the question: what is the greatest good? The answer

was "pleasure." The philosophy was hedonism.

Hedonics was, above all, practical. It worked. But philosophy was only one leg to the stool.

Means had to become available to relieve the great psychological anxieties: death, sickness, hunger, cold, and the social relationships.

Geriatrics had reduced the fear of death. Medical research had largely wiped out sickness. No one needed to go hungry while chlorella surged through the polyethylene tubes and the sea fixed 135 billion tons of carbon every year. No one needed to go without shelter when houses could be built overnight.

Social relationships had been complicated by antiquated morals and laws; its artificial barriers were guarded by society's policeman—the conscience, which punished the instinctive desires. The barriers were torn away, the laws were rewritten, and the policeman's badge was torn away.

Research into the physiology of the human body brought out the exact relationship between the glands and the emotions and slowly brought them under conscious control: the adrenals, the pituitary, and the hypothalamus. The development of that control into something effective and invaluable was the function of the hedonic exercises; they occupied a large part of the Graduate School curriculum.

But the final development of hedonism as a way of life waited on the discovery of the hedometer, which brought statistical significance into the introspective fields of psychology and philosophy. The simple device, which worked through an application of the psychogalvanic reflex, became an integral part of every room, and its constant reports made possible a nationwide application of the axiom: "That action is best which procures the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers."

The wisdom the Hedonist tried to impart to the Graduate students was dia-

grammed upon the wall behind him.

The Hedonic Mural. To the left, a valley; to the right, a mountain. At the bottom of the valley was a low-pressure mattress; a man was asleep on it, curled into a fetal position. At the top of the mountain was a naked woman, her arms held out invitingly.

They were symbols, of course. The valley was *Reduced Desire*. The mountain was *Increased Satisfaction*. There are two ways to be happy: want less or get more. It was as simple as that.

There were trails leading to the top of the mountain. Signposts pointed out the way; they were hedonic techniques: *Modify* and *Substitute*.

There were four paths into the valley: *Substitute*, *Devalue*, *Project*, and *Suppress*.

The valley and the mountain. And the mountain, attractive as it seemed, was relatively worthless. Reality will allow only a very limited amount of modification; population increases, limited as control measures had made them, had rationed the amount to the point of insignificance. If a man allowed his happiness to depend on it, he was dooming himself to frustration.

In the valley of hedonic discipline was found the heart of hedonics, untouched and untouchable. Its techniques made man independent of environmental vagaries.

"As long as we have these techniques available," the Hedonist concluded, "nothing—no one—can make us unhappy. Like gods, we hold our happiness in our own hands."

BERNS was still unconscious, but the neutralizer quickly made him stir in the chair. His dark, deepset eyes opened and stared blankly at the Hedonist. Slowly, they drew memory from a secret place.

His face twisted. His right hand groped, lifted—Pain twitched across his face. He stared down at the cast on his wrist. Tentatively he wriggled his fingers.

The Hedonist stooped and picked up the knife. He looked down at it for a moment. He handed it to Berns, hilt first. "Is this what you're looking for?" he asked politely.

Berns licked his lips. "Yeah," he said. He took the knife and then held it awkwardly as if he couldn't decide what to do with it.

"Why do you want to kill me?" the Hedonist said quietly.

"Because," Berns said. "Because of what you done to me."

"And what's that? Whatever it is, if I can help—"

"What's done's done," Berns said suddenly.

"That's a pre-hedonic attitude," the Hedonist said. "It isn't what happens that's important; it's how that affects us. But what are you talking about?"

"My wife," Berns said. "I'm talking about her."

The Hedonist remembered. Just before moving to the ward, Berns had married one of his dependents—a young girl, not quite out of her teens. There was nothing basically wrong with that. Geriatrics had kept Berns' body young. Hedonics should have done the same thing for the man who lived inside. And yet—Berns had attacked him with a knife.

Dani Farrell. The Hedonist remembered her. A quiet girl, a quick, interested student. With her, hedonics had worked well. She was a happy woman, not deep but sound. He had never expected complaints.

"What's the matter with Dani?" the Hedonist asked.

"You know." Berns's eyes slid away.

"She's made you unhappy?" the Hedonist asked.

"Not her—*she's* all right!"

"Then what is the matter?"

"She knows too much," Berns blurted out.

"You're complaining about that? See here," the Hedonist said with sudden suspicion, "is there something wrong with your sexual adjustment?"

Berns shifted uneasily. "That's what I'm complaining about. With my first wife, it took years. Dani didn't come to me—well—innocent!"

"Innocent!" the Hedonist exclaimed. "You mean 'ignorant.' You're objecting to her education!"

"Some things," Berns said, glowering. "a man should attend to personal."

The Hedonist's face grew stern and then was molded by compassion. The man was sick. He had missed the benefits of a hedonic education, and his previous hedonist had been lax or overworked.

He straightened up. These ante-hedonics cases were tough, but he had cracked them before. "What you want," he said slowly, "is the right to make yourself unhappy and Dani miserable for an outmoded, demonstrably false set of values."

"Well," Berns asked defiantly, "what's wrong with that?"

The Hedonist glanced down at the desk and back up. "It's antisocial," the Hedonist said quietly. "Society can't permit it."

"This is a free country, ain't it?" Berns demanded. "A man can be unhappy if he wants to be, can't he?"

"No!" the Hedonist thundered. "That myth has exploded fifty years ago. The basic freedom is the freedom to be happy. Society must preserve it above all the others, because without it the others are worthless."

"The way I look at it," Berns said sullenly, "it ain't a freedom unless a man can do something else."

The Hedonist shook his head slowly, patiently. He would have to start from the beginning. "If people had the right to be unhappy, they would threaten the happiness of everyone else. Men don't live in a vacuum. Fundamentally, perhaps, everyone has the right to go to hell in his own way, but there are boundaries beyond which a man can't go without injuring his neighbors. That's society's business—establishing those boundaries and setting watchdogs to

guard them. When a man crosses them, he becomes a criminal."

"But that don't explain Dani," Berns said.

"Be sensible, man," the Hedonist demanded. "Would you have us teach a girl all the domestic and marital accomplishments except the one that's most important to the happiness of her marriage? Vital training like that can't be left to anyone. You're no hedonist. What are your qualifications as a teacher?"

"I'm going to file suit," Berns muttered. "You've infringed on my happiness."

The Hedonist exploded. "You've got no grounds. What's more, you've committed a criminal act. For what you've done today, I could certify you for surgery. In fact, that's my duty."

Berns looked bewildered. "You're going to operate on me?"

"You're obviously unhappy," the Hedonist pointed out. "According to society's standards, you're insane. You should be treated and converted into a happy, responsible member of society. A transorbital lobotomy is the quickest, surest method."

Berns struggled to his feet, his face twisted with fear. "No!" he said. "You can't. They won't let you—"

"They?" the Hedonist asked. "Who are 'they'?"

"People," Berns muttered.

That was a lie. "You wouldn't argue with society's right to treat the insane. But I didn't say that was what I was going to do."

Berns mumbled something indistinguishable.

"You need to understand my job," the Hedonist said. "Like me, you grew up before hedonics became part of everyday life. Like me, your training for happiness began too late, when you were already past the formative years of your childhood. For the new generation, happiness will come easy; they have been prepared for it. We have to work for it."

"How do you mean?"

"For me, it meant ten years of specialized training in the Institute of Applied Hedonics. Since then it has meant a job that is never done, the guardianship of a thousand people.

"For you, it means study, beginning this afternoon. As a salesman, I presume you can take time off?"

Berns started and then nodded. *He's afraid*, the Hedonist thought in amazement.

"Then this afternoon," the Hedonist said, as he installed Berns in the necessary on the one seat available, "you're going to observe."

But as the Hedonist left the sliding door a little ajar and returned to his desk, he thought: *Why did the man register fear when I mentioned his business?*

V

THE HEDONIST NEEDS HELP

AFTER the unusual morning, it was a usual sort of day. The stream of patients was unending, and the variety of their needs touched the Hedonist often with pathos. A man who was not a god should not have such power nor be burdened with such responsibilities.

And he wielded the power and shouldered the responsibility.

Medical treatment was easy and fast; the diagnostic chair fixed breaks and scrapes, gave immunization and curative shots, adjusted endocrine balances, prescribed diets, treated or removed cancers and tumors, tinkered with faulty organs.

The complaints and applications were more difficult: Three oldsters complained about their pensions and the high cost of living. There was one case of technological unemployment; the Hedonist arranged to have the man reeducated and reassigned and vouchered the cost to the industry concerned. There were five applications for pregnancy certificates; the Hedonist put them off as best he could: the year's quota for the ward

was already exhausted.

But the ones that took time, patience, and skill were the hedonic cases.

Case No. 1: Unfulfilled Ambition (to write tragedy).

Therapy: Devalue and Substitute ("But, if that is impossible, write if you must—I will read it, and then we will burn it together; you can't be permitted to make others unhappy").

Case No. 2: Accidental Death (of a father)

Therapy: Suppress ("Don't let casual events determine your happiness; that is something for you alone to control")

Case No. 3: Jealousy (of a husband)

Therapy: Suppress ("I can prepare an infringement suit if you like, but I ask you to think: how many times have you been to the postmarital cottage?")

Case No. 4: (Envy of a neighbor's new red house)

Therapy: Devalue . . .

They were all simple—in theory. They were all difficult in application. Not one of the cases was classic. Each one needed individual therapy.

Only one incident was disturbing. During a treatment he felt a sudden moment of dizziness. He concealed it from the patient, but he got a quick diagnosis as soon as she was gone. All the readings were normal. He was in perfect condition. He shook his head uneasily.

As 1600 approached and passed, the unease grew. The Hedonist couldn't localize it. Then, with a start, he remembered his appointment with the Council.

He remembered, too, the call he had forgotten to make. He punched Beth's number. Her mother's face appeared on the wall. A beautiful face. Only an inner maturity distinguished it from Beth's. She smiled inquiringly at the Hedonist.

"Beth," the Hedonist said. "Is she there?"

"Why, no!" She started to frown. "Beth hasn't been home for days. I thought—"

The Hedonist erased the anxiety has-

tily. "Of course. She has been here. But she went out this morning. Perhaps she's with her young man—"

"Young man?" The frown returned. "Beth hasn't any young man."

"She hasn't?" the Hedonist said blankly. "That's strange." And then hurriedly, "Of course. How stupid of me to forget!" His face cleared. He had to protect Beth's mother from worry. Almost magically, her frown was wiped away.

The Hedonist stared at the blank wall for a minute after she said good-by. He could deceive her, but he couldn't deceive himself. Beth had lied to him. There had to be a reason for it. After a little concentration, he began to believe it.

He walked to the necessary in two strides and slid the door back. The cubicle was empty. He stepped into the little room and turned around dazedly. There was, obviously, no one in it except himself. No one could have squeezed into the room when he was there.

And yet Berns was gone. The man was gone, and the Hedonist had not left the room, and Berns could not have brushed past him in getting to the only exit unless he was invisible—

The Hedonist remembered the moment of dizziness.

A time-lapse grenade!

He hunted around on the floor until he found the few shreds of plastic left from the explosion of the gas container. He turned them over slowly in his hand.

Berns was gone. Why? He had obtained a time-lapse grenade. How? He had used it to leave the room without being seen. Why? When? The Hedonist estimated the time he had felt dizzy. It had been almost an hour ago.

For once the hedonic techniques were no good. This was no time for suppression, devaluation, substitution. He had to think and think clearly. Very soon he might have to modify the outer reality, and he needed facts to guide him.

But there were so few facts. The rest was assumption. Berns was only partly what he seemed to be. His story was

only partly true. He had some relationship with the Council, and the Council had summoned the Hedonist on the day that Berns had attacked. Berns would have to be reported and certified.

The Hedonist filled out a certification form and backdated it to the time Berns was installed in the necessary. He hunted through the cabinets behind the wall panels until he found what he wanted. He pressed them against his chest and back under the shirt, slipped a small disk into his pocket, and turned toward the door.

The idling cab was waiting two feet above the street. It was 1615, as the Hedonist looked back at his door to check the milky square:

THE HEDONIST IS UNAVAILABLE
FOR EMERGENCY TREATMENT
SEE WARD 482 HEDONIST

He climbed up into the helijet. The rotors sighed overhead.

"Where to?" the cabbie asked softly.

"Hedonic Council Building," the Hedonist said, staring curiously at the red cap covering the cabbie's head.

The cabbie swung around. "Great sorrow, man! You aren't going there!"

The Hedonist stared at the cabbie's face, stunned.

It was Beth.

"WHAT are you—I mean—how did you—?" the Hedonist spluttered.

"I rented the heli—"

"But you're under age!"

"I forged an IDisk," Beth said impatiently, her dark eyes brilliant.

"Forged!" the Hedonist repeated slowly. He rejected the word automatically. He couldn't believe that one of his young people could have committed a criminal act, and it was impossible to forge an identity disk. The plastic locket with its radiation-sensitive heart of phosphate glass could not be duplicated. Or so he had always believed.

"See here," he said, struggling to get off the defensive, "you said you were getting married—"

"I am," she said with quiet determination.

"Your parents don't know about it!"

"Oh, I haven't told them."

"I suppose," the Hedonist said with quiet sarcasm, "that you haven't told the man either."

"He knows," she said softly. "But he doesn't believe it yet."

"You lied to me." In spite of himself, the Hedonist's voice sounded hurt.

"You poor, blind fool!" Beth said desperately. "Look! It doesn't matter. Not now. The only thing that matters is to stay away from the Council. Don't keep that appointment!"

"The appointment!" the Hedonist exclaimed. He looked at his watch. It was 1620. "I've got to hurry."

"That's what I'm trying to—"

"Are you going to take me?" the Hedonist asked, "or shall I call another cab?"

"Oh, I'll take you," she groaned, swinging around to the front. She punched the buttons expertly. With a muffled roar, the heli rose vertically. When it reached two thousand feet, the jets cut off at the rotor tips and the rear jets cut in. They streaked toward the Old City, rising like a picket fence on the horizon.

The only sound in the cabin was a gentle vibration. The Hedonist sat silent, turning words over and peering under them: forgery, deceit, disrespect. Was the younger generation capable of this? If these hedonically trained young people were not free from immoral and criminal tendencies, then hedonics was a failure.

"How did you know," he asked, "that I was going to the Council Building?"

"I've been watching all day."

"Spying!" the Hedonist said with horror in his voice.

She shrugged. "If you want to call it that. A good thing, too."

"What do you mean?"

"That man. The one who called himself Gomer Berns. He was an agent of the Council."

An agent. The Hedonist tasted the word gingerly. It had extensions and implications. "How do you know?"

"He's been watching you for days. And I've been watching him. He's talked to the Council secretary three times, once in person. Then, today, he staged this scene."

"How do you know what he was talking about?"

"I wired the cottage days ago," she said disgustedly. "When he tossed out the grenade and sneaked away, I was afraid it might be something more deadly. Then I realized what it was. I followed him, but I wasn't quite quick enough."

"For what?"

"He'd already dropped the tape into the mail tube."

"Tape?"

Beth reached onto the seat beside her and flicked something over the back of the seat into the Hedonist's lap. He picked it up and frowned at it. It was a flat, opaque, plastic box about half an inch deep, two inches wide, and three inches long. The back was sticky. He turned it over. Projecting a fraction beyond the box was Berne's clear, plastic IDisk.

He turned it back over, bewildered. Something clicked and moved under his fingers. The box fell open. Inside was a tiny empty reel; there was a spindle for another. Printed circuits, were a maze against the plastic.

The thing was a miniature recorder, equipped to pick up both sight and sound. The lens—for some reason—had been disguised as an IDisk. Gomer Berns's IDisk.

"Where did you get this?" he asked suddenly.

"Where do you suppose?"

A sudden flash of apprehension turned the Hedonist's stomach cold. "You said he *was* an agent. What did you—"

"He's dead," Beth said calmly.

control, and then his hedonic reflexes caught him and set him firmly back in place. His pulse slowed, his adrenals stopped discharging. "You killed him," he said.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It was an accident, I suppose," she said thoughtfully, "although I can't say for certain. I was mad enough to kill him. I tried to stop him from dropping the tape, you see, and he pulled out a knife. The cast made him clumsy. When I twisted his arm, he stabbed himself."

"Go back! Quick!" the Hedonist shouted. "He might still be alive."

She shook her head. "He's dead all right."

The Hedonist groaned and passed his hand over his face. "I'll have to certify you for surgery," he heard his voice staying distantly. "No!" he told himself, sitting up straight again. "I can't do it."

Beth sighed. "I was hoping you would say that. It's all right. Nobody saw me."

The Hedonist shuddered. He couldn't believe the immorality he was hearing. "You'll have to undergo treatment," he said nervously.

Beth laughed. "All you want."

The Hedonist looked down at his hands. He still held the recorder. He shuddered again, pressed the button that reeled down the right window, and tossed the plastic thing through. He watched it spin through the air until it disappeared below. He wiped his hands on his shorts as if to cleanse them of an invisible stain. *Forgery, deceit, theft and murder.* But the stain would not come off. It was his fault. It was his duty to protect the bewildered girl. For a wild moment he found himself thinking of how lovely she had been when they awoke only that morning—of how she looked in his scarlet pajama tops.

"Now," she said, sounding not at all bewildered, "you see why you can't keep that appointment with the Council."

He came back to reality. "Because you killed Berns?"

FOR a moment, the Hedonist wondered whether the heli had plunged out of

"No, because he was their agent. Can't you see what they're trying to do? They want to certify you—"

"They can't do that," the Hedonist protested. "I'm not unhappy."

"When they get through with you," Beth said grimly, "you will be."

"But why—they've got no reason—"

"When have they needed a reason? They want to get rid of you. Why, I don't know. But there could be a hundred reasons. For some reasons you're dangerous to them. If you want to stay alive, you've got to stop judging everyone else by yourself."

It was a web of nonsense. The Hedonist didn't believe a word of it. Beth had lied to him before without raising her blood pressure a fraction of a point. She was capable of anything. It had to be lies.

But there had been gelatin fragments on his floor. And he had held a miniature recorder in his hands, and it had a lens shaped like an IDisk. Or had he? Was it delusion?

He glanced at his watch: 1629.

THE Council Building was a flat-topped spire a thousand feet below. He could see the large "HC" painted across the roof. Around it were the deep, darkening canyons that separated the buildings from its shorter neighbors.

The Old City was little frequented now. Industry was decentralized into small, automatic factories near their markets, and the population had spread far out into almost autonomous suburbs. The parts of the Old City left standing were used only for the functions and services which could not be decentralized: government, major hospitals, and interplanetary commerce.

"Take me down," the Hedonist said.

"But—" Beth began, swinging around frantically.

"Down!" he repeated firmly. "I have an appointment in four minutes. I'm going to keep it." He had to accept it as reality, not delusion. But he was ready

for the Council, if he could get Beth away and out of danger.

She sighed hopelessly. "All right." She punched buttons savagely. The rear jets cut out. They dropped in a long swooping descent that clutched the Hedonist's throat, but at the last minute the rotor's tip jets caught and the heli dropped lightly to the roof.

The little devil! the Hedonist thought. *She did that on purpose.* "Go home!" he said, stepping down from the cab and standing on the roof. The rotors twisted slowly above his head. "Tell your mother to give you an alibi for the time of Berns' death."

"An alibi?" she asked. "What's that?"

The diabolical innocent! "A statement that you were home at that time. She's to lie about it. Tell her I said so. And tell her to make herself believe that it's true. As for you—Don't worry! I'll take care of everything."

"Yes, Hedonist," she said obediently.

"Now get out of here!" he said brutally. "I don't want to see you again." He knew he was lying and the knowledge troubled him. He did want to see her again.

He stepped back before he could see the expression on her face, and he watched the heli lift from the roof. The rear jets caught quickly with an orange flame that swiftly turned blue and then became a mere wavering of the air.

Except for him, the paved roof was empty. The Hedonist turned and walked to the elevator housing. As he approached, the doors slid open. He stepped in, turned to face the front, and the doors began to close.

"Twent—" he began, but before he had finished, the car started down.

The Hedonist counted the floors as they flashed by. He counted backwards from seventy-five, swiftly, for the drop was faster than the one in the heli. When he reached thirty-two, the car slowed suddenly. "Thirty-one," he counted. "Thirty. Twenty-nine."

On that number, the elevator stopped. The Hedonist considered the implica-

tions. Without instructions from him, the elevator had brought him to the twenty-ninth floor. That was true efficiency. But then the Council was efficient.

The door remained closed. It refused to open. The Hedonist looked at his watch: 1633. When the sweep second hand reached the top of the dial and went a little past, the doors parted.

Real precision, the Hedonist thought, and stepped out into a deserted hallway.

There were doors on both sides of the corridor, but 2943 was opposite the elevator. There was a sign on the door. Like his own, it said: COME IN. AND BE HAPPY.

On the door at waist level was a button. The Hedonist shrugged and pushed it. The door slid open. The room beyond was an ordinary waiting room, well-lighted, neat. Chairs lined each wall. Beside an inner door was a desk. The room was deserted.

The place was silent. Completely, absolutely silent. The only sound the Hedonist could hear was his breathing and the internal workings of his body.

He stepped into the room.

He stepped into bedlam.

VI

THE BEDLAM TEST

THE sound was deafening. That was the first thing he noticed. Or, no, it wasn't the first thing. The sound was even louder because his eyes had squeezed shut automatically at the first flash of brightness. He waited and felt behind him with one hand. The wall was smooth. The door was closed.

The noise, he thought, was a recording of every sound ever made. He could hear drums, hammers, a chorus of machines; he heard raspings, scrapings, gratings, screeches, horns, explosions, voices screams, shouts.

He concentrated on identifying the sound, not shutting it out. It seemed to cover the whole range of audibility,

from 15 cycles per second to more than 20,000 cycles. It was loudest, though, in the middle high tones. That was natural enough. The ear was most sensitive for those frequencies.

Question: was the sound objective or subjective?

Unless it had been set off by his stepping into the room, it had to be subjective. Not even the finest interrupter could phase out everything. And he hadn't heard a sound.

Ordinarily, the tympanic muscles would have contracted reflexively to protect the inner ear. They hadn't. Presumption: his sensitivity had been increased or the receptors of the inner ear themselves were being stimulated.

He concentrated on the 1,000 to 4,000 cycle range and reduced the sensitivity of the ear. Slowly the sound diminished. What he had been hearing was the molecular motion of the air particles itself.

He could hear the voice now. He tried to distinguish the words. Slowly he made it out.

"This is a test," the voice said. "Find your way to the inner room. When you open that door, the test will be over. The test can be discontinued any time you wish. If you desire to do so, lie down on the floor and cover your eyes and ears."

The Hedonist did not even consider the possibility. It was not only against his nature to surrender, but he suspected that passing the test was vital.

Slowly he opened his eyes, squinting to keep down the intolerable glare. But the light had dimmed. As he opened his eyes wider, the light flared up, and the eyes snapped shut. He opened them a slit; the light was dim and gray. He opened them a little wider; the light blazed. The light—or his sensitivity to it—was keyed to the width his eyes were opened. After a little experimentation, he discovered the optimum width which admitted the most light without risking blindness.

The room had changed. It was no

longer a waiting room. It was his own room, and he was leaning so far backward that he was going to fall over into the necessary. He caught himself and straightened up and almost pitched forward on his face.

Illusion, he told himself. *The room tilted, not me.* But it was more difficult to convince his eyes of their mistake.

Which way had the inner door been when he looked into the room from the corridor? If this was the same room, and his senses brought him only illusions, the door was directly in front of him about four paces. He hadn't moved.

He felt behind him again to make sure. His hand dipped to the wrist in semi-liquid slime. He smelt a strong odor of decay.

He pulled out his hand, resisting the impulse to shake off the slime, and took one step forward, concentrating on the testimony of his semicircular canals and the sense organs in the muscles, tendons, joints, and skin. The room blinked and changed.

HE WAS on a blue desert. The sand was harsh and gritty under his feet. The scorching wind picked it up and threw it against his face and into his eyes. He could taste it, strong and alkaline, between his teeth. Overhead a huge, orange sun burned down on him.

The Hedonist ignored everything. He didn't blink or rub his face or eyes or try to cover his head. He knew what he was experiencing now. This was the senses without the cumbersome equipment they needed. This was sensation transmitted to the nerves themselves. But as long as he refused to believe in the reality of the illusion, he had beaten the test.

Question: what would the next scene be?

Something stirred behind one of the blue dunes. The Hedonist didn't wait to find out what it was. He took another step, concentrating, as before, on the kinesthetic report of his leg and hip muscles to keep him moving in a straight

line.

The floor rocked under him. It quivered like gelatin. It was insecurity. There were tall buildings all around him. They were tumbling. He could smell dust in the air. Great masses of masonry were shaken from the buildings by the earthquake, and they fell toward him, turning, growing larger . . .

HE TOOK another step. Now he was falling. He was turning and twisting through the air, hurtling toward the distant pavement. Air became resistant, buffeted him, tugged at his clothes. The pavement came up to meet him. . .

He took another step. Everything went black. He stood still, trying to see and there was nothing to see, trying to pierce the meaning of the illusion. Or was it an illusion?

The fears the test had played on had not been the learned fears but the old fears, the instinctive ones: the familiar twisted, the completely alien, falling things, and the firm Earth shaking, falling. Baby fears, never forgotten.

What now? Only the dark?

Close to the floor, something hissed. Something moved over his foot, slowly. Something long and thin. There was a second hiss. A third. Things brushed against his bare legs.

Snakes! the Hedonist thought. *Snakes in the dark!*

Slowly they became luminescent. They glowed in the darkness, lifting in front of him, weaving wickedly. They were all colors: green, red, blue, violet, yellow, orange. One of the snakes was poisoning itself to strike.

The Hedonist reached out and pressed its diamond-shaped head.

The door opened.

THREE men were sitting at the far end of a long table. They looked young, but the youngest of them, the Hedonist knew, was ten years older than he was. They had been the first men elected to the Council; they had held office ever since.

The room was big and windowless, paneled in dark, imitation wood. On the right wall was a door, which should be a necessary. There was a faint glimmering in the air in front of the Council. It could be nothing else but a missile-barrier. It would be airtight, too. The Council was being very careful.

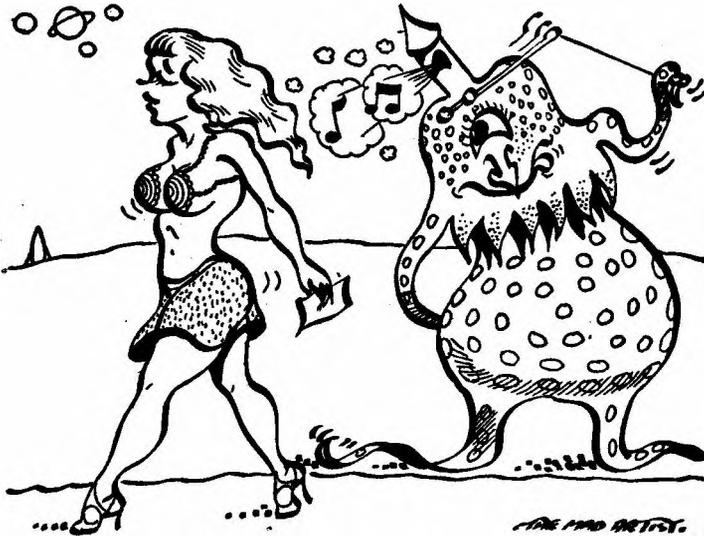
The chairman sat at the very end. He had a pleasant blond face. He was a simple, not particularly intelligent man, who could never have become a hedonist

lessly, "who cannot control himself, cannot help his patients."

"A truism," the Hedonist agreed.

"Look," the chairman said, and moved his hand.

The Hedonist was looking at himself. He was standing just inside the waiting room, his eyes closed. He opened his eyes, blinked several times, and leaned forward and then upright. A little awkwardly, but not too slowly, he walked across the floor. He reached out



except by legislation.

To his left was the treasurer, a dark, brooding man of unfathomable moods. The Hedonist would have liked to have had him in his diagnostic chair for a few minutes.

To the chairman's right was the secretary, a blank, nondescript, expressionless person, but the Hedonist received a subtle impression of tremendous control. He was the one to watch.

"Joy, hedonists," the Hedonist said cheerfully. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"Sit down," said the treasurer, motioning to the chair.

"A hedonist," the secretary said tone-

and pressed the button on the door. He vanished. The experience had taken less than a minute.

The Hedonist looked at the Council. That was it, then. They had wanted evidence for a sanity trial. There was no indication of outside stimulation. If he had reacted to the illusion or if he had given up, he would have been lost. But they had won nothing.

"Are you happy, hedonist?" the chairman asked.

"Certainly," the Hedonist said. "I presume that this is being recorded."

The chairman nodded curtly.

"What kind of job have you been doing in your ward?"

"A man is his own worst critic," the Hedonist said modestly. "But if you must have an answer, I think my work has been adequate. But you have better indicators than that. What has my ward averaged on the Hedonic Index? For the record."

There was a moment of silence. "Ninety-seven," the secretary said.

The Hedonist was surprised. "So high? I've done a better job than I thought."

"You haven't certified anyone for surgery in more than a year," the treasurer pointed out.

"There you're mistaken," the Hedonist said. "I certified someone this morning." He glanced casually at the three faces at the other end of the table. "A man named Gomer Berns." At least he had that on the record.

Two faces were politely interested; the secretary blinked once, impassively. "So?" he said. "We haven't received the certification yet."

"No doubt it's being processed," the Hedonist said easily.

"No doubt," the secretary said. "An interesting statement, in view of this." His hand slid along the arm of his chair.

This record wasn't as realistic as the other. The film flickered, and the sound wavered. But it was interesting. It was a record of the Hedonist's day as seen through the IDisk of Gomer Berns.

It started with Berns' entrance and ended with his departure under the cover of the time-lapse grenade. The Hedonist watched himself at work with a trace of self-consciousness, but he didn't have to suppress it. It vanished before the realization of the fantastic speed with which the Council had acted. The record had been edited skillfully, almost damningly.

"Interesting, eh?" the secretary asked.

"Very. Especially as evidence of infringement of happiness. Consider this notification of intent to file—"

"Nonsense," the chairman interrupted. "The Council is immune to suit—"

"Since when?" the Hedonist asked quickly.

"Since February 18, 2054," the secretary said flatly. "You received notification of the legislation, just as every other hedonist did. If you had attended the last Congress, you would have taken part in the voting."

The Hedonist was silent. There was only so many hours in a day. It had seemed better to let the interminable Hedonic Record tapes go unheard than to leave a patient untreated and unhappy. It had seemed preferable to skip the usually uneventful Congress than to leave his ward untended for several days.

"You have abrogated the basic principles of hedonism," the Hedonist said slowly, evenly, "and hedonism cannot long survive. The moment one man or group of men is raised above the laws, the laws become worthless. The basic freedom is the freedom to be happy. Anyone who infringes upon it is a criminal, not above but beyond the laws—"

"You may stop mouthing these phrases," the secretary said quietly. "We are the guardians of their meanings. Besides—" he shrugged—"the recorder has been cut off for several seconds."

"How then," the Hedonist asked patiently, "do you hope to establish the record as authentic?"

The chairman's eyes opened wide, blue, and innocent. "We will certify it. How else?"

Above the law, above the law, the Hedonist repeated endlessly to himself. It was an accompaniment to the sound of his world collapsing around him.

"Just," the treasurer growled, "as we will certify you."

"ON WHAT grounds?" the Hedonist asked quickly.

The treasurer shrugged. "The necessary grounds. Unhappiness. Maladjustment. Malfeasance, misfeasance—"

"I'll fight it," the Hedonist told them calmly. "You can never justify the charges. Not with the Hedonic Index

of my ward."

"When a prima facie case of illegal therapy, distortion of legal therapy, or disregard of proper therapy, can be made on the basis of direct evidence," the secretary said dryly, "the Index is inadmissible and rebuttal is worthless."

"You've revoked the principle of autonomy, too," the Hedonist observed. He shook his head. "You can't standardize happiness. Every person is an individual case. Publilius Syrus said it a long time ago: you can't put the same shoe on every foot."

"It seems," the secretary said, "that you haven't read the Journal of Hedonics lately either. It explicitly analyzed, contradicted, and exposed the fallacy of your argument. The official position of hedonism has been laid down: hedonics is a true science, not an art."

"You've discovered a calculus of pleasure?"

"It's the corollary of the process you just experienced," the secretary said darkly. "We can reduce pleasure to a common denominator by reliable physical means. No longer do we have to be content with ninety-seven per cent happiness. We can achieve one hundred per cent happiness any time we wish for as long as we wish."

"By machine."

"That is the beauty of it," the secretary said. For the first time there was life in his voice. "The means are one hundred percent controllable, one hundred per cent reliable. The sensations you experienced were real and horrible; the sensations we can project can be real and wonderful. We don't need to reduce desire any longer. We can increase desire and match it with increased satisfaction. We have reached the millenium."

"But it's not real." The Hedonist shook his head grimly. "Systematized delusion. Madness mechanized. I see what you intend. Those who disobey will be punished; those who obey will be rewarded by the projector. You are bringing back the two-valued world. On

the one side, the hell of the mindless, on the other, the heaven of the mad. I wash my hands of it, gentlemen—I no longer call you 'hedonists.' I'm through with you."

"But," the secretary said evenly, "we aren't through with you. Because of your services to hedonism, we are going to be kind. You are going to have your choice of happiness: you may have your desires reduced by surgery or your satisfactions increased by the projector."

"Hobson's choice," the Hedonist muttered. He looked from face to face. They were determined to get rid of him. "But why?" he burst out. "Tell me that!"

"You've infringed on our happiness," the chairman said simply.

"I?" the Hedonist exclaimed. "How?"

"One," the chairman said, "you've cut off your ward's trade in neo-heroin. The income is vital to the proper functioning of government—"

"It's dangerous stuff," the Hedonist interrupted. "It leads to unpleasure and a reduction of real happiness—"

"Two," the chairman continued as if the Hedonist hadn't spoken, "you have been nominated for a place on this Council. If elected, you would replace one of us—and that would be unpleasure, sir!—and you would upset our plans for the future happiness of Earth.—"

"But I had no idea—" the Hedonist began. "I haven't even been to the Congress—I don't want any such—"

"Your lack of ambition is unimportant," the secretary said, shrugging, "except as it affects your own happiness." He moved his hand along the chair. "We have given you an opportunity: choose!"

"And what if I should tell you," the Hedonist said suddenly, "that I have been recording this discussion, that the record is in a safe place, and that it will not be used unless this proceeding continues?"

"It wouldn't matter," the secretary said, unmoved. "This room is shielded." He cocked his head as if he were listening. "At any rate, your cottage has just

been destroyed."

"I suspected as much," the Hedonist sighed. "And so I didn't try." His face suddenly grew pale. "Gentlemen—I find that—this discussion—has suddenly—made me ill. If you will—indicate—the necessary—?"

Automatically, in the face of the Hedonist's obvious distress, the chairman nodded toward the door in the right wall. The Hedonist pushed himself up, cupped his hand to his mouth, and staggered toward the door.

The secretary followed him with unreadable eyes. "Don't forget," he suggested, "that this is the twenty-ninth floor."

VIII

UP AND OVER

THE Hedonist nodded dumbly, miserably, slipped through the doorway as the door slid aside, and turned to close it behind him. The necessary, almost twice as big as his cubicle at home, was decorated in antiseptically clean white tile. But the door had no lock on it.

The Hedonist's face had returned, miraculously, to its normal, healthy color; his breath came quickly but easily. His hand came out of a pocket. The thin, flat disk was in it. He moved it quickly around the edge of the doorway, stopped, slid it back a few inches, and pressed it to the wall.

When he took his hand away, the disk clung to the wall. He pressed the button beside the door. The door didn't budge.

The Hedonist turned around. As he had suspected, the room had a frosted window. He slipped off one shoe, wrapped his hand in the shirt he had removed, and swung the shoe against the window with all his strength. It shattered almost explosively.

As soon as the pieces had stopped falling, the Hedonist looked through the jagged hole. The sun was gone; twilight was settling over the Old City; the

canyons were dark, shadowed places of mystery. He knocked loose some of the lower pieces and looked down. The street was a narrow ribbon below. He shuddered and drew back.

Someone started hammering on the other side of the door. They were shouting. The Hedonist couldn't make it out. Then one word came clear. The word was: Murder.

The Hedonist turned back to the window and cleared it and the narrow sill of the sharp fragments. He slipped off his other shoe, tied the two together, and hung them around his neck. There were two large flat disks on his chest and two more on his back. The Hedonist dug a finger under them and pried them loose. They left red circles on his body.

He put the shirt back on and, holding the geckopads in his hand, stepped up onto the sill. He fitted the pads on his hands and feet, making sure that they fit securely and there was no dirt or glass among the fine, rubbery cilia that made a deep-piled velvet on the underside.

He slipped his right hand and foot around the edge of the window and pressed them firmly against the smooth outside wall of the building. He supported himself by his left foot and reached out with his left hand. When it was stuck, he hung by the three pads and brought out his left foot, feeling in his back the sudden, cold weakness that was recognition of the long emptiness beneath.

He slapped his left foot against the chilly magnesium surface and hung there for a moment like a misshapen lizard. In a moment he had controlled his adrenals. He stopped shivering.

He released his right-hand pad with an upward roll and moved it—up. His left hand followed it and then his feet, one after the other. It was forty-six stories and over five hundred feet to the top; he hunched toward it like an inchworm against the utterly smooth, vertical, building face, broken only by the occasional shallow window wells.

In spite of the greater distance, in spite of the greater effort, he went up. They would be looking for him below, but they wouldn't find his body there. Before he could reach the pavement, they would be waiting with their men and restraints and surgical knives and wires. His only chance was to climb

AFTER a climb of five stories, sixty feet, he stopped to rest. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the lights below. They milled in the remote darkness like fireflies churning in a fantastic dance. Occasionally one slanted up the building face, but it never rose any higher than the broken window on the twenty-ninth floor.

At the thirty-fourth floor, the Hedonist had forty-one stories to climb. Less than five hundred feet. His muscles ached and trembled from the short climb he had made and the continual downward pull of his body as it was supported from the pads at an unnatural angle.

He wished he were thirty years younger. In spite of geriatrics, the years told on a body when a man asked too much of it.

The Hedonist sighed and slowly, painfully inched his way upward again. They would think of helis soon enough. The first one sped by him as he reached the fortieth floor. It rocketed through the dark, narrow canyon on its tail jets. Its exhaust was only a few yards away, and one of the idling rotors almost brushed him. He turned his head to watch.

Perilously, the heli stood on its side at the corner and zoomed out of sight. The Hedonist hung from the side of the building and waited for the thunder of the crash. It never came. He would have to change his plans. The helis had found him.

It would soon be back. Before then he would have to be off the exposed wall where he was like a fly waiting to be swatted. He sidled toward a window.

When he was beside the shallow well,

he loosened his right hand from its pad and undraped his shoes from his neck. There was no chance of untying them; he didn't dare let loose with the other hand. One shoe dangled as he beat against the window with the other.

The taps were feeble and ineffectual. The extra shoe bothered him, and from his suspended position, he couldn't get any force behind the blow.

A muffled roar came up behind him. He turned his head and looked back.

Fifteen feet away a heli hung from its rotors. It couldn't get much closer without battering the rotors against the building. They whirred and roared only a couple of feet from his head.

The Hedonist tried to see into the darkened cab, but the strain only made his eyes water. Then the lights came on inside. The pilot stared out at him with wide, frightened eyes. It was Beth.

HOPELESSLY, they looked at each other, separated by a gulf fifteen feet wide. It might as well have been fifty. The hedonic techniques were no good here; suppression, projection, devaluation, and substitution were worthless. The only thing that could make them happy was modification, and there was no way to modify the impassable fifteen feet that divided them or the five hundred feet of emptiness that stretched below or the hardness of the street at the bottom.

Beth made impatient motions at him. What did she want him to do?

The Hedonist couldn't figure it out. He looked down toward the distant street. A large searchlight was sweeping the width of the lower stories. Soon it would work its way up here, and they would spot him.

Longingly, he looked back at the heli. Beth was still gesturing, frantically. He understood her now: *Come here!*

Gladly, the Hedonist thought. *Give me wings, and I will fly to you.*

Beth's lips were moving. She swung open the door and motioned down at the frame. The Hedonist studied her

lips, incredulous. Again and again they framed the same word: *Jump!*

Jump? Fifteen feet? Maybe. On the ground. But fifteen feet over five hundred is another thing entirely. As a fraction, it expressed his chances of reaching the heli and hanging on. Three chances out of a hundred.

On the other hand, his chances of escape were zero if he stayed where he was. Beth was right. Three chances were better than none. The watchdogs wouldn't get him.

He redraped his shoes around his neck and walked sideways across the smooth magnesium until the geckopads were clinging to the clear window glass. He wasted only a moment on a glance down the long, bare, unattainable corridor. Break the window now, and he would fall with the shards.

He slipped his feet out of the straps and onto the ledge. He released his right hand and caught the strap and got his left hand free. Slowly, holding to the straps, he turned himself around.

The pavement was a mile below.

The Hedonist shuddered and squeezed his eyes shut. He opened them and looked out toward Beth. *Please!* she said with her lips. And: *Hurry!*

The searchlight finally jumped past the twenty-ninth floor. As it swept by it caught the Hedonist, silhouetting him against the bright window and the brighter walls, like a dark clinging beetle.

The Hedonist blinked blindly. Gradually he made out the heli again, the lighted cab and the dark outlines around it. Slowly he bent his knees until his arms were stretched full length below the pads. He let the straps go and crouched lower.

Now he was toppling forward. The action was irreversible. He was committed to the jump, and the only thing between him and the distant pavement below was the door jamb of the heli. He straightened his legs abruptly. He hurtled through the air.

He rushed toward the heli, and the

heli rushed toward him. Beth had rocked the ship to bring the cab a little closer to the building. Closer, but not close enough.

His agonized fingers missed the door jamb by inches. And he was falling, falling through the darkness, falling toward the distant pavement and death. He plunged through the thin, cold air toward the Earth that rushed up toward him to deliver the last, deadly blow. . . .

HIS arms hit something, slipped down past it. His, clawing hands caught it, held it while his body fell and came to a jerking, swinging stop that almost tore the hands loose.

The Hedonist dangled above emptiness and looked up because he could not look down. The heli was above him. He was clinging to the tubular metal landing skid. Beth's face was framed in the door above. Abstractedly, he watched the play of emotions across the face—horror changing to relief and joy and back again to concern and terror. The Hedonist swung on tiring arms and felt the heli dropping with his added weight. Beth's face disappeared for a moment. The heli lifted, leveled off. Beth leaned out again. She stretched far down from the door, but her reaching hand was two feet short of the skid.

She'll fall! the Hedonist thought, and he had a strange sensation in his chest as if his heart had turned over. He shook his head desperately.

With a sudden burst of energy, he pulled himself up until his arms were over the skid. He clung there, gathering strength. In a moment he raised a leg over the skid, sat upright, and caught the edge of the door jamb.

Beth's hand was surprisingly strong as she caught his wrist and helped him into the cab. He collapsed into the seat beside her and closed his eyes. Rapidly his breathing slowed and became regular.

"Let's get out of here!" he said.

He felt the rear jets kick in and boot the heli forward. He opened his eyes.

The dark walls of the artificial canyons reeled past.

"I thought I told you to go home!" he growled. Nothing in hedonics had ever made him so happy.

BETH'S hand, which had been reaching toward his hand, jerked back. "That's gratitude!" she said indignantly.

"Gratitude?" The Hedonist's eyes widened. "Where did you pick up a word like that? And when did you learn to expect it? Happiness is a man's right in this world, and if he has that, what's left for him to be grateful for?"

Beth was silent. Finally, distantly, she said, "I came back because I thought you might need me. You did, apparently. I couldn't go home because the watchdogs are after me. They found Bern's body."

"So I gathered," the Hedonist said thoughtfully. "Watch out for the jog!"

Beth swung her eyes to the front just in time to swerve the heli around the building that loomed up in front of them. The new canyon turned a thirty-degree angle. Slowly the buildings got lower and shabbier. They were getting farther into the Old City.

"I lost them when we reached the City," Beth said scornfully. "They didn't dare follow me down. Which way will we go?"

"The way you are," he said absently.

"But we're almost to the ruins," she objected.

"That's right."

The heli flew on in the near silence. An eery glow grew bright on the horizon, like a low aurora polaris. The luminescence was mainly green and blue but there were flickerings of violet and purple.

"You weren't as confident as you sounded," Beth said suddenly. "You had those geckopads with you."

"I'd have been a fool not to prepare for the possibility," the Hedonist said casually. "If I hadn't I would be mindless or insane by now."

"Lobotomy I can understand," Beth said. "But what do you mean by 'insane'?"

"Induced delusions," the Hedonist said heavily. "The Council has perfected the sensies. Now, they're realities. The Council is going to make Earth one hundred percent happy."

Beth shook her head slowly. "Poor, happy Earth," she murmured.

The Hedonist glanced at her silently. Anything that decreased a man's capacity for pleasure was wrong. Delusion did that. It ruined a man for reality.

Anything that took a man's happiness out of his own hands was wrong. Happiness wasn't a gift to be bestowed. It was a grail, a purely personal goal, which could only be described in general terms. A man could do that, and he could train someone for the quest and sometimes help him over the barriers, but he couldn't do it all. He couldn't find it for him and he couldn't give it to him.

The mile-wide crater swung under them, glowing phosphorescently. Mostly, as it had been on the horizon, it was blues and greens, but there were flickering patches of purple and violet, and here and there fitting wisps of yellow and orange. The crater was almost two hundred feet deep; after fifty years, it was still deadly. For three miles around the crater, the shattered spears of buildings stretched mutely above rubble, weathered a little now, its sorrow blunted.

"Take it down," the Hedonist said.

"Here?" Beth exclaimed.

"On the other side. Hurry. There's no time to waste. . . ."

The heli hovered above the rubble, lit obscenely by the luminescence behind. Beth and the Hedonist stood a few feet away.

"I thought you set it for homing," the Hedonist said, frowning.

"I did. I had to give us time to get out."

In a moment something clicked in-

side the cab. The rotors speeded up, and the heli lifted itself into the sky. It went up fast. When it was high enough, the rear jets cut in. They watched it streak off toward the rising towers they had left.

Distantly, over the City, it exploded and fell in a shower of sparks.

"They shot." The Hedonist sighed. "I thought they would. That will give us a few hours."

Beth had pulled out the IDisk that hung like a locket from a chain around her neck. It had begun to glow in gentle sympathy with the crater behind them. "Look!" she said.

"Don't worry about it," the Hedonist said. He fished two large pills out of his pocket. "See if you can get this down without water."

"What is it?"

"Cysteine, An amino acid. A radiation protective. It'll last long enough to get us out of here."

She choked down one of the pills; he swallowed the other easily. "Let's go," he said.

They walked away from the crater across the rubble. Soil had blown in, and the rocks had weathered down. Seeds had drifted down or been dropped by birds. They had sprouted. Most of the rubble was already covered by a kind, green blanket. In fifty more years, this part of the Old City would be gently rolling meadows.

"How it happened I don't understand," the Hedonist said, "but somewhere you've picked up a poor opinion of hedonics."

"No—no," she protested. "You don't understand—"

"This is what it saved the world from," he said, sweeping his hand from the ruins back toward the glowing crater. "For the warped conations of a twisted world, it substituted the only real goal—happiness, and it taught man how to find it, and how to keep it."

"What is a man profited," Beth said quietly, "if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The Hedonist stared at her in astonishment. "Where did you learn that?"

"I read it," she said. "In an old book."

"I know that. But where did you find one? It isn't on the proscribed list, exactly, but it isn't approved, either. I haven't seen one in twenty-five years."

Beth shrugged carelessly. "There are things that even the Council knows nothing about."

"So it seems," the Hedonist said thoughtfully. He did not ask what she meant, but he wondered. *How well do I know her?*

Side by side, not touching, they walked in silence over the silent mounds of the troubled past.

VIII

FUN TOWN

BETH was the first to speak. As the buildings around them slowly changed from broken stumps to dark, hollow shafts, she said, "What do you intend to do?"

"Get you someplace you won't be picked up immediately," he said slowly.

"Don't worry about me," she said impatiently. "I can take care of myself."

"Don't be foolish," he said. "I'm your hedonist. It's my duty to look after you. Do they know your name?"

"The Watchdogs? Not yet maybe. But they will. They're getting smarter."

"Getting?" the Hedonist repeated puzzledly. "Since when?"

Her furrowed face smoothed out magically. "Since recently. But what I want to know is what you're going to do. You're the one they're hunting. That trick with the heli won't fool them for long, only until they run a proteinalysis on the wreckage. Then they'll be after you again."

The Hedonist lowered his head and studied the ground. It was more than he cared to admit, but there was no evading her logic. "That's true. And there's no place to run. I'll have to get the Council overruled and its policies—"

"Folly!" she burst out. In the silence, the word was loud and startling. "How many times have you yourself pointed out the fallacy of altruism?"

"True," the Hedonist admitted. "But I am a hedonist. That makes all the difference. My life is making people happy. Would you have me turn my back on all that now? That's my happiness. I could no more stand aside and see others unhappy than I could eat while others are hungry."

"And how many times," she said quietly, have you pointed out the fallacy of special cases?"

The Hedonist was silent. The streets had become discernible. They trudged along them, and the silent shapes of the past shouldered close. The Hedonist's eyes were watchful.

They passed into an area where the buildings were sound. Among the dark, looming warehouses, light, occasional and feeble, was evidence of occupation. Twice they had to dodge the sweeping searchlights of mechanical watchmen. They were approaching the spaceport and its complex of warehouses, yards, hotels, and fun houses. They stayed close to the sheltering walls until they emerged, suddenly, into a brightly lighted cross street.

There were people here, walking briskly on business or pleasure, dressed in shorts or slacks or dresses. Some of them reeled and some of them wore masks covering their whole faces and some of them had faces like masks. No one looked at Beth and the Hedonist as they joined the traffic, even though they looked cautiously at everyone who passed.

THIS was the Strip. Here three worlds met to share their secrets and pool their pleasures, and nothing was taboo. Along this colorful, incandescent street anything could be purchased, anything could be sold.

Beth and the Hedonist stared at the riot of brilliance and color stretching into the distance and forgot, for a mo-

ment that they were fugitives from happiness.

In jumping, sparking letters, the nearest of the signs said:

JOY FOR SALE!
ALL KINDS
YOU NAME IT—WE'VE GOT IT!
THREE WORLDS FUN HOUSE

Licensed, Hedonic Council

Farther down the street were the more modest signs of hotels, restaurants, and shops. Towering above them was the blood-red sign: MARS HOUSE.

"What now?" Beth whispered.

"First, food," the Hedonist said. "I haven't eaten since breakfast. Then rest. I prescribe the same for you."

She frowned and then sighed. "All right," she agreed. "You're the hedonist. But what are you going to do about that? She pointed to the IDisk on the breast of his shirt. It was glowing brilliantly.

The Hedonist slapped his hand over the telltale radiation. "I didn't think we'd get so much." He took his hand away; the disk was gone.

"You can't walk around without one," she said.

He put his hand back to his shirt, and the disk was there again. It wasn't glowing any more. Beth looked closer. The disk was opaque, and the identification on it was meaningless.

"Turned it over," the Hedonist muttered. "Don't attract attention. It will fool anything except a close inspection, and I don't intend to get that close. Drop your locket inside your blouse."

As she obeyed, he turned her toward the door of a modest Foodomat. It was almost deserted. There was a couple at the back, but they were engrossed in each other. At the side, against the wall, a man teetered idly in a straight chair. The Hedonist inspected him with a casually sweeping glance. The staring pupils told their story. The man was deep in the fantasies of neo-heroism. He was locked up tight in his own, private paradise.

The Hedonist took Beth's arm again.

"Come on." They entered the necessary together. It was big enough for three or four people at a time. "Got your false IDisk?" he asked. She nodded. "Coins?" She nodded again, puzzled. "Go into the di-booth. Bring me the tape."

"But won't it be reported to the local hedonist?"

"Don't think so," he said. "Not in a transient area like this. But in case it is, your fake disk should confuse the matter long enough to make it unimportant."

While she went into the booth, the Hedonist took care of his own necessities and was waiting for her when she came out. She handed him the six-inch tape. He scanned it quickly.

Height, weight, temperature, BMR, urinalysis for sugar and the keto-steroid indicators of adrenal activity, refined Papanicolau cancer test—he gave them no more than a glance. He skipped over the section dealing with the external senses and the sensory network, scanned the X-ray report and the electrocardiogram, and barely noted the E.Q. The blood cell count was what interested him, the red, white, differential, and hemoglobin.

His sign was heavy with relief. He crumpled up the tape and threw it into the disposal. "Let's eat."

"Wait a minute." She put a hand on his arm. "So the radiation didn't do me any damage. What about you?"

He shook his head. "Can't take a chance. I haven't got a false IDisk. But if you're unharmed, I can't be in any danger."

She frowned but didn't say anything.

Inside the Foodomat, they walked quickly down the glass-fronted serving line, slipping coins into the slots. The Hedonist went to a table with a tray of planked plankton steak with a high-vitamin chlorella sauce and a hot milk-substitute. Beth chose a lighter meal, chiefly low-fat chlorella patties and Kafi. They ate quickly and in silence. The couple at the back finished and left,

but no one came in.

Beth and the Hedonist got up, stuffed their dishes into the disposal, and walked through the doorway. The door slid shut behind them.

"Where now?" Beth asked.

"You're going to rent us a room."

Beth's eyes met his levelly. "One room?"

"Of course," the Hedonist said, surprised. "How many do you think we need?"

WHEN they were within fifty yards of the slideway into the magnificent portal of Mars House, the Hedonist drew Beth suddenly out of the stream of traffic and into a shadowed niche. "Pretend to be interested in me," he muttered. "Put your head on my shoulder."

She put her slim arms around his neck and buried her face in the base of his throat. Her lips moved softly against his flesh.

The Hedonist felt his pulse quicken "Not so—" he began. "Not so—"

"What?" she asked in a muffled voice. Her face was cool against him.

"Never mind. The clowns are only a few yards away."

"Watchdogs?" she whispered.

They passed in motley, vivid and gay, but their faces were young and sharp and intent. In their hands were the subduers modeled after the ancient electric prodders. There was something horrible in the contrast between their unsmiling purpose and their dress.

And then they were gone; the Hedonist felt his body relax. Once more he became conscious of Beth. "Stop that!"

Her lips stopped moving against his skin. "What?" she whispered innocently.

"That! Listen, now. We won't take chances. You'll register for a single, using your false IDisk. I'll sneak into the room later. The clerk will want to know your business." He paused and thought swiftly. "Say that you're volunteering for the new Venus colony.

Got money for the deposit?"

She took her head. Her lips slid deliciously across the base of his throat, and her silky hair brushed against his cheek.

"There's a pocket inside the shirt. Money in it. Take it."

Her hand was cool and slow and sensual as it fumbled the money out of the pocket and withdrew. In spite of the Hedonist's efforts at suppression, his breathing quickened. Then she was gone, and he felt suddenly alone, suddenly cold and deserted.

She walked quickly, youthfully, to the slideway and stepped onto it. She disappeared through the rose portal without a backward glance.

"Old fool!" he said savagely, and he walked slowly toward the hotel.

The lobby was remarkably spacious. It must have been at least twenty feet square. The red resiloid floor was sprinkled with red sand that grated underfoot, and the walls were the realistic depth murals of Martian landscapes. The lobby was lighted by a Mars-size sun suspended invisibly from the ceiling. Periodically, the Hedonist understood, the sun faded out and Deimos and Phobos raced across the dark blue dome of the ceiling, the swift inner moon twice a day from west to east.

Beth was standing at the desk, talking to the clerk; as the Hedonist passed, she slid her IDisk under its scanner. The Hedonist fed a coin into the news-fax dispenser. A sheet of paper slid into his hand. He took it absently and wandered over to the elevator. It was a crude-seeming openwork model in a rough, tubular frame; behind it the wall curved shinely like the outer hull of a spaceship. The Hedonist sat down on a mocked-up luggage carrier and hid his face behind the news sheet.

Hedonic Index at 2000: 94%. Weather for tomorrow: same as yesterday, sunny and warm after the early morning shower. News bulletin: the flash noticed over the Old City at 2009 has been identified as a meteor. . .

THE Hedonist looked back at the sheet. The rest of it was hotel advertising. One of the ads said:

Visit the Exotic MARTIAN ROOM
(in the penthouse)

Against the Outré background
of the CRATER

Taste

Strange LUXURIES and Stranger DELIGHTS
"A pleasure experience without compare"

At the bottom of the sheet was the notation: *Hedonist on duty at all hours. Press 11 for therapy.*

A breeze touched his face with a familiar fragrance. Something small and light landed on his outstretched hand. Beside him, the elevator climbed quietly. The Hedonist looked up. The cage was disappearing through the blue arch of the sky. In his hand was a crumpled corner of paper. Behind the cover of the news sheet, he smoothed it out. There was a number on it: 3129. He squeezed the paper into a ball and slipped it into his pocket.

He waited five minutes, then took the elevator to the thirty-second floor. He walked down one flight, and in another minute stood outside a door marked 3129.

The corridor was empty. He rapped gently and the door slid open. He stepped inside quickly and shut the door behind him.

The room was empty.

The Hedonist searched the room frantically, but there was no possible place for her to hide. There were only eighty-one square feet to the room, and she was on none of them.

His stomach suddenly felt cold and empty, as if the meal he had eaten only a little while before had suddenly been teleported away.

"Hedonist?" she asked. There was alarm in her voice. "Is that you?"

He jumped and then sighed with relief. "Yes," he said. She was in the necessary. Now he could hear the muffled spatter of the sprays behind the door.

"I'll be out in a minute," she said.

She was. The door opened. She was dressed in something black, lacy, and

clinging, and she was brushing the damp ends of her hair. The Hedonist had never seen her look so desirable. Suddenly he wasn't tired any more. He felt young and alive again.

"Where did you get the clothes?" he asked quickly.

She brushed past him; it was an upsetting experience. She pushed the button that folded the chairs and tables into the wall and raised the bed through the floor. "Ordered them," she said carelessly. "There was money left. We need clothes that won't be recognized. There's some for you, too."

She motioned toward the luggage door. It slid open at his touch. In the compartment behind were two boxes. The Hedonist opened the top one. Inside was a dark-blue tunic and a pair of slacks. He never got to look in the other one. A thump on the floor drew him around.

On the narrow strip of floor beside the bed was a pillow. He looked at Beth, startled. "What's the reason for that?"

"That," she said sweetly, tossing a blanket down beside the pillow, "is where you're going to sleep."

"I don't understand," he said in bewilderment. "We've been sleeping together for almost a week now—"

"But that's over," she said, wide-eyed and innocent. "You said so this morning. And this is scarcely the time for therapy. Unless it's a question of *your* happiness—"

His happiness? Of course not. That was absurd. "Of course not," he said, frowning. "Only—"

"Only what?" she asked when he didn't finish.

"Nothing," he said and settled himself on the hard floor.

He turned over and over in the darkness, trying to find a comfortable place for his hip and shoulder bones.

Absurd, he said to himself. Beth was acting very strange; not like herself at all. He yawned, and a wave of relaxed weariness swept out toward the ex-

tremities of his body. Definitely not hedonic.

The bed was plenty big enough for two . . . It was soft . . . molded itself to a tired body . . . and Beth was softer. . .

IX

NAME YOUR PLEASURE!

THE Hedonist woke up. He stared into the darkness above him and tried to figure out what had awakened him. There was no sound, no movement, no odor. And yet something—*indefinable*—was different about the room.

When he identified it, it was only a little thing. He couldn't hear Beth's soft, even breathing.

He sprang up, grunting a little from the pain of sore, stiffened muscles, and switched on the lights. The bed was empty. Beth wasn't in the room. The little cubicle of the necessary was empty, too.

Beth was gone.

He slid the door open and glanced up and down the hall. It was dark and deserted. Slowly he let the door go shut, walked to the bed, and sank down on the edge.

Gone. Beth had left him. Silently, in the middle of the night, without a word, without—he glanced with sudden hope around the room, but it turned to disappointment—a note. He felt a cold, drawn-out emptiness.

Maybe she was better off on her own. Maybe he was dangerous to her. But she might have said something. He wouldn't have tried to keep her. He would have—

He suppressed the anguish, devalued the importance. She was gone. The question: what should he do now?

He glanced at his watch: 11:55. Almost midnight. Three hours since he had laid down on the floor. He had slept, he supposed, for a little more than two of those. Now, he was still tired, much stiffer, but there would be no

more sleep. He felt sure of that.

He shrugged, stripped off his underclothes, and stepped into the necessary. Steamy jets loosened his muscles; icy jets refreshed him. When he was dry, he inspected the dispensers on the wall.

Ethyloid, one of them was labeled. Three positions were available: Scotch, Bourbon, Gin. The Hedonist shook his head. He wanted to improve his ratiocinations, not dampen them. That meant, too, no neo-heroin and no mescaline. He located the spigot labeled: *Coffee*.

Not Kafi? he thought in surprise. He shrugged. No doubt it was part of the Mars House scheme of decor. He filled a cup with the dark, steaming liquid and sipped it. It was the most delicious stuff he had ever tasted.

That is one consolation, he thought wryly. *Dupont has brewed another batch, and it is the best the laboratories have ever done.*

He told himself to forget about Beth. He told himself several times. Eventually the Hedonic exercises were almost successful. Beth was pushed into a corner of his mind and imprisoned there where she could not scatter his thoughts in an unwary moment.

He concentrated on the problem of survival.

Decision: his survival depended on the overthrow of the Council.

Question: was his survival worth the price?

Answer: No, not alone; but it wasn't his life that was important; it was Earth and hedonics.

While he had been occupied with individual therapies, the Council had turned off the main road. They were in full cry down the wrong trail. The rabbit they were chasing was an illusory rabbit.

The tricked hound soon loses his eagerness for the hunt.

The Council had turned to pure hedonism. It had gone far back, to Aristippus and the Cyrenaic School: the only good is the sentient pleasure

of the moment; the true art of life is to crowd as much enjoyment as possible into every moment.

It was false, just as every extreme must be. Happiness had to prepare for the future, or there was no future for happiness. Every moment is important, not just for the happiness it contains but for the happiness it leads to.

Imaginary gratification dulled the senses and pushed every other type of satisfaction farther out of reach, becoming meaningless.

The only road was the middle road. The only hedonism was rational, the hedonism of Epicurus, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Eventually Earth would realize that. Pure hedonism could not endure. But it was important to save Earth the long detour which might, eventually, discredit hedonics itself.

But how to discredit the Council!

THERE was always the Congress, he thought. The names of fifty hedonists on a petition could call an emergency session, and while the Congress was in session every hedonist was immune from arrest and any proceedings against him.

What the Congress had done, the Congress could undo.

The Hedonist's only problem was to get fifty names on a petition. It was not a small problem: he was a hunted man.

He couldn't do it alone. He needed help. He considered the hotel hedonist only for a second. He didn't know the man, and he couldn't take chances. The first poor chance he took would be his last. He closed his eyes and ran over the list of the hedonists he knew. Suddenly he snapped his fingers and moved to the phone.

He consulted the directory on the panel beneath the screen and punched a number. There was one man he could trust: Lari.

They had gone through the Institute together. Ten intimate years of living

together and mutual analyses and shared confidences had exposed a bed-rock of character. Their chance meetings at conventions and Congresses had been infrequent, but the understanding and affection couldn't change.

He knew Lari better, the Hedonist thought, than he knew himself.

The screen grayed, then defined itself into patterns of dark and light. Lari looked up wearily from his desk, his face lined, his eyes large and dark. The Hedonist stabbed a button. The screen went dark.

"Yes?" Lari said. "Something seems to be wrong."

"It does indeed," the Hedonist said in a deep voice. "That is why I have called you. Lari, this is—this is—" For a frantic, impossible moment, he groped wildly for the name. He had not been a name for twenty-three years; he had been a position, a manipulator of people's happiness. Then he said, "Morgan. This is Morgan."

"Morgan?" Lari's voice was twisted and strange.

The Hedonist frowned, wishing he could see Lari's face, but he couldn't risk his own face on the screen.

"Where are you?" Lari asked.

"Never mind," the Hedonist said. "That isn't important. I need your help."

"Yes," Lari said heavily. "I guess you do."

"You know then?"

"Yes. Go on. What can I do?"

"Meet me. I've got to talk to you."

"Where?"

The Hedonist thought swiftly. "Interplanetary Strip. There's a fun house called the Three Worlds."

"How'll I find you?"

"I'll find you," the Hedonist said. "Will you come? Now? I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't—"

"I'll come. In half an hour."

"Good. See you then."

The Hedonist turned off the screen and looked around for his clothes. They were gone.

HE FOUND his IDisk on the floor beneath the disposal; it had stopped phosphorescing. He held it in his hand and stared around a room that, except for the discarded underclothes on the floor, was as bare as he was. Then he thought of the luggage compartment.

The door was a little ajar. Inside there was one box. In it were the blue tunic and slacks and sealed packages of disposable underwear, socks, and shoes. He slipped into them quickly. In his preoccupation, he almost didn't hear the noise outside the door.

It was a scuffing sound. The Hedonist stared at the door and silently flicked the button that locked it. He scooped up the box and his discarded underclothes and stuffed them down the disposal. He noticed the cup, and that followed. He noticed the IDisk in his hand and stuck it on the tunic, backwards again.

Now to get out. He stopped, stricken. There was no way out. Mars House was newer than the Council Building. The hotel had no windows; even if it had, his geckopads were gone.

Someone tried the door and found it locked. The Hedonist glanced frantically around the room. He, could, he supposed, hide in the bed, but the floor recess would be searched.

"Open the door," someone shouted. "In the name of the Council. Joy!"

Watchdogs! In two silent steps, the Hedonist was beside the luggage compartment. He slid back the door and wedged himself into the box, his knees doubled up against his chest. He felt like a fetus. He let the door slip shut until there was only a hairline crack letting light and air in to him.

There was a moment to think. How had they found him? The only answer that came to him was: Beth!

No! He refused to believe it. Not Beth. And yet—Beth had sneaked away while he was asleep. But if she wanted to turn him in, why should she have rescued him from his precarious position clinging to the outside of the Coun-

eil Building. Unless—she had changed her mind and had decided to turn him in to save herself.

No! Not Beth! And yet—she had deceived him before.

The odor of burnt plastic drifted into the box with him. Something slammed nearby. Feet tramped into the room. Bright motley crossed in front of the crack. It turned, searching the room. There was a subduer in its hand, like a two-foot ebony club.

The brief whir of machinery told him that the bed was being raised. The feet clomped impatiently, in and around. The Hedonist watched the crack intently, hardly daring to breathe. Suddenly, very close and huge, appeared fingers, reaching. . .

The Hedonist jerked his hand back. The door clicked shut. The box fell out from under him. He dropped, fast. He clutched his hands tight against his sides. They could be scraped off against the wall of the chute. He fell in utter darkness. He was afraid.

A giant palm pressed him down, forced the breath from his body, flattened him against a hard, smooth board, tried to mash him, squash him, break him. The darkness turned red and then became black again. . .

THE Hedonist opened his eyes. His legs were dangling into emptiness. There was a little light filtering past them, and he twisted himself around so that he could look out of the box without committing himself to leaving it.

He was at the bottom of the chute. Radiating out from the box in all directions were endless rubberoid belts, lighted only by the dim radiance of machines looming beyond. He was in the service cellar.

Something pressed against his back, pushing him out of the box. He grabbed the edges and tried to hold back, but it was futile. Unceremoniously, he was dumped onto one of the belts. It complained at his weight, but it started him

toward a distant and unknown destination.

The Hedonist slid his legs over the edge and dropped to the floor three feet beneath. He stood still for a moment, studying the pattern of moving belts and chattering machines. One of the machines had lights flashing inside it. They flashed in sequence, and it clucked to itself as if it were counting.

The Hedonist looked it over quickly. There were thirty-five bulbs, and the one that was lighted for a moment was nineteen from the end. He grabbed the handle of the heavy switch on the front of the machine and pulled it open. The machine went dark and silent. He hoped that it had controlled the elevator.

The service cellar was a maze. Tunnels and narrow passageways led here and there with apparent aimlessness, ending abruptly, twisting, turning. The belts took up so much floor space that the Hedonist spent most of his time crawling under or climbing over. The cellar wasn't meant for men.

At last he found a stairway that wound upward in a tight spiral. He ran up the steps quickly. After two turns he saw a glowing button in the curved wall. He pressed it. The wall swung aside. The Hedonist walked out into the hotel lobby.

It was dark and empty. The sun had set. Phobos was moving swiftly across the sky toward the east.

He was beside the elevator framework. Distantly, he heard a ghostly voice. "Hel-l-l-l-p!" it said. ". . . stuh-uck!"

The red sand gritted under his feet as the Hedonist smiled and walked out into the brilliant night.

MONEY was a problem. Beth had taken all the money he had. The Hedonist solved that one by picking up a dime on the street. He walked into the glittering entrance arcade to the Three Worlds Fun House and studied the slot machines. Finally he slipped the coin into a dexterity game.

The machine was an enclosed cylinder separated into ten horizontal compartments by transparent, bright, colored disks. In the center of each disk was a hole diminishing in size from the bottom to the top. At the sloped bottom was a hollow plastic ball. Three jets of compressed air lifted it through the holes in the disks, and the intensity of each jet was controlled by a key on the front. The object of the game was to raise the ball as high as possible before it toppled into one of the compartments.

The first time the Hedonist got back his dime. The second time he worked the ball clear to the top and hit the jackpot. He scooped the dimes into the tunic pocket and walked to the next machine. It was a tone analyzer.

Within the range of the machine, the Hedonist could hear a compound tone. It was faithfully duplicated on a screen by a swirl of colors. As the Hedonist analyzed the tone into its components of frequency, intensity, wave form, and phase, the colors separated into a prismatic layer arrangement.

By the third trial, the Hedonist had corrected for the machine's inevitable distortion and collected the jackpot. The whole business had taken four minutes.

It was not as difficult as it seemed. The machines were skills for the more expensive pleasures inside; they weren't set for a high return. Being public, too, they would never be approved by the Council if they produced too much unpleasure. Most significant, however, was the Hedonist himself. Sensory analysis and its corollary, dexterity, were his business. He had spent years on more difficult exercises than these.

Weighed down by more than fifty dollars in change, the Hedonist walked into the fun house. The clear doors swung open in front of him. When they swung shut behind, the lights went out.

There was a disturbing moment of disorientation, as if he were floating aimlessly in space. It didn't help to identify the cause: an interrupter automatically canceling the wave-lengths of

light that should have reached him. Laughter poured in on him from all sides. Suddenly an apparition appeared in front of him.

It was a satyr with stubby hooves and shaggy legs and sharp little horns. Its red, sensual lips were curled into a joyful grin and its eyes were alight with laughter and lust. It hung upside down from the ceiling.

"Joy, sir, joy!" it cried. "Welcome to the Three Worlds. Name your pleasure. If it exists anywhere on the three worlds, you will find it here. What will you have?"

Before the Hedonist could speak, the satyr had disappeared. In a wink, it was back, floating horizontally.

"Joy, sir!" it shouted gleefully. "What will it be? Gambling?" He swept out an arm expansively, and a doorway opened in the darkness. The Hedonist saw glitter and movement and brilliance, fantastic machines doing incomprehensible things. "The very latest devices, sir. Eight out of every ten players leave winner."

"It's surprising you can afford to remain open," the Hedonist commented wryly.

"It's a rich man's pleasure, sir," the satyr said quickly with a contagious laugh. "What shall it be? Sensies? We have all the latest tapes, sir. And many that won't be released to the public for months. There is no limit to what the sensies can give you, effortlessly." His voice dropped. "We can even offer you—real pain! Smuggled. Very rare and expensive. What will it be?"

The satyr and the pathway snapped out of existence. When the satyr reappeared, it was still horizontal, but its head and feet had been reversed.

"Joy, sir! How can we please you? Will it be girls?" As it spoke, doors opened in the darkness; behind each door was a girl, posed expectantly. "We have all kinds: amateurs and professionals, ice-maidens and nymphs; short ones, tall ones, thin ones, fat ones; girls

of every shape and color, of every talent and desire. Name your delight, and she is yours!"

Helplessly, the Hedonist watched the satyr vanish. When it flashed back into view, it was standing on its feet. It threw out its arms dramatically.

"Your pleasure, sir! Name it and you shall have it. Narcotics? Of course! All the alkaloids. Neo-heroin. Whisper your addiction, and we will supply it in any form you desire. Or if you have none, let me recommend the unusual sensations of the latest craze—mescaline! It will slow time to a crawl. It will let you be beside yourself—legally and literally. Enjoy the symptoms of schizophrenia—that long-lost mental thrill—"

"A booth by the door," the Hedonist said quietly.

The satyr broke off in mid-declamation. It looked a little foolish. "Er—uh—your pleasure? A booth, sir?"

The Hedonist jingled the coins in his pocket.

The satyr recovered quickly. "Of course, sir. A booth. But here!" The Hedonist felt something slip over his face. "In the Three Worlds, identity is lost. Only pleasure is recognized! Only joy is unmasked!"

And it vanished.

X

A ROOM ON THE STRIP

THE Hedonist blinked as the darkness gave way to light. Half-blindly, he followed a small spot of light through a milling crowd of masked men and women. The spot led him to a dark, transparent door in a line of doors that were lighted and opaque. The booth was more like a good-sized room. There were two comfortable chairs, a table, and a pneumatic couch. Against the wall was a row of coin-operated dispensers. The usual things: drinks and narcotics.

The Hedonist sank wearily into one

of the chairs and looked through the door. He could see the fun house entrance. Anyone could see him, too.

"For light and privacy," the table said, "deposit one dollar for five minutes."

Into a slot in the table top, the Hedonist fed five dollars in change. The room brightened. Around the edge of the door, a row of strong lights came on. They beamed against it. He could still see out, but no one could see in.

He bought a cup of Kafi from the dispenser and leaned back to sip it while he watched the entrance. It had been half an hour since his call to Lari.

Other people came through the door but not Lari. One girl came in already masked. Her mask was passion; below it was a young, curved body in revealing red satin. She didn't wait to have the fun-house wares described. She knew what she wanted and ignored the darkness as she brushed past the satyr's image—both of them invisible from this side—into the room.

A heavyset man in a blue suit and a mask of thick-veined, red-faced rage grabbed her around the waist and tried to draw her close. She let herself be swung in against him while she deftly flicked back his mask and kept on turning right out of his arms. She disappeared in the surging throng.

After five minutes, Lari had not come in. The Hedonist watched the patrons of the Three Worlds stream past his door toward unknown destinations and unknown pleasures. Some were dressed in rich, glittering clothes, and some were dressed in transparencies, and once a girl in a mask of agony and nothing else broke screaming through the mob and dashed across the floor pursued by a naked satyr.

Joy! the Hedonist thought. *Pleasure! Here hedonism has reached its nadir. It can sink no lower.*

It could, though. It could sink below saturnalia to madness. It could sink to delusion inanimately received, where nothing was important but the senses

—the body useless (let it wither), the mind worthless (let it rot).

But wasn't this implicit in hedonism from the start? No. It wasn't. The pursuit of happiness need not be passive, could not be passive. And the freedom to be happy need not be license, could not be license, for license leads inevitably to unpleasure.

Hedonism was right. Pleasure was the only human good. But it had to be balanced against the total pleasure possible. Choice was necessary, and that demanded wisdom.

Like wisdom, happiness could not be a gift. You can teach a man, but you can't make him wise. You can show him the road to happiness, but he must travel alone.

LARI stood in the doorway, blinking. His eyes were dark, troubled pools. The Hedonist recognized him by his build and movements, in spite of the mask on his face. He pushed forward out of the darkness, and the mask on his face was fear.

The Hedonist glanced at his watch. Since he had put in the call, almost an hour had elapsed. He watched Lari work his way through the crowd. Lari stopped the man with the mask of rage, but the man shook him off.

No one followed Lari. No one came through the entrance behind him. As Lari passed, the Hedonist swung the door open and caught his wrist.

"In here," he said softly, pulling.

Lari started and then let himself be tugged into the booth. As the door swung shut behind him, he stared at the Hedonist with terror-stricken eyes. It took a moment for the Hedonist to realize that the expression was in the mask.

But Lari kept staring. "Great sorrow, Morgan," he whispered, "is that you?"

"Yes," the Hedonist said. "What's the matter?"

Lari pointed toward the ceiling. "Look at yourself!"

The ceiling was a mirror. The Hedonist looked up. Gazing down at him was an idiot, loose-lipped and imbecilically happy. The Hedonist shuddered and jerked his head down. He started to lift the mask from his face.

"Never mind," Lari said, sinking down into the other chair. "Leave it on. It's safer that way."

Lari faced the Hedonist across the table. "All right," he said. "Tell me what you want."

Briefly the Hedonist described what had happened to him that day, the summons, Gomer Berns, the Council . . . But when he started to describe the Council's new devices and its plans for them, Lari cut him off impatiently. "I know all that," he said, fidgeting.

"You know and you haven't done anything?"

"What is there to do? So, you escaped. What do you plan to do now? I don't see how I can help—"

"I don't want you to help me," the Hedonist said. "I'm not important. The important thing is to get the world back on the right road. We've got to replace the Council—"

Lari laughed nervously, choking. "How do you plan to do that?"

The Hedonist outlined his plan for a petition. "Once we have an emergency session, we can throw out the Council and get the world back to sanity. You and I know the proper hedonic techniques; we know that this way is madness. And once the situation is presented to the Congress in the proper light, it will defend the old standards. Well," he said as Lari was silent, "isn't it a good plan?"

"A fine plan, a beautiful plan," Lari said breathlessly. "It hasn't got a chance."

"Why not?"

"You're not a hedonist any more. The Council revoked your license, destroyed your office and files. You're a criminal. You'll be picked up any minute and put to surgery."

The Hedonist brushed it aside. "That

doesn't matter. I can hide until the Congress has acted."

"Anyone who helps you is liable to the same penalties," Lari said suddenly. "But it doesn't matter. That's right. You'll never get an emergency session. And even if you did, it wouldn't do any good. There isn't a hedonist in the country who would sign your petition. The Congress is behind the Council, wholeheartedly."

"All?" the Hedonist said dazedly.

"All! Every one!" Lari pounded hysterically on the table. Suddenly, frantically, he turned toward the wall and slipped a coin into one of the dispensers. A tiny syrette of neo-heroin dropped into his hand.

THE Hedonist's eyes were incredulous as they watched Lari push up a sleeve, apply the syrette to a vein, and press the button. There was a quick, sharp, hissing sound. Lari dropped the empty syrette to the floor and leaned back, his eyes closed.

"Neo-heroin?" the Hedonist said.

"Yes, I'm an addict," Lari said calmly, his eyes still closed. "It's nothing to be ashamed of."

"For anyone but a hedonist, no. But how can you expect to help your dependents when your senses are dulled and your mind is depressed?"

"I'm a person, too," Lari said violently. "I have emotions and desires like everyone else. I need happiness, too."

"You haven't been happy?"

"Happy?" Lari said softly. "I haven't been happy since I was a child. None of us have. We were brave and foolish, just a handful of hedonic therapists shouldering the burden of a world's happiness. It was mad. It was wonderful, but it was mad and impossible."

"But we did it," the Hedonist exclaimed. "We did it."

Lari sighed. "Yes, we did it. For a little while. Not perfectly, not completely, but we did it. And we paid for

it. We sold ourselves to a thousand people apiece; we were their slaves. They brought their burdens to us, and we took them on. There are few nights I have had as much as five hours sleep, and most of that was allotted to therapy."

"You don't know what you're saying!"

"Oh, I know. I know too well. It was more than feeble tissue could endure, the labor and the sorrow. And when the Council offered us a chance at happiness, do you think we could turn it down? By then I'd already been on neo-heroin for two years."

The Hedonist clenched his fist. How could he convince Lari that he was wrong? It was so difficult because there was truth in what Lari said. A hedonist became a machine for making people happy; after a few years he even forgot that he had a name.

Inside the booth, the lights dimmed. "For light and privacy," the table said, "deposit one dollar for five minutes."

The Hedonist was busy dropping coins into the table slot when the door opened. He moved smoothly to his feet. Standing in the doorway was the girl in the mask of passion and the red gown. She stared at him as she moved close. She lifted his mask, and he let her do these things, not knowing why.

She let the mask fall back and threw her arms around his neck. "It's you!" she sobbed.

It was Beth's voice. The Hedonist pulled down her mask. It was Beth's face. There were a glad smile on her lips, but there were tears in her eyes. They had a strange effect on the Hedonist. They made his heart pound and his knees weak.

"I've been hunting for you everywhere," she said.

"Where did you go? Why did you leave me?" the Hedonist asked.

"There's no time for explanations," she said, drawing back and tugging at his arm. "We've got to get away from here."

"A little while after you left, the Watchdogs came," he said, pulling back. "They almost caught me."

"You can't think I had anything to do with that!" she exclaimed. "I couldn't. Oh, you've got to trust me!"

"Why?" the Hedonist asked. "You've been acting very strangely."

"You're the hedonist," she reminded him sharply. "Don't you know?"

He shook his head in bewilderment.

Softly, she said, "I'm in love with you. I had no intention of marrying anyone but you. I wanted to look after you, to make you happy. I was no exception. All the women in the ward were in love with you, but I was the only one with the courage to do anything about it."

The Hedonist was suddenly aware that, under his mask, his jaw had dropped down. He closed it with a snap. "That's fantastic!" And he added, suddenly, "You made me sleep on the floor."

A smile slipped across her face. "You may be the Hedonist," she said, "but you don't know anything about love. Some desires should be thwarted; it's like shading a flower that's used to the sun—it grows furiously to reach the light."

The Hedonist stared at her, wordless. "It's impossible," he said at last. "I'm a hedonist. I can't marry or love—"

"Fool!" she groaned. "How long do you think you can hold up the sky all by yourself? Just once, think of yourself. That's all over! Can't you see?"

Out of the corner of his eye, the Hedonist caught a flicker of movement. The walls of the booth fell through the floor. Behind the walls was the motley of clowns. A dozen black subduers were pointed toward them.

At first the Hedonist thought they were wearing masks, all of them the same: impassive blankness. But they were faces. The Hedonist realized, with a shock of recognition, that one of them belonged to the Council secretary.

"The girl's right," the secretary said. "It's all over."

His presence meant that it was a trap, carefully planned, skillfully executed. The Hedonist looked at Beth and the mask of passion dangling from her neck.

Slowly, painfully, she shook her head. "No, no!" she whispered. "You can't believe that. You mustn't—"

"I don't," he said suddenly. He turned to the secretary. "What are you going to do?"

"We're taking you in for treatment," the secretary said unemotionally. "Both of you."

Both of you. Beth and himself. Not Lari.

The Hedonist looked at Lari. Through the mask of fear, he could see his old friend's eyes. They were the eyes of a man who was lost, forever.

"I'm sorry, Lari," the Hedonist said softly.

The eyes winced and closed. The mask turned aside.

"Let's go," the Hedonist said to the secretary.

For the second time that night, the lights went out.

XI

A MAN'S PRIVILEGE

THE Hedonist threw his fist and felt the paralyzing shock go through it and up his arm. But in his shoulder he felt the solid impact of the fist against something that yielded. The secretary grunted and fell backward in a flurry of falling noises. There were shouts and groans and the clatter of feet.

But the Hedonist was too busy to listen to them, too busy even to enjoy the pleasure of striking back against the forces that had taken his life and his world and pulled them down together. He had swung on around, caught Beth, and pulled her through the door of the booth and into the shouting, milling crowd outside. There was laughter at first, as most of the patrons thought it was a joke, and then moans and screams

and growing hysteria.

The darkness was absolute. They hadn't left it when they left the booth. Someone had an interrupter focused on the whole area.

The Hedonist held tightly to Beth's wrist and forced his way through the jostling, clutching, screaming crowd. He brought Beth close and yelled in her ear. "Are you all right?"

He could feel her head nod and then her lips were moving against his ear. "I can't fight this mob," she shouted. "You go ahead. I'll steer from behind."

"Where?" the Hedonist asked.

"Never mind! Quick! There's no telling how long the darkness will last."

The Hedonist hesitated, shrugged, and turned. He lowered his numbed shoulder and plunged into the squirming, clawing sea of humanity. She guided him with strong, sure movements of her hand. Fists bounced off his body and face and nails raked him, but he managed to get his partially paralyzed arm up in front of his face and forced his way onward.

It seemed as if the darkness had thickened, as if the night had arms and hands and feet to hold them back. The pressure increased and grew until—suddenly—it fell away before them and there was nothing.

The Hedonist reached with his foot and there were steps going down. He stumbled down them, dragging Beth behind. When they reached a level stretch again, the noise had faded in the distance, and they seemed to be alone. He brought Beth up beside him.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Where are we going? Who's using the interrupter? Who—?"

"No time now," she panted. "Come on. I'll try to tell you on the way."

She led him through the darkness with a sure instinct. "The answer to most of your questions is: 'The Underground.'"

It was a strange new word. The Hedonist let it tumb'e around in his mind, and everywhere it touched it

summoned up an exotic image: men tampering with hedometers; people meeting in dark, hidden places to share their illicit passions of grief, pain, and sorrow; saboteurs spreading infections of gloom. . . .

How could it have existed without his knowledge? "And you're a part of it," he said.

"Ever since I realized that what kept us apart was hedonics. Try to understand us! We aren't troubled about the great mass of the people; they're contented with what they have. We're concerned with the few malcontents who find happiness impossible and get into trouble."

She stopped. They passed through a door he could not see, and in a moment he felt a sudden breath of cool air against his face.

"Then you aren't trying to overthrow the Council?" he asked, puzzled, as they moved on.

"Of course not. What would be the point? We don't want the responsibility for a world overpopulated with mediocrities. Let the Council have that. All we try to do is to rescue the few who are worth saving."

With one step they came out of the darkness into the light. The Hedonist blinked at the brightness; the blindness wore off quickly. They were in a long, narrow passage lit at infrequent intervals by bulbs in ceiling pits. The Hedonist could not see the end of it.

"Then you think hedonics is a failure?" he said.

The struggle through the mob had torn the red gown. Beth was trying, with only partial success, to hold it together. "No," she said with great seriousness—and the Hedonist would have smiled at the youthful gravity if it hadn't been so real. "For the great mass of the people, hedonics was a howling success. As a physiological and psychological discipline, it was a great step forward. But as a practical science, it was impossible. How many hedonists practiced it in those terms?"

The Hedonist looked blank.

"Very few," Beth said soberly. "Those few tried and of them only you and one or two others really succeeded. The rest compromised with the world. To be a hedonist, a man would have to be a god—and men aren't divine. Not yet. At least, not many of them." She looked at him with warm, dark eyes.

The Hedonist felt them melt a cold spot deep down inside him; it had been there for a long time, so long that he had forgotten all about it. "So you rescue the malcontents. Before they go to the surgeon?"

"All we can, and we get most of them."

"And then what?" the Hedonist asked, frowning.

Beth led the way up a few short steps. They came out into the night. The real night with the stars overhead.

"We bring them here," she said.

The Hedonist looked up from her shadowed face. Across the broad field was a towering, pointed shape, reaching up toward space and freedom. "The planets!" he said suddenly. "Mars and Venus."

"And Callisto and Ganymede," Beth added. "We send them out to be colonists. They make good ones. They can work out their discontent against their environment instead of themselves. That's the best therapy for them.

BEFORE the Hedonist could recover his breath, a broad-shouldered man who towered above him like the ship across the field had stepped out of the shadows behind them. The Hedonist looked up at the dark, scowling, bearded face. He had never seen more obvious self-torment. He itched to treat the man. *Devalue*, he longed to say, and *substitute*.

"You got him, did you?" the man said in a rumbling voice.

"Yes, Captain."

"You helped us?" the Hedonist asked. "You're the one I should thank?"

The man nodded gloomily. "Me and some of the boys."

"I don't understand how you could take over a fun house so easily—"

The Captain shrugged his massive shoulders. "We own it. We own most of the Strip. We still need things out there"—he waved his hand toward the sky—"that Earth can give us—men and tools. And for that we need money. So we give the rabbits what they really want, and they give us what we need."

"Didn't the Council object?"

"Fat lot of good that would do." He chuckled at the idea. "They know what we could do if we took it in our minds to—and there's nothing those fat rabbits could do to stop us. We've got ships. We control the space stations."

"They don't do anything about your aiding the escaped prisoners?"

"Why should they? Gets them off their hands, don't it? That's all they want. They're happy to leave us alone. Someday, maybe, we'll decide to come back and do something about the Council. Not now. We're too busy."

"Come on," Beth urged.

The Hedonist looked back the way they had come. On the horizon were the dark towers of the Old City, and in front of them was the ghostly radiance of the crater. The towers seemed like mute fingers trying to warm themselves before a cold, deadly fire.

"I can't," the Hedonist said. "I can't go. I can't leave Earth like this and go seek my own happiness."

"But you can't help Earth," she pleaded. "There's nothing you can do. You have to accept reality."

The Hedonist was silent. Could he help? Could he overthrow the Council, all by himself? What was reality? Deep down, he knew that he couldn't do anything. The black spires on the horizon were not fingers but gravestones. No one can raise the dead.

Earth is happy as it is, I suppose, he thought. It's overcrowded. There's no space left for modifying reality. Anyhow, he couldn't change it.

"All right," he said. "Let's go." They started walking across the star-lit field. "I suppose you need hedonists on Venus."

The Captain stopped short. "Wait a minute," he growled. "You got the wrong idea. We don't want missionaries. We're too busy to be happy. We've got a million things to do up there. We've got no use for any of your immorality." He turned viciously toward Beth. "I thought you said—"

"He'll be all right," she said frantically. "I tell you he'll be a right." She tugged at the Hedonist's arm.

Immorality, Captain? No, not immorality. The first society in which a man's instinct didn't conflict with the demands of society upon him.

Morality wasn't everything, of course. It was a little like death, the end of struggle and conflict. In that sense life was immoral, an eternal fight against the leveling forces, and the immoral, criminal, lawbreaking part of humanity was out there on the planets and the moons and Jupiter, some day to be lifting an illicit hand toward the stars.

What was it the Captain had said? *We're too busy to be happy.* The Hedonist could see the truth of that. All his life he had been too busy to be happy. He had had a job to do.

Happy men don't make good colonists. To tame a planet, to remold a world, takes hungry men, angry men. They had to be discontented, and they had to stay discontented. Otherwise, the world turned on them and broke them.

Devaluation was no good. Suppression was no good. Substitution was no good. You can't devalue the need for food. You can't suppress the desire

for breathable air. You can't substitute for the necessities of shelter against the heat and the cold and the insects and the viruses. . .

"I suppose," the Hedonist said, looking up, "that you could use a doctor. You need obstetricians and geriatricians, I guess. You have people who get sick, who break bones, who have babies, who grow old. I imagine the children need teachers. . . ."

A slow, brilliant smile spread across the Captain's face. It reminded the Hedonist of the sun suddenly, joyfully breaking through the dark clouds. "Sure, Doc," he said. "Come on. We've got a million things to do and only a few hundred years to do them in."

SO, THE Hedonist thought, his training would not be entirely wasted. His medical skill would be in great demand, and then there would be the children. He would teach them the hedonic disciplines without removing the angers that kept them alive. Hedonics wasn't finished, after all. It was only a new, finer beginning.

He took Beth's arm possessively, and they started walking toward the tall ship.

"Hedonist—" Beth said hesitantly. "What is your name?"

He looked down at her upturned face and broke into a smile. "You can call me Morgan," he said.

"Morgan," she repeated the unfamiliar name. It sounded sweet on her lips, and he felt now a freedom he had never known.

Perhaps, he thought, there was a great deal to be said for the privilege of being unhappy.

Coming in the Next Issue

DARK DESTINY

A Novelet About Castaways in Space

By WILLIAM MORRISON



The Portable STAR

By ISAAC ASIMOV

Holden made love to his friend's wife. He couldn't help it!

IF SPACE voyages are "romantic," Holden Brooks was certainly carrying on the tradition when he stepped into the cabin of his best friend's wife, with one straightforward objective in mind.

He did not signal. He merely opened the door and walked in. She was waiting for him as, somehow, he had

known she would be, wearing a loose night garment. She held out her arms to him and they trembled slightly. Her dark hair fell below her shoulders, accenting the pale roundness of her face.

Her name was Celestine Van Horne and her husband sat in one corner of the room, idly pinching his ear-lobe.

Holden paid no attention to the husband's presence. He stepped directly to Celestine and placed his hands on her shoulders. She swayed toward him and they kissed violently, longingly, over and over again.

Breathlessly then, he swept her from the floor, cradling her in his arms. Her eyes closed, and her hand stroked the back of his neck gently.

Holden had turned toward the bed when, for the first time, someone spoke.

It was scarcely an impressive speech. Philip Van Horne was scarcely an impressive man. His sandy hair was thinning, his frame was slight, and his eyes were a pale blue. He rose from his chair and said with an air curiously compounded of indignation and bewilderment:

"What's going on?"

Holden placed his soft burden on the floor and looked at the man who had spoken. Holden was taller than Philip by half a head and more massive. His lips drew back, showing strong teeth in a broad face. His shoulders hunched a little. The light of battle was glowing in him.

Celestine, having backed against the bed, watched with a feral pleasure.

Philip looked nervous. He said, sharply, "Holden, stop it."

Holden moved forward with little shuffling steps. His fist shot out, catching Philip on the side of his head and sending him to his knees. Celestine's laugh was high-pitched and strained.

Philip got to his feet with an effort and stumbled toward the door. His wife was there before him, spread-eagling herself as a barrier. She was still laughing.

Philip looked over his shoulder in hor-

ror. "Don't do it, Holden. Don't!"

Holden didn't. A puzzled look seemed to soak into his face. His hands, which had risen to encircle Philip's neck, fell limply.

Celestine, her eagerness fading, moved away from the door, and sat down on the bed. She lit a cigarette.

Holden said, "I'm sorry, Phil. I knew what I was doing, but I just *had* to. I—"

"I know," said Philip, brushing his knees. "It's *they*."

"That's right," said Holden. "I'm sorry, Celestine."

"Oh, well," she said, shrugging.

Philip said sharply, "Put some clothes on, Celest."

His wife raised her eyebrows. "Now don't be silly, darling. I wasn't myself. No one was."

Holden Brooks was still apologizing. "They just push buttons and have fun. You understand how it was, Phil? There was no way I could stop—"

"Oh, shut up," Philip said, "and go away."

The door signal flashed.

"That's Grace," said Holden. His eyes went quickly from husband to wife. "Listen, there's no use saying—"

Philip said, "She knows what the situation is."

Grace Brooks edged in. She was a little thing with a triangular delicately-boned face that ended in a pointed, dimple-centered chin.

She said in a low voice, "I was getting afraid to be alone."

Holden took her hand. "All right, Grace. Let's try for some sleep."

When the Van Hornes were alone, Celestine stubbed out her cigarette and placed it in the small vent that puffed it out into the poisonous atmosphere of the alien planet on which they were stranded.

They stared distrustfully at one another. There was nothing to do, nothing to say. They were slaves; both of them; all four of them.

Slaves more thoroughly than any Earthly understanding of the word. . . .

IT HAD been exciting when it was first suggested. Holden Brooks and Philip Van Horne worked in adjacent offices in the Administrative Service of the Housing Unit in which they lived. Both had accumulated half-year sabbaticals, and some months earlier Holden had bought a space flivver none the worse for being second-hand. Why not, then, a shared-expense space tour?

"There's no point in having a space-flivver," Celestine said, when the four of them talked it over, "if you don't use it. Air and water last just about indefinitely with a good recirculating system, which the ship has, and power is no problem. So that just leaves food to think about. And we can renew stocks almost anywhere."

Grace said, "I don't think I could drink recirculated water."

"Nonsense, darling. Pure water is pure water, even if it comes from perspiration or sewage. You're just being medieval if you worry about that."

It worked out well. The controls of the space-ship were simple enough, and in a week Philip could handle the ship as well as Holden could. The *Spacio-nautic Handbook*, with its details on all inhabited planets, stood always ready to direct them to this or that interesting one.

In fact, the entire vacation might easily have been a complete success had not the ion-beam alignment in one of their micro-piles lost focus, first fitfully, and then permanently.

Holden Brooks put his fingers through his brown hair in dismay and said, "Well, we just can't make any Jumps through hyperspace, that's all."

"Wasn't the ship overhauled before we left?" Celestine demanded, sharply.

Philip bit his lip. "You can't predict these things, damn it."

"Then what do we do?" Grace wanted to know, her thin voice tremulous.

"Pull in for repairs, I guess," Holden said, dubiously.

And because their Jumps, after all, were amateurish ones, it turned out that

there was no inhabited planet within half-a-light-day distance. None, that is, that the ship could reach in reasonable time by traveling through normal space.

Holden checked the handbook twice, then Philip checked it.

There was only one star in the neighborhood and there was only one planet in its family where the gravity was not impossibly high, and the temperature not impossibly extreme. The handbook called it Sigmaringen IV, and placed a dagger mark next to it which meant, conventionally, that it was uninhabited and uninhabitable.

Grace looked troubled. "It sounds horrible. Can't we fix the beam in space?"

Philip said, "Focusing a beam in the absence of a gravitational field is for an expert, not for us," and they headed for Sigmaringen IV. Their ship dropped to the planet's surface on the noiseless, flameless, gravity-shield of the field-vortices produced by the two micro-piles that were still in working order.

WHAT made Sigmaringen IV sound horrible to Grace was the *Handbook's* information on the planet's chemical makeup. The thick atmosphere consisted exclusively of nitrogen and argon in a proportion of three to one, with small quantities of the other inert gases. There was no water on the planet, no trace of free oxygen or of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, not more than a trace of carbon in the soil. The soil consisted almost entirely of aluminum and iron silicates with a heavy overload of free silica which, whirled aloft by perpetual winds formed an apparently permanent "cloud layer."

"Just like Venus," muttered Phil. "Old home week." His thin, solemn face twisted into a half-smile.

It was "day" when they landed, but the only light was the dull gray that filtered diffusely through the dust clouds.

Grace shuddered and said, "We should have ultra-waved for help."

Holden's troubled eyes looked down

upon his wife out of a perplexed face. "I thought of that, too, but it would cost an awful lot. Isn't that right, Phil?"

"A year's salary for each of us," Philip said incisively. "They don't send repair ships through hyperspace for half-credit pieces."

The first day on Sigmaringen IV was passed in adjusting the beam-focus. On the whole, it was a creditable job, and by the time the planet's rotation brought them and their ship into the night-shadowed half, it seemed obvious to both men that the ship would survive one Jump at least, probably half-a-dozen.

Holden stood up, put down his ergometer, and said, "It's night. Might as well leave the take-off for morning."

Philip yawned. "Why not? Better check with the girls, though."

For a wonder, the girls raised no objection. Grace frowned a little, but confined herself to a murmured, "If you say so."

The first night on Sigmaringen IV, in retrospect, was uneventful. Over the morning coffee, Celestine bubbled excitedly about her odd dream. Holden, with initial creaking, began to recount one of his own.

Finally Grace, with a marked reddening about the cheek-bones, said, "I won't tell you my dream. Let's get away from this horrible place."

Celestine laughed. "Darling, that sounds terribly sexy. You *must* tell us. Were we in it?"

Grace said, "We're being watched. I'm *sure* of it."

"Oh, come," said Celestine. "There's no carbon on this wretched world and even I know that means there can be nothing living on the planet."

Phil said, "Actually, we have nothing to keep us here. We can go."

Holden mopped his lips and got up. "I'll take first shift."

In five minutes he was back. He said, "Funny things! I can't get the ship started!" He stared at them out of bovine eyes.

"What do you mean?" Celestine demanded. "The beam is focused, isn't it?"

"Nothing's wrong with the controls as far as I know. I just can't get close to them. When I try, I get—" He waited a long time and then, as though he had failed to think of another word, he mumbled, "Scared!"

"Scared?" In various tones, all three said that.

Holden, visibly suffering, said in a choked voice, "You try it, Phil."

Philip got silently to his feet, walked out.

In less than five minutes, he also was back. "Scared stiff," he whispered. "Couldn't touch a thing."

"Are you two mad?" demanded Celestine.

Philip ignored her. He turned to Grace, "What was your dream?"

Grace's small face was white and against it the makeup stood out harshly. She said, "I dreamed we were surrounded by children and they were curious about us. I dreamed they were watching us and wouldn't let us go. It was very real and I—I still feel it."

Philip said, "I felt it, too." He looked troubled.

Celestine said, "Darling, this is too ridiculous. Grace is open to suggestion. She's a sweet girl, but she's sensitive, and this *is* a gloomy world. That's *all*. Now let's leave."

Philip said, "How?"

CELESTINE looked at her husband with something approaching contempt and said, "If I knew how to handle the controls—"

"You'd be just as badly off," said Philip.

Grace said quietly, "They're watching us right now."

Philip looked at her thoughtfully, raised his eyebrows, and leaned back in his chair to flick the polarity knob that controlled the transparency of the ports.

"I doubt there's anything to see," he said.

He was quite wrong.

At a distance of a hundred yards from the ship and spaced some five to ten yards apart, a series of mounds could be dimly, but definitely, made out through the sandy murk. Five could be seen. Philip frowned and stepped hastily to the other side of the ship. He trans- parented the opposite port. Six mounds there.

"Apparently," he said, "we are sur- rounded."

"They're just mounds of earth," pro- tested Celestine.

Holden said, "They weren't there when we landed."

Grace said, "They're not material. They're energy creatures. They use earth-mounds as—as clothing. Or adorn- ment."

"Such nonsense," said Celestine.

Philip said, "If those things are tele- pathic, their thoughts and emotions may be leaking across. Grace is most sensi- tive to them."

"And I'm the least sensitive—is that it?" Celestine was suddenly furious. She got to her feet, "Is this a joke of some sort? Are all three of you up to games to panic me?"

Grace burst into violent laughter and Celestine turned on her with eyes glar- ing. She shrieked, "It's funny, is it?"

Grace shook her head but could say nothing. She whooped and shouted and held her sides. She grew weak from laughter until it subsided into breath- less sobs.

Then Philip giggled and burst into un- restrained laughter. Holden joined him, his baritone brays overriding all.

Celestine was in tears. "Of all the nasty, contemptible—" She stuttered in her attempt to find appropriate adject- ives, and then before she was anywhere close to recovering her emotional equi- librium she, too, was swept away on a tidal wave of shrill mirth.

Grace cried, "Stop it! Stop it!"

Slowly, and in the order in which they had begun, they stopped. Celestine was last, flushed, a handkerchief over her mouth.

Grace said, agonized, "They're push- ing buttons. They! They!" Her fore- finger jabbed toward the port. "They can make us do anything."

There was no argument. They all felt it now. Even Celestine's last argument sounded timid and weak when she said:

"The *Handbook* says there's no life on the planet."

"The *Handbook*," said Philip, gravely, "bases its reports on a quickie expedi- tion, probably, that reported no oxygen, no carbon and no water, after passing through the atmosphere and manipulat- ing a reflection spectrometer. Ordinarily that means no life, but I'll just bet that no expedition ever thought it worth their while actually to land on this planet."

Grace stared out the port and whis- pered, "Children about an ant-hill. Watching them scurry. Putting ob- stacles in the way to see what the ants would do. Maybe stamping on a few."

Philip said, "No telling when they'll get tired, either. Holden, I think we better start recirculating water."

"Must we?" Grace asked faintly.

"Now don't be ridiculous, darling," said Celestine with sudden sharpness. "The wastes are electrolyzed and the hydrogen and oxygen are compressed and stored, then combined again into water as pure as pure. It's so pure we have to add mineral tablets to it."

Holden moved into the engine room. A moment later, the faint hum of the recirculator could be heard.

Philip sighed. "Well, they let us do that."

AS THE ten-hour day period pro- gressed, Holden tried three more times, to get the ship started. Philip tried twice. Neither succeeded.

Holden said tensely, "I say, attack. I say, shoot a few of them down. We have blasters."

"They won't let us, you fool." In his own discouragement, Philip was grow- ing careless with epithets.

Holden paid no attention. He said,

"I'm willing to try. I'll put on my suit, go out there, and shoot them down. If they don't let me, they don't let me, but I'm going to try."

Philip said, with shrill anger, "What's the use? If we can't even go near the controls, how do you expect to get near them?"

Celestine said sharply, "Oh, shut up, Phil. At least Holden is showing guts. Do you have any better suggestion?"

"No."

Holden climbed into his space suit. His fingers, large and clumsy in the enclosing metallo-latex, snapped on his helmet. He hefted a blaster and marched in stubborn silence to the airlock.

Philip shrugged and said to Grace, "It isn't going to do any good, and it might be dangerous for him. Don't let him go, Grace."

"Don't do it, Grace," Celestine said, quickly. "Don't stop him. It just kills Phil to see someone else with backbone."

"Don't be foolish," Philip said. "Has it occurred to you that we can't afford to lose him? I can't pilot this ship all alone."

Grace said in a monotone, "I don't think he's in any danger. I just don't feel any danger for him."

It was suddenly lonely, with just the three of them watching Holden Brooks through the port. He was a large, robotic figure, murky grotesque, slogging on heavily as he leaned into the wind. Sand spurted up from under his mesh boots at every step.

They could see him raise his arm, point his blaster, and involuntarily they held their breaths.

The featureless mounds of soil that were their alien tormenters did not move.

Holden fired. The subsidiary bonds that held together the molecules of one of those mounds were neutralized in the force-field emitted by the blaster. All at once, without sound or flame, the mound blew apart into impalpable dust. Except for some remnants at what had been its base, it was gone.

Holden aimed at another and another. Then they, too, were gone.

Inside the ship, Celestine cried excitedly, "Good! Good! He had guts and he's doing it. So much for caution."

Philip was silent, his lips compressed. Then suddenly he said, "Look!"

He pointed. Where the first mound had stood before it disappeared as if by magic, a new mound stood.

At each spot where the blaster had had its effect, and which had been blank a moment before, a mound once more puffed up out of the ground. Holden, looking to right and left, let his arm drop. As he stood there staring, his attitude of frustration and discouragement were plain even through the impersonal lines of his suit.

Slowly he turned, and slowly he trudged back to the ship. . . .

The four space voyagers ate without appetite, and sat helplessly about the clutter of the meal.

After awhile Philip said, "They *are* energy creatures, as Grace said. Blasting the soil in which they dress themselves is like tearing a man's shirt. He can always get another one." He paused thoughtfully, before he said, "If we could only attack their minds directly!"

"How?" grumbled Holden.

"There's such a thing as psychology," Philip reminded.

"Yes, but what do we know about their psychology?" demanded Celestine.

"Nothing." Philip shrugged. "I grant that. But they're intelligent. They must have emotions or they wouldn't enjoy playing with ours. They can frighten us. Suppose we could frighten them. They're only children, if Grace's intuition is right."

"The blaster didn't frighten them," said Holden.

"They knew it wouldn't kill them," Philip pointed out, "so there was nothing to be afraid of. They'd fear death, I suppose, but how do you go about killing energy beings? Now what else would they fear? Pain? Loss of security? Loss of loved ones?"

"Ghosts, too," added Celestine, disagreeably. "Have you thought they might be afraid of them?"

Philip looked at her with his eyebrows raised in approval. "You're right!" he exclaimed. "The unknown! Any creature is afraid of what it doesn't understand, of something outside its experience."

Holden said, "The ship is outside their experience. They're not afraid of it. I'm sorry to say."

"The ship is just another form of matter," said Philip, "and we're just another form of mind wrapped in matter." He looked thoughtfully out at the mounds, just barely seen now in the dimming light. And he said musingly, "Now what *wouldn't* they understand?"

Grace said dreamily, "The sun, the unclouded sky, the stars. They've never seen any of those."

"I dare say you're right," said Celestine. "But we can't bring the stars down to them, so that's no good. Stars aren't portable."

Grace rose to her feet. Her face suddenly looked dreamier than ever. Her lips were parted. She moved slowly to Holden and deposited herself on his lap with a gesture that was almost abandon. She lifted her face to his with a slow smile. When she spoke her words were slurred.

"Ta' me t'bed, Hol'n. I feel so *fun-neeeee*." She put her cheek against his and giggled.

Holden reddened, and said protestingly, "Now, Grace—"

Grace tossed her head back and looked at Philip and Celestine upside down. She said, "W'rried 'bout *them*, are you? J'st a pair o'—"

At the accusation that followed, Philip's eyes opened wide, but Celestine only said, with dry amusement, "Why, the little she-devil!"

Holden got to his feet in confusion, holding his wife desperately, while she squirmed against his body in a manner to make her meaning and emotion unmistakable.

"*They're* making her do this," he muttered. "I—I'd better take her away."

It was half an hour before he reappeared.

He said, "She's herself now, but she's—got a headache. She's embarrassed about what happened, how she acted in here. You won't mention it to her, will you?"

Celestine shrugged. "Nothing she said or did shocked us."

Holden said miserably, "How can we stop it all? If we just sit here and let them poke our minds here and there, we'll find ourselves killing each other or doing other terrible things."

Two hours later Holden, in gruesome proof that he had been prophetic, had invaded the Van Horne cabin to claim Celestine, and had nearly killed Philip in the process.

NOW he was gone again, and Philip sat on the edge of the bed, elbows on wide-spread knees, fingers intertwined loosely, his face dazed and unhappy.

Celestine said, with abruptness, "Well, there's no use brooding about it. It couldn't be helped. Do you want a sleeping pill?"

Philip looked up, and when he spoke it was not exactly complimentary to her. He wasn't even thinking about Celestine. What he said was:

"A portable star."

"What?" His wife stared at him.

"Something you said earlier," he said. "A portable star. It might work." He stood up. His hands balled into fists and he moved about restlessly. "We can't just let things go on, can we?"

"What are you going to do?"

Philip didn't answer. He just tore out of the cabin and on into the engine room. With feverish, inspired haste, he dismantled the water recirculator and removed the gas cylinders. Cautiously he twisted the hoses together, clamped them into position with wire from the electrical stock supply drawer and fitted an Elgin tube of transparent quartz

over the combined nozzles. Turning again to the water recirculator he loosened the pencil-thin catalyst-chamber, squinted a moment at the spongy platinum-black it contained, and slipped it in his pocket.

He moved back into the common room and pulled his own space-suit from its rack. The other three in the party were waiting for him—Holden, with a hang-dog look on his face, and his eyes sliding away from direct contact; Grace, pale and scrubbed-looking, as though fresh from a sponge bath; and Celestine, wearing new makeup, though it showed traces of an unsteady hand in the application.

Celestine asked Philip, "Are you leaving the ship?"

"That's right," he told her grimly. "Help me with this, Holden."

Holden lifted the cylinders onto the back of the suit, strapped them in place just next to the oxygen cylinder that would supply Philip's respiratory needs. He passed the two hoses over Philip's head.

Philip shifted the catalyst-chamber from his trousers pocket to the pocket in his space-suit. He dipped his finger into a glass of water and ran it around the inner surface of the quartz jacket he had drawn over the twinned hoses.

Celestine began, "What do we do for water if you—" and let her question fade into silence.

"Take care of yourself, Philip," Grace said uncertainly.

"Thanks," he said tightly. He placed the helmet over his head.

Once outside the ship, Philip Van Horne felt cut off from all things human. He had polarized all ports to full opacity before leaving the ship, and now no spark of light invaded the solid blackness all about.

Slowly he moved away from the ship, bucking the steady wind. Hearing its whistle against his suit was the only sensation he could recognize. Dimly he sensed the natives, curious, waiting for him.

He halted and cracked open the gauges to both cylinders. When he felt the gentle push of gas within the quartz jacket he put his gauntleted hand over it.

He lifted the nozzles. *They* could see him, he hoped, or could sense him by whatever method it was they used. A sudden thought chilled him. What if they lacked the sense of sight, or any sense corresponding to it? Desperately he refused to think of such a thing. They *had* to be sentient!

He raised the catalyst-chamber toward the open top of the quartz jacket. For a single moment, he was furiously certain that this would do the trick. But only for a moment. He paused, hands lifted halfway. Could anything work so simply, after all? To try, to fail, to have to return to the ship to report failure—

His hand moved, stopped again. Swift thoughts came.

The creatures—call them that—were emotion-controllers. Was the doubt of his success his own? For a moment he had been certain, and then—

Had the triumph he had felt spilled over too openly? Were they now canceling it out in their own way?

Once more, half-heartedly, he made a tentative gesture of raising the catalyst-chamber, and instantly depression hit him, as dark as the night that surrounded him. It would not work. How could it?

And that thought decided him. The depression had come too quickly, too patly. It had not come from his own mind, but from *theirs*. He could fight it now, and he did.

He fought the despair, fought his own apparent knowledge of inevitable failure. Closing his mind to what was trying to seem to be bitter certainty, he lunged at the quartz tube with its leaking gases swirling upward.

He fought the fear that followed. But it grew until it became the same fear that had kept him from taking the controls of the ship. However, the ship's controls were complicated. There were

fifty motions involved, each with its fresh surcharge of fright. And here it was necessary only to touch one object to another.

In the dark, he could not tell by sight how close chamber was to quartz except for the position of his arms. But he knew there must be only inches left. He compressed those inches, and his forehead slicked with perspiration.

He fought with what remained of his untouched mind, and momentarily he

the open end, it sparked in his hand like a star, twinkling and shifting tirelessly.

And the aliens were gone!

Philip could now see that. Out here it has been as black as tar before. It was as black as tar now, except for the dim blue star in his hand. But there was a lightness in Philip Van Horne's mind that was clear enough in the information it gave him. The touch of the aliens had been so constant a factor for over two full days that, with it removed, it

Isaac Asimov's Future History

IN THE current issue of our companion magazine, *Startling Stories*, we're presenting a "future history" by Poul Anderson. This special feature shows how some of Anderson's stories fit into a large and consistent pattern.

Here now—on the opposite page—is a similar future history from Isaac Asimov. We call it a "page" from his notebook because the scheme was not originally worked out as a consistent pattern and includes only about one-quarter of his total writings. Another quarter would be included in his robot history (mentioned in the note), and the remaining half is miscellaneous.

Asimov says of his history, "It's not the beautiful job that Heinlein did, but was actually made up *ad hoc*. My cross-references in the novels are thrown in as they occur to me and did not come from a systematized history.

"The fact that I reach only 48,000 A.D. may be surprising—it surprised *me*! I had never once thought of the actual dates of my stories and now that I come to write them down, I find that I haven't been so far flung as I thought. If some reader checks my stories carefully and finds that my dating is internally inconsistent, I can only say I'm not surprised."

The latest Asimov story in this framework is *The Portable Star*.

—The Editors.

felt the dim contact of metal against quartz. Contact broke off immediately in a perfect agony of despair, but that one moment had sufficed. The moisture he had introduced within the quartz was a second catalyst, and between the effect of powdered platinum and water traces the hydrogen and oxygen combined in chemical action and burst into flame.

Pale blue, dancing in the residuum of dusty air that blew into the jacket from

was as though a boulder had been heaved from his crushed body, leaving him free to stand once more.

He called into his radio, "Holden! Holden! Get to those controls!"

Turning, he ran back to the ship as fast as he could pump his encased legs. . . .

THE two men were at the controls. The two women were asleep.

At last Philip had a chance to explain

A PAGE FROM ISAAC ASIMOV'S NOTEBOOK

A. EXPLORATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Year	Title	Event
1975	<i>Trends</i>	{ First man-carrying flight to the moon, against social resistance.
1985	<i>The Singing Bell</i>	{ Settlement of the moon proceeds; mining operations set up.
2000	<i>The Martian Way</i>	{ Mars settled. Much of humanity still rebels against settlement of other planets. This is finally overcome.
2020	<i>Ring Around the Sun</i>	{ Venus settled. Mail service between planets established.
2050	<i>Marooned Off Vesta</i>	{ Passage across asteroid belt no longer a matter of exploration. Commercial flights across the belt begin.
2100	<i>Heredity Callistan Menace Christmas on Ganymede</i>	{ The moons of Jupiter are settled. Human eyes turn toward the intergalactic spaces. The hyperspatial drive is discovered about 5000 A.D.

B. EXPLORATION OF THE GALAXY

5500	<i>The Portable Star</i>	{ Flights to other stars become feasible in small space cruisers. Very little of the Galaxy explored.
6500	<i>Misbeforgotten Missionary</i>	{ Organized space exploitation begins. Mankind begins spreading outward.
8500	<i>Sucker Bait</i>	{ Population has increased to the point where the inner regions of the Galaxy are overcrowded. Government-sponsored emigration to the outer reaches are begun. Most of the Galaxy is now mapped and well-known. The old political structure is now incapable of handling the vast numbers of worlds. Earth's last atomic wars render its crust largely radioactive about 10,000 A.D. and that is the last straw. The Galaxy breaks up into numerous political organizations.

C. GALACTIC EMPIRE

30,000	<i>The Stars, Like Dust (Tyrann)</i>	{ The star-regions begin to agglomerate into larger groupings. The empire of Tyrann grows and declines. Trantor grows less spectacularly, but more solidly.
34,500	<i>The Currents of Space</i>	{ Trantor has grown until half the Galaxy is under its sway. The Squires of Sark, with their control of <i>kyrt</i> -rich Florina, are the last independent group seriously to contest Trantor's hegemony. Trantor becomes the Galactic Empire officially, about 35,000. Earth is all but forgotten.
36,500	<i>Pebble in the Sky Blind Alley</i>	{ Galactic Empire is at its height. Earth completely forgotten as origin of humanity. Slowly the Empire grows static and decadent. Hari Seldon is born about 47,000.
47,000 to 47,500	<i>Foundation to Bride and Saddle The Big and the Little Dead Hand Now You See It— —And Now You Don't</i>	{ The Galactic Empire settles into final decay. Its last battle with the rising Foundation dates at 47,200. The Mule rises and falls somewhere about 47,300. The Second Galactic Empire is established at 48,000.

Note: A similar historical pattern can be constructed for those stories which do include the development of positronic robots, beginning with *Strange Playfellow* and ending with *The Caves of Steel*. There are also many stories that fit into neither pattern.

more in detail to Holden, who still couldn't seem to take it all in.

"It wasn't just light," Philip was saying. "They knew what light was, from the steady gray illumination of their cloudy skies. The illumination may have been whiter, but they recognized it for what it was. To them, it was still just a piece of their sky that had come down to the surface. Flame was something else again.

Holden shook his head, "I still don't see why."

"It was *blue* light that flickered and shifted, and could be carried about. That was the main point. It was light that could be held in the hand. It was a portable star, and not just featureless light in the sky or from a ship. Remember flame can't exist on this world of theirs with its atmosphere of nitrogen, argon, and sand. In millions of years nothing could possibly have burned on Sigmaringen IV until I got the compressed hydrogen and oxygen from the water recirculator and let them burn in one another. The aliens were faced with the unknown, the incomprehensible. They

were only children, after all, and they ran."

Around the space-ship now was the comforting blackness and emptiness of space; the friendliness of the stars.

Holden sighed deeply. "Well, we'll be Jumping soon, and then we'll just be a day or two outside Earth. We can report these energy creatures, only . . . Phil?"

"Yes."

"There's no point in telling what happened to us."

"No, I suppose not."

"Let's just forget it all. It was mental control. It's better to forget."

Philip said, "Much better."

His words rang hollowly in his own ears. Mental control or not, he would live with the memory of Celestine barring him from the door while Holden pursued him with clutching fingers; the memory of Celestine laughing wildly.

Forget?

In his mind, he could hear Celestine laughing and, quite uselessly, he put his hands over his ears.

"What's the matter?" said Holden.

"Nothing," Philip said drearily.



"It shoots a stream of electron particles. They used to call it a flashlight . . ."

"I am only a woman, and
my heart weeps . . ."



Illustration
by EMSH

THE FEMALE

By ROBERT CRANE

TO THE Prince L'a was given the task of guarding the strangers.

I SAT in the garden of the palace in the evening, playing long-shadow music on the little bells, and my lord came to me and put his hand upon my heart and I knew that he was filled with sadness. He said, "It is decided," and I said, "Sit, my lord, and tell me what is decided and

why your spirit is so heavy."

He said, "Quieten the bells," and I quietened them, and all the birds in the garden ceased singing.

My lord sat beside me and said without words, "We met in the Circle outside the Temple of the Trees, all the elders and all the princes, to talk of the strangers who fell from the sky in the shining disk. This is how the talk went: the elders, none excepted, were agreed that

the strangers must lose the joy of their bodies without any delay. Of the princes three spoke up, I among them, and prayed that the strangers should live and dwell among us as if they were our own kind."

I said in anger, "Ah, the elders are cruel. Their hearts have grown small."

"It was not easy to answer their speech," my lord said. "When the strangers descended we went out to greet them and they replied to our greetings with fire and noise, and twelve of our family fell in redness and the joy went out of their bodies. Therefore, the elders argued, clearly this is a sign that the strangers are mad, like the wild beasts in old stories, and before any further misfortunes overtake us let us destroy them swiftly, and the shining disk also, so that the day of their coming may be forgotten for ever like an evil dream. But the three of us spoke differently, and we said, For a thousand years we have not destroyed any living thing, and these strangers—ill-favored as they are—still are like ourselves, the blind dream of the great Creator. Therefore, let us not molest them in any way, and when they are ready to leave let them leave in peace, bearing the knowledge of our quietness so that they will not disturb us again."

I said, "That was justly spoken."

My lord went on without words, silent in the silence of the evening, "We argued each against each until we were weary, and then the strangers were brought in so that we could listen to their thoughts and their hearts. But their thoughts were like a million fish swimming in a small pool, and their hearts were wild with fear; and we learned nothing from listening to them except that the shining disk can no longer fly, its wings are crippled, and the strangers cannot return to the place from which they came. Then they were led out again, and the elders said, *See, they cannot leave here, and what shall be done with them since they are mad and dangerous.*

"But I believe the elders were ashamed

of wanting to destroy them, and after I had spoken again they looked at each other and one rose up and said, *The Prince L'a speaks fine words: therefore let him have charge of the strangers, let him house them and feed them and let him prove to us that they deserve to live in our land.* And I said, *Gladly.* And another elder rose up and said, *Let it be understood that one further act of madness shall mark the end of our tolerance. If they harm any others of our family they shall go instantly.* And I said, *This is understood.* And a third elder rose and said, *The Prince L'a shall be held to a full accounting of all that happens while these strangers are in his charge.* And I said, *I shall be held to the accounting."*

When my lord had finished speaking he put his arms around my body and held me, and I could feel his sadness. I kissed him and comforted him, and said, "There is nothing to fear, oh my lord. The strangers will live with us in peace, and the stars will be brighter for your kindness." And I started the little bells ringing, and all the birds in the garden began to sing again. I said, "My lord, what can I do to set your heart at peace?"

He said with words, looking with love at me, "The strangers are now in the palace. We shall go together and welcome them and make them contented to live among us."

I said, "Rest, my lord, and I will go. Rest here, my dear lord, and listen to the long-shadow bells and close your eyes."

He smiled, and I smoothed the soft hair of his mane and left him.

THE wife of the important politician said, "Jim, here comes another of them. Oh my God, it's a *she*. I swear it's a *she*. Jim, don't let her come near me—"

The important politician said under his breath, "Control yourself, Marva. Think of the position we're in. We can't afford to offend these people. Give her a

smile. Act friendly."

The beautiful girl-friend of the celebrated gambler said, "Did you ever see a dream walking, Mike? You should enter her as a filly at Hialeah—"

Mike Postellano, the celebrated gambler, said, "Shut up. They probably have this place wired for sound. You want to ruin our chances?"

The wife of the captain of the disk said, "Darling," in a whisper, and held tightly to her husband's hand.

The captain of the disk, whose name was David Llewelyn, looked at the strange creature who had come into the room. He observed the long bony head, the huge soft laterally-set eyes, the short delicate arms held forward from narrow shoulders, the long mane, the hoofed feet; and he said nothing.

I SAT among them and strove to open my heart to them, since they were strangers far from their own lands, but my skin wrinkled with fear at the sight of them and my nostrils quivered at the odor that came from their bodies. Their faces were small and round like fallen fruit, and their limbs long and thin like spiders; their eyes were squeezed together, and they had small beaks with tiny nostrils and small mouths like wounds that have not healed; their necks were skinny, and the hair grew *above* their heads like the leaves of a pineapple. The sight of their deformities frightened me, and the odor of their bodies frightened me even more, like the feathers of an old arrow; and it was hard for me to sit and not to run from their presence.

I played the gentle bells of welcome for them and tried to listen to what their hearts had to tell me, but it was as my lord said: they spoke of nothing except fear and confusion. I called my sisters and my handmaidens, and they brought fine grasses for them, delicate herbs from our emerald garden, red and yellow apples and bowls of our clearest waters; but the strangers cried out loudly when these were placed before them and were

afraid to eat or drink. My sisters brought our sweetest birds to sing and lit the butterfly lanterns for them; but they were still afraid, and I pitied them.

I saw that three of the strangers were males. One was old, with swollen intestines from drinking too much water. One was harsh and cruel with hard fingers. One was young, and he regarded me quietly; and this one I marked for friendship.

I saw that three of the strangers were females, and they wore strange garments. One was old, with swollen intestines from drinking too much water and blue hair like the nest of a bluebird. One was younger, with yellow hair and with two pointed humps upon her chest; and it might have been that she dwelt formerly in a desert, where food and water are scarce at certain seasons. The third was young and quiet, and shrank from me. And I could not understand how any of them could conceive.

After I had sat with them for some time I left them and returned to my lord. He perceived the shadow in my eyes, and he held me in his arms until all the coldness and the quivering went from me. His breath was like perfume, and the sun shone from his eyes driving my shadows away, and I was glad.

I said to him, "My lord, three of the strangers are females, and they wear strange garments, and I cannot understand how they could conceive."

And my lord said, "Hush, the great Creator achieves his ends in many mysterious ways."

THE captain of the disk thought, *Funny little thing with a face like a horse. Cute, though. Feminine.*

—What do we call these characters? Hippographs? Hippians? Can we live here among them in peace? God knows. They're obviously intelligent, highly-developed, civilized. But then, so are we. Highly. Look how we escaped from Earth.

—The ship will never fly again. We're stuck here. The end of the line

for six who had to be saved.

—*There were two hundred ships despatched from our territory. Each one carried six who had to be saved, whose primary function was to perpetuate the human race, its ideas and its ideals, its deathless spirit. Who could expect priority in these circumstances? Poets, scientists, philosophers? No, sir. Mr. Big gets priority, Honest Jim Callaghan. Musicians, engineers, doctors, architects? No, sir, Mr. Big's shadow is ahead of them all, Mike Postellano, the celebrated gambler, to whom Honest Jim owes so much. In this way we preserve and perpetuate the deathless spirit of the human race, with Mrs. Callaghan and the gorgeous blonde girlfriend who giggles all the time.*

—*And when we landed, Mike Postellano in his typical humanitarian way had to mow down the first group of hip-pians that we saw. Bang-bang-bang. Demonstrating his superiority to these characters. Very human. It was a miracle that they didn't slaughter us after that.*

—*My wife. Poor kid.*

—*Perhaps we should have stayed on Earth and taken our chance like the others who stayed behind.*

—*It's too late, now.*

I SAID to my lord the Prince L'a, "I have been three days with the strangers and they are still strangers to me and I have no knowledge of their hearts. Except the young male, whose words are without meaning but gentle."

My lord said, "Be patient with them. Understanding comes with every hour."

I said, "My lord, if I were as they are, far from my own land, I too should be afraid. I beg of you, speak to the elders and ask if we may not build a house for them so that they may be free of our eyes and not held like prisoners, and so that they may observe their own customs and prepare their own food privately."

"The elders will not listen."

"Tell them, my lord, that we are not

barbarians who take birds from a tree and lock them in a cage."

My lord said, "It is useless to speak to the elders."

But afterwards my lord came to me and said, "I spoke to the elders as you requested, and they said Nay because the strangers harmed so many of our family when we went to greet them."

I said, "My lord, let me speak to the elders," and he answered, "They will not listen to you since you are a female." We talked for many minutes until he said, "Go, go then, leave me in peace," and I sought out the white-maned elder and pleaded with him. He said, "Nay," but I pleaded with him again, and he said, "Go, go then, build the house, and when the house is finished we will listen anew to your request."

So we called together all the princes and others of our family to talk about what manner of house we should build, and they all listened to me; and in the evening I went to the strangers to tell them what had been agreed.

But the confusion still remained, there was no understanding between us even though I marked the shape of the house on the floor for them to see. The old male with the swollen intestines made noises at me like dead leaves rustling in the night, and he touched my arm and it was like the touch of a drowned serpent. Then the young male walked with me into the garden, and suddenly in the cool air there was speech between our hearts and I was filled with joy. We conversed without words, very gently.

I told him, "Now be glad, for the princes and others of our family will build you a house where you may be private and do as you wish."

And he smiled at me.

Then I said, "What brings you to our land?"

His spirit went far from me, and then he said, "In the world from which we came we could not live any longer. There were great fires and great winds, and it was the end of all joy for our people."

I asked, afraid, "Why? Did a comet approach?"

He said, "No, it was done by the inhabitants themselves, quarreling. This was their last quarrel, and they flew in shining disks and hurled pieces of the sun at each other until nothing good was left. The lands were covered with ashes and bitter salts, the grasses withered and the streams from which we drew our water turned to acid, and the air burned our lungs as if fire was in it. Even the birds fell from the trees in sickness and the fishes died."

I said, trembling, "How could this be?" and he was silent.

I said, faltering at his side, "Is this true?" and he said, "It is true but it is

and he was silent.

I said, "Is there love between you and your female, the dark-haired one?"

He answered, "Yes," and I left him and hid alone in the garden and wept, pitying him.

THE captain's wife said, "Darling, I keep thinking about the damndest things." She sighed.

"Like what, for example?"

"Oh, how you were going to take me to Mexico for a vacation, because I'd never been there. Now I'll never see it."

"This is much more exciting than Mexico."

"I guess so—and on the Wednesday before everything happened I saw such



"If he ever asks for a shave too, you can start looking for another barber"

over now. There is no cause to tremble."

I said, "What of the six of you who are now among us? Is there any quarrel between you?"

He said, "The noblest and the wisest were chosen to fly from the desolation, to find new worlds and make new lives. How could there be any quarrel between us?"

I said, "Is there love between you?"

a pretty dress in Saks Fifth Avenue. I keep wishing that I'd bought it."

"You have plenty of clothes—"

"They're all in the ship, darling. And we aren't allowed to go near the ship."

"In a few days, when they realize they can trust us, they'll let us get anything we need."

"Mike Postellano says if he wants to go nobody's going to stop him."

The captain walked over to the corner of the room where the celebrated gambler and the important politician were whispering together, and said, "Look, Mike, the ship is out of bounds. You'd better stay away from it."

Mike stood up and said, "Who are you talking to, kid?"

The captain said, "They have guards on that ship day and night."

Mike said, "You think I'm scared of those goddam horses?"

Honest Jim Callaghan said jovially, "Now, boys. No arguments, fellers. We're all in this mess together."

The captain said, "Mr. Callaghan, keep this goon of yours under control, or we'll all be in a hell of a worse mess."

Mike hit him in the face and said, "Who's a goon, kid?"

MY LORD found me in the garden, in the darkness, and said, "Why do you weep?"

I said, "Leave me, my lord. let me remain here awhile."

He stayed near me, and I was glad. I said, "Go, my lord, leave me," but he stayed, and I crept close to him and was glad of his stubbornness. He held me in the silence of love, and the stars were over us; and when I was comforted he said, "Now tell me why you wept."

I told him, and he grew still. When I finished he said, "This is a dream you had through eating the coarse grasses of the forest," and I said, "No." He said, "You are a female, and your mind is filled with strange thoughts," and he scolded me. But later, when he should have slept, I knew that he was awake even though he did not move. I said, "Rest, rest, my dear lord," and he said, "It is the middle of the night, why are you not asleep, female?" And I said, "I am asleep."

Later, he went quietly away, and I lay in fear. Then as the dawn came, I heard loud noises like thunder, and I ran to the place where I knew my lord had gone, to the shining disk; and many of our people were hurt and some had

fallen in redness, but my lord was unharmed.

MIKE POSTELLANO said, "I don't understand how I got away. There was a thousand of these goddam horses round the ship. I thought they had me for sure."

The captain said, "I warned you. I told you not to go. How many did you kill this time?"

Mike said, "I didn't kill none. I fired in the air. I just tried to scare them."

The captain said, "I hope to God you're telling the truth."

Mike said, "I didn't have a chance to fire more than a couple shots. They snatched the gun away from me."

"You damned fool," the captain said.

The blonde girl friend of Mike Postellano said, "Blow, little man, before Mike beats your brains out."

Honest Jim Callaghan said, "Now, now, boys. Let's keep it friendly. After all, Mike was only trying to ensure our safety."

"With guns," the captain said.

"You're yellow down to your guts," Mike said.

The captain's wife called, "David, come here. Please come here."

Marva Callaghan said, "Jim, Jim, stop them from fighting."

Honest Jim said, "How can I stop them, dear? The boy asked for it, didn't he?"

Mike said, "That'll learn you who's boss around this place, punk."

IN THE morning the elders and the princes met in the Circle outside the Temple of the Trees, and my lord was among them, and I hid behind a cypress tree, where I could listen. The white-maned elder spoke, and said, "How many of our family were harmed in the night?"

My lord answered, "Seven."

"And of these seven, how many have lost the joy of their bodies?"

"Three. And another is hurt seriously."

"Was the stranger harmed?"

My lord answered, "We were careful to do him no harm."

The white-maned elder said, "It is for the Prince L'a to explain how this happened."

And my lord said, "It is beyond my understanding. But this I know. They must possess some sickness. For the strangers come from a place where they quarreled often, and in the end there was a great quarrel when all the inhabitants fought among themselves, hurling pieces of the sun at each other until nothing was left but a desolation. Their lands were destroyed, and they could not breathe the air. And from those that remained alive of the people the noblest and the wisest were chosen to find new worlds and make new lives. And the six strangers in my palace are six of these."

The white-maned elder said, "Since they arrived we have known no peace."

My lord said, "The sickness must still be in them, and their minds are disturbed after all the sorrow they have known. Their hearts are confused."

The white-maned elder said, "Let each prince speak, and each elder, so that we may decide what shall be done."

And I hid behind the cypress tree and listened, and there was none who spoke for the strangers, and when the speeches were done my heart grew big with fear for I knew what the white-maned elder would decide. And I sprang from my hiding-place and ran into the center of the Circle, and said, "Hear me, I pray of you."

The white-maned elder, who knew me well, said, "Who is this female?"

My lord said, "She is mine."

The white-maned elder said, "In the Council of the Circle there is no place for females. Remove her."

And my lord said to me, "Go."

But I stayed and said, "Oh, learned elders and noble princes, hear me. Let justice be done, but justice follows truth.

I speak for none except the young male whose heart I know, and who is kind and gentle." And I spoke on about the young male and about the young female, pleading for them; and all in the Circle listened in silence until I had finished speaking. Then the white-maned elder said, "We have heard you. Now go and do not return here."

I sat in the garden in the evening, and the bells were silent and the birds crouched low on the branches; and my lord came to me and put his hand upon my heart and said, "It is decided."

And I was afraid to speak to him.

He said, "Be not afraid, there is no punishment for you."

And I said, "I fear for the strangers."

He said, "All the elders and all the princes considered your words and this is what they said: When the strangers arrived they did harm to our people and we thought this was a sign that they were mad. But we did not destroy them instantly, we permitted them to live. Now again they have done harm to our people, and again we have a sign of their madness, and have they not brought their sickness with them? For they could not live among themselves, they destroyed their own lands and their own families, until they were forced to flee and come to this place. And in time, when they have multiplied, who knows what they will do? They will make a desolation of our lands also, and is this to be permitted?"

I said, "Oh my lord, what then was decided?"

He said, "You are a female, it is not for you to know."

I said, "My lord, my lord, what of the gentle young male and she who is with him?"

He said, "We must fear their seed."

And he left me and went alone to the house.

And I waited, and when he came out I washed his hoofs and comforted him, and he did not look at my tears.

cRESCENDO

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

How could Floyd love his neighbor when she kept sending him dead cats? He hated Nina's poetry and her dead cats—until one Hallowe'en

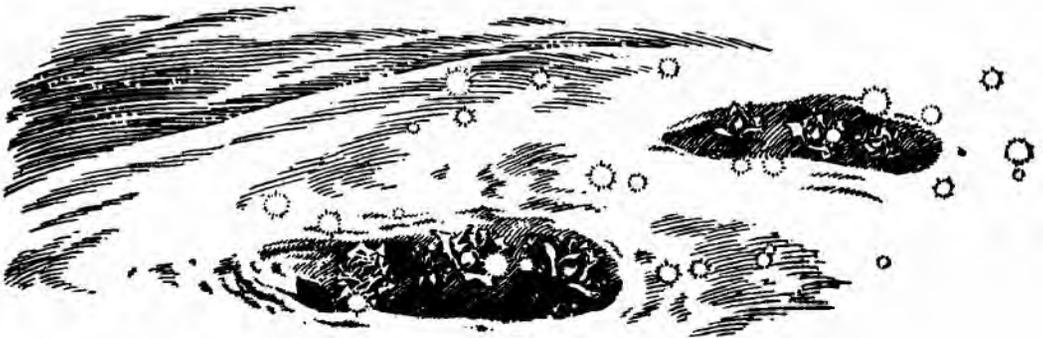
THE dead cat was still about a foot down. Floyd leaned on his shovel and looked thoughtfully into the hole. There were times, like the present moment, when he was tempted to forget the whole thing. Nina Ashdar was an indisputable witch—a spiteful, malicious, hell-mean little witch—and he couldn't possibly hope to come out on top in a feud with her.

Furthermore, she was darned good at her witchcraft—witness the boil on his chin and all the limp, anomalous, malformed cats she had conjured up against him. She hadn't been a bad neighbor, before they had started feuding. Why not get back on decent terms with her?

A reconciliation would be simple. All

he'd have to do would be to accept one of her poems—any one, no matter how short, it didn't matter—for *Crescendo*, and she'd be all smiles and nods and waves over the garden fence. Her poems weren't impossibly bad, actually. Many little magazines printed things that were weaker than hers. The gravest objection he had to them was that they were so derivative. But if he could bring himself to compromise to the extent of four lines in the next issue of *Crescendo* . . . It would be wonderful to be done with dead cats.

Floyd Evans frowned. After a moment he sighed and shook his head. His sore chin jutted out aggressively. His personal resentment he could have over-



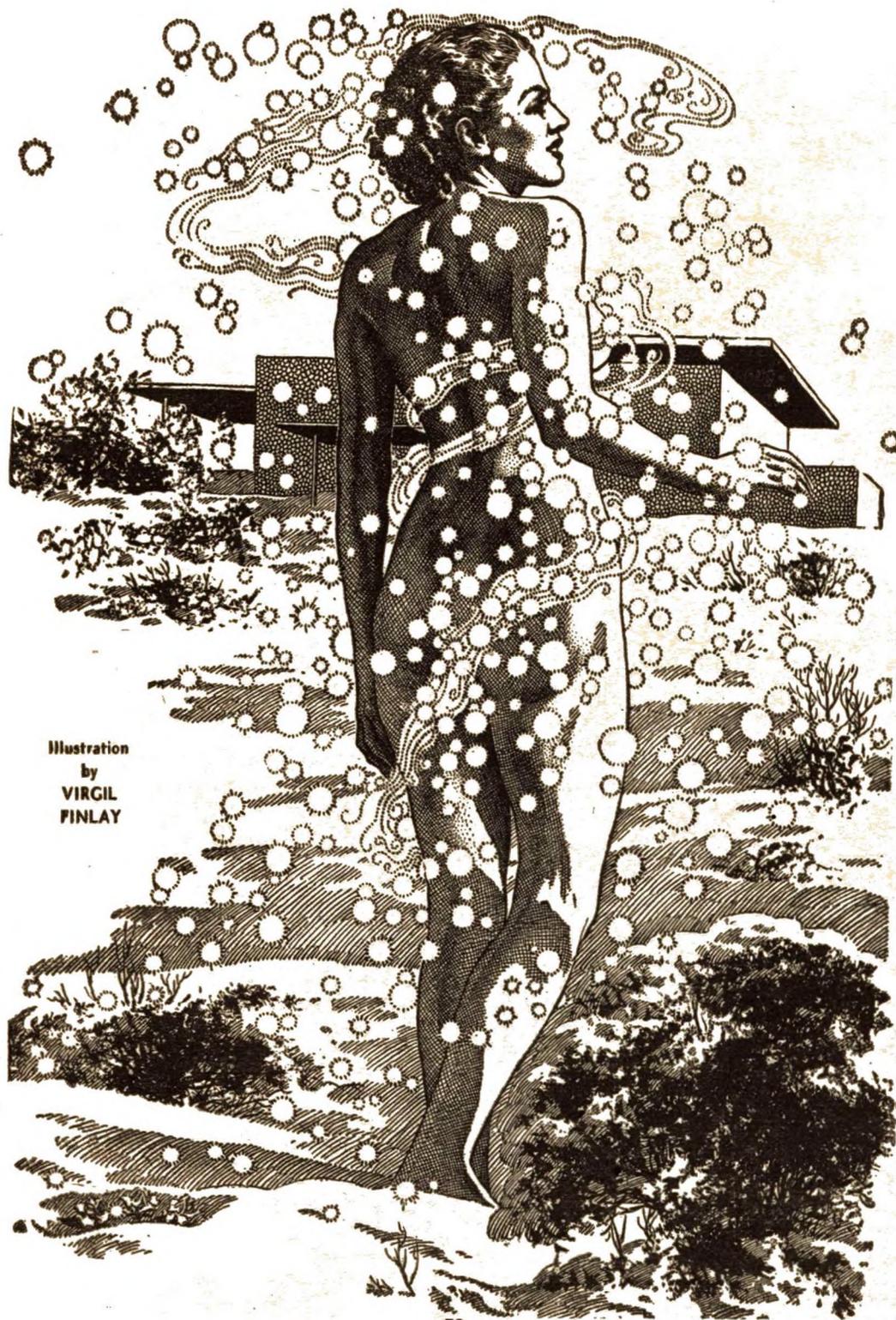


Illustration
by
VIRGIL
FINLAY

ridden, but it was a matter of artistic principle. In its year and a half of existence, *Crescendo* had come to stand for the day after tomorrow, the advanced avant-garde, the truly original. Nina's poems were derivative in a way that set his teeth on edge. They were early Auden imitations, written with a very blunt and blurry pencil by somebody with no ear and a lack of feeling for grammar.

Take the word "strict" for example—Nina had "strict" in every other line of her poems, and sometimes in contexts that showed she thought of it as a verb. Nobody had used "strict" in a poem since the 30's, anyway. He couldn't print stuff like that.

He began to shovel dirt out of the hole once more. The cat was good and ripe; Nina's synthetic animals seemed to get ripe harder and faster than real ones would have. Having the carcass dumped over the fence into her garden ought to infuriate her. Sometimes he wondered why she kept sending him recently deceased artificial cats, when having them returned to her via the fence several weeks later irritated her so. But no doubt she didn't know how to stop the feud without loss of dignity either.

He scooped up the disinterred carcass on the shovel and carried it over to the fence, trying not to inhale. Actually, the cat was less disgusting now than it would have been two weeks earlier. It didn't look so much like a cat.

He took careful aim. It was almost dark, and he wanted the cat to land where it would do the most good. He gave the shovel a mighty heave.

The cat flew over the fence and came to rest, with a noise like a bursting watermelon, in the middle of a chrysanthemum bed. Floyd laughed nastily. Nina wouldn't get much pleasure out of *those* flowers.

He drew back discreetly into the shadow of a yew, and waited. In about ten seconds an upper window in Nina's house flew open and she stuck her head out. She gasped; it was a gasp that was

perfectly audible even behind the yew tree. Then she began to swear . . .

Floyd smiled sourly. If he knew anything about Nina, her swearing was, literally, cursing, and he'd have a couple of new boils by morning. Already the blossom on his chin had increased its throbbing and smarting. But it had been worth a good deal to hear her horrified gasp. He hadn't done too badly for himself.

All the same, he felt depressed as he went back to the house. The days were getting shorter; in a month or so winter would be here. Fainton in winter was a lonely place for a young man with intellectual interests. Thank God he had a worth-while project like *Crescendo* to keep his evenings occupied. Tonight, after supper, he'd make a big pot of strong tea and go over the page proofs for the fall issue. They ought to have been back at the printer's a week ago.

Supper was bacon and eggs and canned tomatoes, but when Floyd went to the stove to scald out his teapot, he found that the water in the tea kettle wasn't even warm. Puzzled, he inspected the kettle, the fire, the water. The bottom of the tea kettle was hot, so hot that it sizzled when he touched his dampened finger to it, but the water inside the kettle was definitely cool.

He turned up the fire. The kettle got so hot he could smell the heated metal, but the water inside obstinately stayed less than luke-warm.

It was impossible. Had the laws of nature somehow been suspended? Were all the molecules of water in his kettle refusing—Oh. He was a dope not to have thought of it. Nina, of course. The ability to keep water from boiling was one of a witch's traditional powers.

Floyd made a disgusted noise. It wasn't only that he wouldn't get any tea—and he loved tea in the evenings, a big, strong, hot, generous pot—but what about his boils? How was he going to poultice them without hot water? *Damn* Nina. She knew what she was doing, all right.

After a minute he got a glass of milk from the refrigerator. It wasn't quite cold enough, and it tasted faintly sour, but he drank it anyhow as he frowned over the page proofs.

When he had finished them, he felt somewhat better. It looked like a good issue. The article on "The Agenbite of Inwit in Browning's Paracelsus," was well-written, and he'd not be surprised if it attracted some favorable comment. Browning was such a dated and tiresome author that it was about time for him to become fashionable again. And the little story about sodomy was excellent. Yes, a good number of the magazine.

He fastened the pages together neatly with a paper clip and laid them aside. Now that that was out of the way, he'd look over the manuscripts that had come in the last week. It wasn't too soon to start working on *Crescendo's* winter number now.

For an hour or so Floyd opened envelopes, pencilled comments, frowned, whistled, raised his eyebrows, sighed. Most of the contributions were criticism or poetry; there were only two short stories in the lot. About nine-thirty he got another glass of milk from the ice-box and opened another envelope. His eyebrows went sharply up.

It wasn't only that there were three "stricts" in the first two lines, he remembered the poem itself. He'd gone over it a word at a time with Nina, trying to show her why it wasn't any good. Did she really think he was so kapok-brained that he wouldn't remember a poem he'd read less than two months ago? Had she submitted it under her own name?

He shook the enclosed return envelope out. It was addressed to Mr. Richard Frisbie, North Ascalon Ave., Sunland. She'd had that much sense, anyhow.

Floyd snorted. He drew a pad of *Crescendo* note paper toward him and began to write. "Dear Mr. Frisbie," he indited, "You are either a victim of telepathy on a large scale, or you are a

shameless plagiarist. This poem is identical with one submitted to me two months ago by a Miss Nina Ashdar. It wasn't any good then either. Next time pick something better to plagiarize. I don't want to see any more of her work."

That would make Nina sit up. He signed the note, "Sincerely, Floyd Evans," and stuffed it and the rejected poem in the Frisbie envelope. He'd mail it tomorrow morning on his way to work.

He put a pad soaked with witchhazel on his boil before he went to bed.

FOR the next two days Floyd was conscious of a certain apprehension. He went about his duties at the bank distracted and sore-chinned. He didn't know how long it would take Nina to get the note he had addressed to Frisbie, but he knew that when she did there would be trouble. He didn't in the least regret having sent the note. But he couldn't help wondering what she'd think of this time. Tomorrow night would be Hallow'een.

Friday evening was crisp and clear, with a nearly full moon in the sky. Floyd would not have been surprised if he had had to wade through drifts of dead synthetic cats to reach his front door, but the moonlight showed the yard flat and placid, and there was nothing wrong inside the house. He even managed to get the water in his tea kettle hot enough to have a cup of Nescafé with his supper.

About eight o'clock four trick-or-treaters appeared and exacted tribute. Outside of that, the evening was completely uneventful. By the time Floyd went to bed, about eleven, his nerves were so on edge that it took him nearly an hour to get to sleep.

He was wakened by a gentle rapping at the front door. He pulled on his bathrobe, stuck his feet in his slippers, and went to see what it was. He didn't feel at all apprehensive, probably because he was yawning so hard.

It was Nina. He looked at her with

amazement—what was she doing here?—solicitude—she'd freeze to death like that—and, eventually, delight. He hadn't realized she was so beautifully made.

"Un—wha—how—unh—" he said.

"Darling." Her voice was soft and blurry and as warm as August. "Darling. Dear Floyd."

He stared at her. "Nina, what . . . unh . . ."

She put out one small hand and touched him on the shoulder. At the contact, impulses he rarely thought of awoke in him. Current shot dazzlingly through a circuit he hadn't even known was there. He drew a deep breath.

"Floyd," she said.

He hesitated no longer. He took her by the elbow and led her into the house. In the bedroom he put his arms around her, kicked the door shut with one foot, and waltzed her smoothly over to the bed. For a moment he stood kissing her. This was the best thing that had ever happened to him, and he knew it. He prolonged the kiss. The room seemed to swim in waves of musk and ambergris. Then he pushed her gently backward.

"Oh, boy," he said. "Oh, boy."

SHE left about five the next morning. Floyd, who wasn't due at the bank until nine on Saturdays, woke about seven, feeling wonderful. After he had bathed, dressed, and breakfasted, he went out in the yard and, busy as a bird dog, went from plant to plant picking every flower he could discover. He made them into an enormous bouquet for Nina. Then he trotted over to her house with them and, wreathed with smiles like a bridegroom, stood knocking at her door.

Her window opened. A dead cat fell with a sickening plop at his feet.

For an instant he was too surprised to be indignant. Then fury woke in him. He bellowed, "Why the hell did you do that?"

Nina stuck her head out. She looked exactly as if last night had never hap-

pened. "What else did you expect me to do?" she inquired sarcastically. "Next time pick something better to plagiarize.' You—you—editor!"

"But—last night—you came—I thought you meant it. Why, you said, 'Dear Floyd.'!"

"Last night was Hallow'een," she said, as if that were a complete explanation. "The Sabbath. Naturally I came over. Now get out of my yard."

"But—"

Another dead cat landed at his feet. Wrath, resentment, and nausea contended in Floyd's breast for a moment. Wrath won. "I wouldn't print your poems if they were written by Yeats!" he bellowed. "I wouldn't print your poems if they were written by Dylan Thomas or Shakespeare! You don't know what a poem is! You don't know anything! You can't write!"

Nina seemed to grow pale. Then her window slammed down. Floyd bellowed a final insult—something to the effect that she wouldn't know an imagist from a new critic—up at the unresponsive pane. He tore his careful bouquet into shreds and twigs and hurled the bits onto her front porch. Then he stalked out of the yard.

After that, nothing new happened. The fall issue of *Crescendo* came back from the printer and was sent out to the subscription list. Floyd started work on the winter issue. The days got shorter and colder. It got ready to snow.

The winter issue was duly printed. There were no new submissions from Nina, either under her own name or that of her alter ego in Sunland. He rarely saw Nina herself; she seemed to be busy doing the writing for astrology magazines that constituted her livelihood. The winter dragged slowly on, a monotonous succession of boils, dead cats, and under-brewed tea. Floyd's boils grew so noticeable that the bank moved him to one of the rear windows, where he saw nobody except farmers who wanted crop loans. It was all right with him. Winter had him in its grip.

January drew on to its close. And suddenly, on February second, it was preparing to be spring.

February is the month of revolutions. Floyd in his wire cage, fingering the latest blossom on his forehead, felt a sudden rebelliousness. All he'd done all winter long, with regard to Nina, was to throw an occasional not very far-gone dead cat over her fence. It was time to retaliate more effectively.

When he got home that night he sat for an hour or two thinking. Once he wondered whether, if he printed some of her poems, Nina would undergo a more or less permanent transformation into the girl she'd been on Hallow'een.

Girl? She'd seemed more like a goddess, a wonderful but highly earthy divinity. When he thought about it, even now, he . . . It wouldn't work, though, and he knew it. Entirely too far-fetched. Printing her was impossible anyhow. He had his principles.

He knew what he'd do. He'd build a cat catapult.

The cats he'd chucked over Nina's fence this winter hadn't bothered her much. The weather was too cold for the cats to be very ripe, and anyhow she wasn't out in the garden this time of year. But suppose a cat, even a comparatively fresh one, came flying down her kitchen chimney and landed with a thump on her breakfast table. Would she be discommoded? Ho-ho! He jolly well thought she would.

Floyd had been an enthusiastic sling-shooter as a boy. He hadn't much mechanical aptitude, but he understood about sling shots. He got down the Castr-to-Cole volume of the encyclopaedia and looked up catapults.

Um, yes. Frame, propelling gear, trough, pedestal. He thought he could manage it. He could introduce a few simplifications, since he wasn't after distance and penetrating power—it was only about fifteen yards to Nina's house—and he thought pieces of twisted inner tube would be a good substitute for skeins of animal sinew. What about the

bowstring that held back the wooden arms? Maybe some of the brake cable from his old bicycle would do for it.

He got a pad of *Crescendo* note paper from his desk and made a quick sketch on it. Then he went out to the garage.

By eleven o'clock the catapult was substantially done. Floyd would have liked to give it an immediate trial, but the moon hadn't yet come up and he was tired and cold. Better go to bed. He'd wind the engine up the first thing in the morning. Nina could have an unexpected sauce to her hot cakes or whatever it was she ate.

He was wakened after a few hours' sleep by a gentle rapping at the front door. He pulled on his bathrobe, stuck his feet in his slippers, and went to see what it was. History—though he was yawning too hard to notice it—history was repeating itself.

The moon had come up, and the snow banks were reflecting its radiance with a soft yet dazzling light. Against the unearthly glow Nina's body seemed to glow with a light of its own; she was as naked as she had been at Hallow'een, and far more beautiful. Floyd felt a lump of wonderment rise in his throat as he looked at her.

None the less, he tried to collect himself.

He wasn't going to be a sucker a second time. Hallow'een had been splendid, but its aftermath had left him with a considerable bitterness. He didn't mind having been seduced, but he did mind having been betrayed. "What's the big idea?" he managed to say.

Nina only smiled at him. She touched his hand lightly, still smiling. "*Floyd,*" she breathed, "*Floyd.*"

He delayed no longer. To have clung to an obsolete resentment, at a time when the whole moon-lit world was rocking and swelling with desire, would have been insanity. He caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately. Then he took her by the elbow and led her, once more, masterfully down the hall to the bedroom.

NINA left a little earlier than she had before. Floyd slept until after eight, blissfully aware that he was going to be late to work. When he did wake, he lay on his back with his hands under his head, thinking over the events of the night.

Nina . . . Nina . . . what a girl she was. He had the distinct impression that, several times during the night, he had offered her his soul on a silver salver, swathed in tissue paper and wrapped as a gift. She had accepted the gift gratefully and had enjoyed it. Then she had given him his soul back again, laved in perfume, better than ever, beatified. Who had given the gift?

He knew one thing. Whatever the sequel to last night might be, whatever the future held in the way of boils, dead cats, cold tea, he was a lucky man. A lucky, lucky man.

He lay a little while longer, considering. Then he got up, ate, bathed, dressed and went to the bank. He passed the garage, where the cat catapult was, with an unregarding smile.

His euphoria did not disappear during the day, but it receded somewhat. For one thing, he was really pretty tired, and for another there was an irksome mix-up in his department over a crop loan that ought to have been renewed and apparently hadn't been. By closing time Floyd was in a considerably soberer mood.

He walked home slowly, with his head bent. What was going to happen next? Nina had come to him on Hallow'een, and again last night. It was an interval of three months. Would she come again on May first? And in between would there be more dead cats?

He was sick of it. He was sick of feuding with her, sick of the boils that made him feel loathesome to himself, sick of trying to get back at her. He was sick of all the things that came between him and the task of editing *Crescendo*. The magazine, when all was said and done, was his biggest interest in life. He wanted to be free to concentrate on it.

And the winter issue—there was no use in trying to hide it from himself any longer—the winter issue had been distinctly below par.

If Nina would always be the way she had been last night . . . But did he really want her to be? Last night had been wonderful, a blessing, a privilege, something he'd remember with satisfaction all his life. He'd stick to that. But he didn't know how long he'd be able to keep it up.

As far as that went, what was Nina really like? What was the link between the glowing, wonderful woman, the almost goddess, who'd come to him in the moonlight, and the mean, hateful, bad-tempered little witch who afflicted him with those damned boils? What was Nina Ashdar really like?

Ashdar. Floyd raised his head as if he were listening. That name—he'd heard it—if he could only remember—no, it was gone. Regretfully he shook his head. He sighed. And yet there was something there, if he could only get it. If he could answer that question, who is Nina Ashdar? satisfactorily, he might have more time for editing his magazine.

Head still bowed, he turned in at his front gate. It wasn't too dark for him to see his own footprints in the snow. Off to one side, and lighter, were the marks that Nina's bare feet had made when she came over last night.

There was an odd pinkish tinge to the marks. Interested and perturbed, Floyd bent over them. He drew in his breath sharply. In every footprint Nina had made—coming up through the snow, growing in the snow—were tiny pale pink flowers.

He got down on his knees. He leaned far over. In the gathering dusk he squinted intently. Yes, the flowers were roses. Tiny, perfect roses. And coming up from them—he sniffed—was a heady rose scent, the very breath of June.

He got to his feet again, slapping snow absently from his trousers. He looked around himself unseeingly. It

seemed to him that he had had an important revelation without understanding exactly what the revelation was. Nina and the roses . . . He turned and went in the house.

Without removing his overcoat, he went to the bookcase and got out the Anno-to-Baltic volume of the encyclopaedia. He looked up "Ashtoreth." There were several others references; he read them all, ending with "Ishtar." For a moment he stood undecided, pleating his lower lip. Then he left the house.

IT HAD grown quite a bit darker while he had been reading: Venus was brilliantly visible low in the west, and he could scarcely see Nina's head when she stuck it out in answer to his rapping. "Come on down," he told her. "I want to talk to you."

"Go away."

"I want to talk to you."

The window closed. There was several minutes' silence. Then Nina opened the front door. "If it's about last night," she said spitefully, "I don't remember anything about it. I don't know why I came down, anyhow. I wish you'd go away."

"I'm not interested in last night," Floyd told her. She seemed to be wearing some sort of shapeless house dress. It looked terrible. "I came over to tell you I know what makes you act the way you do." He cleared his throat accusingly. "You're a goddess."

It was quite dark, despite the brilliant light of Venus, but he could see her make a spiteful face and begin to twiddle her fingers. He felt an itching, throbbing lump, another damned boil, start out on his left cheek, but he persisted. "I said, you're a goddess."

She stopped in mid-twiddle. "What makes you say that?" she asked with what seemed to be genuine curiosity.

"All sorts of things. Your name, in the first place—Nina's the lady of heaven, and Ashdar is Ashtoreth."

"It's just a pseudonym I took to write for the astrology books."

"What's your real name, then?"

Nina was silent. Floyd pressed his advantage. "You said you came to me on Hallow'een because it was the witches' sabbath. That wasn't the real reason. That was just an excuse. Last night you weren't a witch at all. You were more than a woman. You were a goddess."

She laughed unmusically. "Thanks for the compliment. I must be pretty good."

"Don't try to make fun of it," Floyd admonished her severely. "A witch couldn't do the things you do. Who ever heard of a witch making synthetic cats? They're more like miniature lions anyhow."

"I—I've always been able to make things."

"That's what I mean. Do you realize that there are roses growing—real, sweet-smelling roses—in the footprints you made in the snow? You're a goddess."

"I'm not! I'm not either!" she cried almost in panic.

"Yes, you are. Can you remember being born?"

"Can you?"

"Don't be flippant. You know what I'm driving at. Can you remember being a child?"

Nina nodded. "Yes. I had the most wonderful toys. Men, and women, and animals. And a beautiful big golden ball."

"Most children don't have toys like that. But can you remember your father? Your mother? Anything like that?"

Nina made a tiny noise that was almost a whimper. "Floyd, don't! Please don't! Please stop!"

"Why not? Don't you want to be a goddess?"

"Don't send me away! Maybe you're right—I'm frightened. Maybe I forgot I'm what you say, on purpose. But don't make me go away. It's so lonesome up there!"

Floyd hesitated. He licked his lips. She did sound distressed. He had a sud-

den vision of the neglected page proofs for the spring issue of *Crescendo*. They seemed to beg silently for his blue pencil. He thought of the long, quiet evenings of editorial authority. They had never seemed so good. "Go on back," he told her sternly. "You can't get away with this, Nina. If you're a goddess, you've got to be one. Go back, Nina. Go back and be a goddess."

She seemed to shrink away from him. Her shapeless garments dropped from her; he caught a wonderful glimpse of the unearthly beauty of her body. She gave a final tiny whimper. Then she rose upward rapidly.

Upward, and back. For a moment she floated above him. She seemed to call, to beckon. She seemed to hold out her hands to him. Then she receded rapidly into the glow of the evening star.

She was gone. He couldn't believe it. The mother hubbard contraption she had been wearing was still lying on the porch. He picked it up and shook it. She wasn't anywhere.

He regarded Venus, now almost on the horizon, blankly. That was where she had gone. He was positive of it. It

was reasonable enough. Venus was the planet sacred to Ishtar.

At last he sighed. Now that it was over, he felt a poignant sense of loss. It was not unmixed with relief—there'd be no more boils, dead cats, straw-colored tea. But, loss.

For the next few weeks he worked, though with diminishing enthusiasm, on the proofs for the spring issue of *Crescendo*. He even wrote a few letters to contributors. Then he shoved the proofs in a drawer.

He sent off for a small reflecting telescope—\$29.50, observatory clearness guaranteed—and paid for a year's subscription to a magazine for amateur astronomers called *Sky and Telescope*. Now, every evening that it is clear enough and Venus is above the horizon, he is out looking earnestly at the planet through the telescope.

The first of May has passed, but Floyd is still hopeful. There's still August first, and October thirty-first after that.

He hasn't exactly forgotten *Crescendo*. But it looks as if the spring issue of the magazine would be a long time in coming out.



Among Next Issue's Stories

DOUBLE DATE

Here's what happened when Smitty found himself on a date with two girls at the same time

By WINSTON MARKS

WAYFARER

They called him an idiot—but the alien voices he heard were real

By ROGER DEE



Counterfeiter

By WINSTON MARKS

They duplicated lettuce of the garden, not banknote, variety . . .

I SLAPPED the requisition down on Oliver's desk. "Would you mind," I said, "explaining?"

Oliver picked up the slip in his fat fingers, let it drop, and folded his hands across his belly again. "Like it says," he said mildly. "The big red rubber

stamp. Disapproved. Or in simpler words, you don't get what you want, Buster."

"But, cripes, man, I'm ready to demonstrate. Three years' work, and you bounce back a lousy two hundred buck's worth of requisition. Dollars to dough-

nuts, they got the stuff in the stock room right now."

"Demonstrate, shmemonstrate. I sent it through channels and it came back red."

"I'll take it to Stockham," I announced.

Oliver shrugged. "I think he's washing retorts in the chem lab right now," he said. "Things are tough, that's all. I'm sorry, Blakely—I really am. I know what it means to you. But when the director gets chopped five thousand a year and goes around turning out lights in his own office—well, that's what Stockham's doing."

Completely puzzled, I climbed the marble stairs to see the old man, himself. Stockham waved me in and I fluttered the pink slip at him. "I think there's been a mistake, sir. Oliver says—"

"No mistake, Dr. Blakely," Stockham snapped. "Our budget is shot." He worked the loose skin of his grizzled face with one hand and gripped the arm of his chair with the other. "Your project and all others in pure research are canceled. You'll be handed a memorandum within the hour, but I'll give you a preview. The Clow Foundation is about to become unhinged on the Ph.D. level. All but a few technicians and a small consulting staff will be terminated this week. No more funds for—" he almost choked at his anger over the words—"unproductive projects." He swiveled his chair away so he wouldn't have to meet my eye.

Which is the ungentle way I met the depression of 1961. As I walked, stunned, from the senior director's office, his girl handed me a mimeod sheet, still wet and pungent. My name was on the separation list.

In the vaulted corridor outside, the busts of Einstein and Langmuir followed me with stony eyes. They had their niches already. LaVoisier smiled at me in the curve of the stair well, but Archimedes and Pascal looked the other way, and Euclid hissed, "Alchemist!"

MATH Ph.D.'s were indeed a glut on the market. My telegrams to the Ford and Carnegie Foundations were answered promptly, politely and negatively. All my ex-classmates were in the same spot or hanging onto their appointments by the glint of their Phi Beta keys.

A week later I wheeled my old '54 jalopy up the rutted side-road between the acres of rich loam that was our family farm. I came unannounced, unnerved and disillusioned. It was almost bed time, and the family was on the front porch. My brother Joe, whooped at me, and Dad, Suellen and her sister, Toby, hauled me out of my car before I could turn out the lights.

Dad noticed my black mood right off and simmered down Suellen, Joe's chubby, tow-headed wife. He led me up to the old porch swing. "Stop chattering, and let the lad say something," he said. "Wonderful to have you with us again, boy. Little vacation?"

"As we say in the theater, I'm between engagements," I told them.

"No!" Toby exclaimed.

"That's right. Fired. Separated. Terminated. Caput!"

They looked as if I'd just handed each one an anvil. Joe recovered first. "Swell," he grinned. "I got a pitchfork that'll just fit those delicate hands of yours."

Sue said, "Come on, Toby. Let's feed the brute. Looks like he's been on the breadline for weeks." Toby got off my lap, and suddenly I realized I had been holding a small, but mature young woman. The package of short pig-tails, freckles and tight denim pants was no longer a teen-age dynamo. She was a full size power-plant with a 10,000-volt smile.

When she had gone in with Suellen, Joe said, "Believe it or not Bill, we were just talking about you when you drove up, and Toby was asking when you might get down this way for a vacation. Then she came right out and announced she figured on marrying you. You know Toby. Says what's on her mind, and

darned if she doesn't mean it about half the time."

No, I didn't know this Toby. She was an impish little creature who came to live with them shortly after Joe married Suellen. She had been away at college when the fire levelled her parents' ranch buildings and trapped them on the second floor of their old homestead. Orphaned, she couldn't stand the city any more. She appeared one afternoon with her suitcase and a face full of tears, and Dad took her in as a "hired hand."

She and Suellen sold their farmland, and the proceeds were more than ample to finish Toby's education, but she'd have none of it. She was soured on city people in general and capital K culture in particular. She called herself the out-cast of sorority flats, and declared she'd die an old maid in sneakers before she'd wrestle it out in high heels with the college boys.

"I thought she was down on the intelligentsia," I said. "As I recall, I have a degree."

"Yeah, but you got nothing against sneakers," Joe laughed.

When I went in to eat the cold fried chicken the rest of them sat around drinking coffee and watching me.

Dad said, "Hope you can stay with us, Bill. Toby needs a carpenter for her new project."

"Building us a good old-fashioned highway market," Toby interrupted.

"To sell our own produce?" I asked. "What happened to the frozen food contracts?"

"Like I predicted," Toby said, "soon as this depression broke the market they started a price war—with us for ammunition. They tore up our contracts, and Dad refuses to sell at their prices. We'll undersell their frozen prices by fifty per cent and still make a profit by operating our own stand."

They explained to me that the big super-markets now dominated all food distribution, and their acres of frozen food cabinets offered everything freezable. Fresh and canned goods were al-

most entirely out.

It sounded feasible to me, and I agreed to help them.

JOE wanted to know about my work. "Did you make any progress on your conversion process theory?"

"The math and paper work are done," I told him. "That's what hit me so hard. I was ready to build a unit and prove out my formulae when the axe fell." I pointed to where I'd dropped my briefcase. "There it is, three years' work, frozen because the board of directors panicked. I can't publish until I verify my math operations with an experimental demonstration. So, let's build a vegetable stand and forget it for a while."

Toby looked up from her manicuring operation. "Is this the same deal you talked about when you were here last Christmas? The idea for transmuting metals and stuff?" I nodded. She asked, "Couldn't you work on it here?"

"It would take quite a bit of money," I explained. "At the foundation where I had their big transformers and rectifying units to work with it would have been very inexpensive, but here I'd spend two or three thousand dollars just on power equipment. And like I told you, there's nothing practical about it. The cost of power exceeds the value of anything you would transmute, by a factor of about a hundred to one. It's just a new principle, and it would bring me some recognition if I could publish my paper."

"Let's do it," she said suddenly. "Let's build you a rig. I've got money in the bank. We can be partners. You get the glory, and if there's ever any profit, we'll split it!"

"That's sweet of you," I told her, "but better save the money for your dowry. With those freckles, you'll need it." I meant it to be friendly, but it came out sounding condescending.

Toby flushed, and then I remembered Joe telling me about her assertion regarding marrying me. I could have

kicked myself.

The stand went up in a hurry. Then the real work began. For three weeks we rose with the larks, picked dewey-fresh lettuce, tomatoes and other assorted vegetables as they came ready. We cleaned, trimmed, hauled and displayed them like we remembered the old-time farmer's markets doing.

Nothing happened. Even the thrifty had lost the habit of highway shopping. Then we built a couple of huge signs on which we posted a daily super-bargain, such as:

LETTUCE, 3c A HEAD

It cost us more than that to grow it, but we had to stop those cars somehow.

It worked. As the summer wore on, more and more old cars stopped at the stand. The depression was working in our favor. But when we totalled our profit in October it was tiny. Our loss-leader items had sold all too well. Our volume was fair but the take was small.

"We got most of our operating cost out of our crop." Dad said, not too enthusiastically. "Next year we'll put in a line of groceries and increase our gross volume."

It was at Sunday dinner, the day after we closed the stand for the winter that Toby kept looking at me out of the corners of her big, gray eyes. After dinner I learned why. She led me out back in the crisp fall air. She drew me into the old chicken shed where she pulled a string that flooded us with light. She waved her hand in a triumphant arc. "All right, Mr. Brain, you need a lab. Now you have a lab. I want to see your gadget work. Let's get going."

She had scoured the little out-building, floor to ceiling, tacked up oil-cloth curtains and stuck Air-Wick bottles in the corners. Joe had built a couple of broad benches and wired in electrical outlets. A small heater warmed the air, and it had a secluded cosiness.

"You provide the gray-stuff and I'll kick in the green. We split the proceeds 50-50. No arguments this time."

Her faith in me gave me a glow. It really did. But I explained gently, "Don't you realize, baby-doll, there will be no proceeds? If I wanted to bilk you I'd have some stock shares printed. There's just no practical use for my gadget."

THE materials started arriving the following Friday morning. Toby had been banging ears in our household, and the whole family presented a united front against my objections. Dad voiced the decision. I was to be excused from all chores. They would feed and clothe me. I would engage myself and bring honor to the name of Blakely. Next spring I could pull my weight on the economic front by helping Toby expand the market.

Even so, I begrudged every dime of Toby's that I had to spend. I redrew my plans and set out to develop a miniature and somewhat revised version of my converter. Being only a second-class mechanic, it was months before my ten thumbs were able to express my math symbols in metal, wood, glass and polysterene. Toby prodded me every foot of the way. She became more expert at soldering fine connections than I, and she even developed a talent for glass blowing over the coffee hot-plate.

Finally, on a balmy May evening, I called the family to the hen-house to witness my hybrid triumph of mind over matter. It looked like a cross between an incubator and a permanent wave machine, and much, much more useful than it was designed to be. My rooters sat about on folding camp-stools as I turned on the water valve and activated the transformer primaries. Toby was flushed with excitement. She said, "Stop fiddling, Bill. We're ready."

I fed a charge to the smallest segment of my bank of condensers. My jury-rigged rectifier glowed ominously, but nothing melted. I explained, "This will all seem very remarkable at first, but be prepared for a big let-down. Now what would you like me to duplicate?"

"Duplicate?" Toby said, "I thought

that this rig—”

“—transmuted some substance into another,” I finished for her. “It does, but I need a prototype, a model, that is. The raw-material is good old well-water, but I need a pattern to copy.”

Joe flipped a half-dollar over to me, which jarred me a little. Just so they wouldn't get any serious ideas, I bled off part of the condenser charge to shorten the time-stability factor. I laid the coin in the hopper, dropped the lid and narrowed the focus of the scanner. Everyone jumped when I popped the switch, which actually made more noise than the static discharge—about like popping an old buggy-whip.

I didn't have to open the door. My screw-holes for the hinges were too big and it fell off. Anyhow, there were two four-bit pieces. Toby goggled and started to reach out. She drew back. “Have to check it for radiation or something?”

I said, “Go ahead, pick it up. You are thinking about cyclotrons and magnetrons. My process is strictly an energy shift, a warp, a—a transfer.” I looked at Suellen. “Like your cookie-cutter, Sue. Joe's half-dollar was the pattern. We used it to punch a sort of fancy hole in space, filled the hole with water mist and used the electricity charge to make up the energy disparity between water and silver.”

No one was listening. I might as well have read my formulas to them. Score zero for my lecturing ability. They passed the coin from hand to trembling hand. As the time limit approached Joe had the silver piece in his hand comparing it with the original. “Same date, even,” he said. “Can I keep it, Bill?”

“Sure,” I said, “but I wouldn't put it in my pocket if I were you.”

“Why no—hey!” he shouted. “What's —”

They were shocked to the bottom of their Scotch chromosomes in spite of my warnings. Sue whimpered, “It melted—back to water.”

“That,” I said flatly, “is the disap-

pointment.” I turned to stalk out, but Toby caught me. She spun me around and jerked my head down to her altitude. “You're wonderful, Bill!” she said and planted a most unsisterly-in-law kiss on me that I was to remember vividly and longingly.

PRESS of work on the vegetable stand delayed finishing my paper. We sawed and hammered for a week enlarging and closing it in. And the day the trucks arrived with our stock of grocery staples I got a phone call from the Foundation.

Old Stockham cackled cheerfully. To make ends meet they had secured a contract to do some stress analysis computations for General Aircraft. But their staff was scattered to the four corners, and could I rush down and help them off the hook?

I told him it was our busy season, but he mentioned a bonus figure that would enable me to pay Toby back what I had borrowed. I said yes in spite of Toby's heavy head-shakings. Dad and the others were happy for me. Sue said she'd help run the stand and dad could get a hired hand if necessary. I packed.

Back at the Foundation I was swept into a remarkable fury of activity. Before I had a chance to scrape the honest farm soil from under my nails they were tapping data keys on the three-story transitron computers. Research for the sake of philosophical posterity and the glory of dear old Siwash was a thing of fading memory. *Production* was the watchword, and I spent ten to twelve hours a day producing for pay.

At day's end I was too exhausted even to work on my paper. My sole relaxation was my correspondence with the folks. Toby wrote that the loss-leader idea was pulling in business better than ever, and she thought we were showing a real profit. She seemed vague in certain areas of her description, however, and it smelled as though she were concealing something.

In mid-August I admitted to myself I

was homesick, and a week later in the privacy of my sleeping cell I considered the possibility that it was really Toby I missed. With the smallest effort I could conjure up the scene in the hen-house and feel her arms around my neck, the warmth of her little vibrant body against mine and the tingle of her lips.

When we finished the G. A. project on the 29th, I stalled Stockham's grateful offer to keep me on at my old salary, and I headed down the highway like a lovesick calf. My old sports car strained every cylinder under my impatient foot. I arrived ahead of schedule four o'clock in the afternoon.

The turn-off where our market was located was obscured by some twenty assorted vehicles of vintages older than mine. Business *was* good. The ten-foot sign registered on me. No wonder they had customers!

HEAD LETTUCE ONE CENT

There were other changes. Toby was hidden behind a shiny, new cash register which she played with one hand while the other pawed over a mountain of groceries and produce. People were lined up waiting to pay for their loaded baskets. Suellen and Joe were trucking in cartons and fresh supplies, jamming things into bins all of which seemed almost empty.

TOBY saw me gaping. She planted a sneaker on the counter and dived over a short, startled customer to land all over me. I grabbed her in a hug that should have bruised her from the neck down, but she wriggled and gasped for more. I had been right about her lips. They were the juice of existence, and I was dry. My taste was sweet but short. She flipped back into the check stand and yelled, "See you soon, professor."

Reluctantly I drove on to the house. Dad was just coming out of the old hen-house. He met me on the porch. "Missed you, son," he said quietly, and he avoided my eye. He looked fit, and his grip was

firm as we shook hands solemnly.

"Keeping chickens again?" I asked casually.

He went through the lengthy pipe-loading and lighting ritual before he answered. "Well, I'll tell you, Bill. Better let Toby explain. I'm not entirely sure I could justify what's been goin' on here."

My misgivings ripened, but I was in the shower when Toby, Sue and Joe came up, and then no one wanted to talk much at dinner. Afterward, Toby begged off from the dinner dishes and got me out on the porch swing.

"Now," I said sternly, "what's with the hen-house and the one-cent sale and all the secrecy?"

"You won't like it," she said, "so kiss me first."

With considered discretion I held her off. "Have you been making change with phony money?"

She shook her pigtails. "Why that would be cheating," she said. "Anyway, it takes too much power to make it stick together long enough to pass it. And when I read the electric meter to figure costs—well, you were right. It warn't practical."

"All right, what *have* you been counterfeiting?"

"Now don't get mad, Bill. Not more than a little mad. Remember, we're partners."

"Tell me!" I said sharply.

"Lettuce," she said. "And sometimes carrots and tomatoes. It helps to vary the special, and we were running short, anyway."

"What!" I jumped to my feet, horrified. She pushed me back down to the swing.

"Now simmer down and quit worrying until I give it to you," she said firmly. "I fiddled around with the rig and found that the more power I fed to it the longer things it produced would last. Silver and metal stuff took a heck of a lot of power to hold it together, but a good-size head of lettuce used only about

half a kilowatt. On our farm rate that's about a half cents worth. And with that much power our produce stands up well for almost ten days."

I TRIED to interrupt, but she stilled my working lips with a soft palm. "Hold still, now, will you? I figured that if we sold only perishables, people would eat them up before they melted. I was right, too. Haven't had a kick all summer. Of course, we ate some ourselves first to be sure they weren't poison."

I grabbed my head and moaned. "The Department of Agriculture, the Federal Trade Commission, the Pure Food Bureau—oh, my gosh, gosh, gosh!"

"They'll never know."

"You bet they won't," I snapped. "As of right now the convertor is out of business." I had her check all made out, but the occasion was not as I had pictured it. "Here's your \$2800. Our partnership is dissolved."

She took the check and stared at it with disbelief. "Why, you—you flat-footed city hick! You misty-eyed moralist! That's not all that's dissolved." She stormed into the house slamming the screen door so hard straw from a swallow's nest under the eaves showered down on me.

Dad and Joe came out. Joe said, "Sorry you feel that way about the convertor, Bill."

"That's just how I feel," I said. I stared at them hard. "Times must be tougher than I ever knew them when even the farmers are out to gyp the public." Dad said nothing. He puffed huge clouds of smoke at the mosquitoes.

Joe rubbed a two-day stubble of beard on his chin. "We didn't exactly feel like we were cheating. So they do pay us a penny for a cup of water? They save a potfull of money on the rest of their vegetables. And how much food value do they lose when a tomato does dissolve inside them? Heck, it's 90% water anyhow."

"In other words," I said, "a little cheating is all right, Joe? Honesty is

just a matter of degree, is it? Is that what dad taught us?" I got louder the madder I became. "Do you suppose I could publish my paper in a scientific journal now? That would look good: 'Young genius demonstrates new principles of matter conversion and tomato counterfeiting!' And you all had the guts to say, 'bring honor to the name of Blakely.' Bring honor, my eye! Bring cash! And Toby—if we must starve, let's not do it in obscurity, she said."

Toby exploded out the front door again. "Stop yelling at your folks, will you! It was all my fault." She stood before me, denim legs apart and hands rammed into her riveted pockets. "I'll admit I didn't think about your publishing the paper. All right, I didn't think, and I'm sorry, but you quit yelling at people."

In the embarrassed silence that followed Joe and dad sat down on the front steps, Toby flopped on the far end of the swing, and we all stared at the full moon. I felt righteous, lonesome and asinine.

SUELLEN popped out just then with a platter of chocolate cake and a tray of glasses of milk hugged against her ample bosom. "What a gloomy looking outfit," she said. She served us, then plumped down between Toby and me with a huge wedge of cake for herself. I watched her devour it—Suellen, who was always on, or about to go on, a diet.

She said reflectively, "I've been considering putting in a little honest-to-god bakery goods down there. City folk don't know good baking any more." I offered no comment.

She finished her cake and licked the frosting from her pudgy fingers. "I guess maybe we were a little dishonest, Bill. On the other hand, we weren't hurtin' anyone. And we really didn't make anything off the phony vegetables, you know. They were just advertising. City people pay higher prices than ours, and they can't eat the advertising they are paying for, let alone digest it."

Suellen's homely reasoning made some

sense, but she could see I wasn't about to give in on the principle of deception. So she got up abruptly. "Goodnight, all. We'll have to roll out earlier yet if we have to *pick* enough lettuce for tomorrow. C'mon, Joe." They went in.

Dad got up, too, but he came over and looked at Toby and me for a long moment. "You two," he said, "don't let this throw you. Things will work out, you see if they don't."

I looked at Toby, but she stared hard straight ahead with her lower lip out half an inch. I said, "I'll be going back to the Foundation, dad. My old job is open, and—well, I can contribute more that way, I guess."

"I see, son," dad said quietly. He went in.

Then Toby got up and said in a flat voice, "Good night, chum. Sorry we went to different Sunday schools."

I sat there like a stuffed shirt and let her go in alone. Then I watched the moon go down. At midnight it had set and my spirits with it. When I went in I noticed a light in the kitchen. Suellen was at the cake again. She clutched her flannel nighty around her overfull curves and grinned at me strangely.

"I'm going to tell Joe on you," I said.

"Oh, he's all for it," she said. "You see, this cake is converted. I—I've been sneakin' out to the henhouse every day after I bake. Hope you don't mind, Bill. After all, I'm not foolin' anybody but myself, and it's such fun! What a heavenly way to reduce! Would you believe it, I've lost six pounds already, and I've been eatin' like a hog."

She saw me frowning. "Honest, Bill, I wasn't going to sell this to the public. My thought about the bakery was to offer the real stuff. I think it would go."

"Sure it would," I said. "You make wonderful cake, Sue. And you can use the convertor any time if you just eat the stuff yourself. But you get my point, don't you? Even if I weren't an old maid about deceiving people, the Pure Food people would catch up to us sooner or later."

She nodded. "Sure, sure, Billy. No hard feelings."

"It's like artificial coloring and preservatives," I went on, eager to justify my earlier outburst. "It's against the law to use them to mislead people into thinking that—that—"

She looked up at me. "You look funny. What's the matter?"

I GRABBED the heavily frosted cake off the platter with both hands, bit into it and stared at it. I opened the door to the stair-well with my elbow, ran upstairs to Toby's room and told her to turn on the light.

She did, and when she saw me she pulled the covers up around her neck. I shouted, "There's the key! Look at it!"

Toby scowled at me. "Looks like Suellen's cake to me. Have you gone squirrely?"

"It's the answer, it's the answer," I told her. I put the cake down on her night stand and grabbed her shoulders. "You were on the right track but you had your signals crossed."

She tried to wiggle free. "You're getting frosting on my pajamas," she said. "Look at your hands!"

"It's converted cake," I told her excitedly. "In ten days those stains and Suellen's excess fat will dissolve to water. Get it?"

Her eyes sparkled. "Got it. Now go wash your hands and come back. You're making sense, boy."

THE only advertising we did was on the labels in which we wrapped the bakery stuff. The boxes and sacks read:

THIS PRODUCT IS NON-FATTENING

Warning—these perishables must be consumed within five days from date of purchase. Contains digestible but completely unstable ingredients warranted not to yield fat-producing calories upon assimilation.

Suellen and Toby baked an assortment of prototypes, and I turned out a few dozen of each the first day. The henhouse took on a redolent aroma unknown

to chicken houses in all history, I will wager.

Within a week our clientele shifted strongly toward the better heeled trade which arrived in long, low automobiles. If ever you want to know about the effectiveness of word of mouth advertising, call on me.

By Sunday we were exhausted. After dinner we lay around on the lawn under the shade trees discussing our new problems of production.

I wanted to go into wholesaling. We had had several offers from jobbers in town already. Suellen and Joe wanted to stick with the stand. Sue sighed happily. "Did you notice the late model cars stopping now? It's the hicks with money. Toby was smart to insist on charging extra for our stuff instead of cut-pricin'. Heck, they'd pay double again. I'm for staying with the retail

end of it and pouring it to them."

Toby sprawled supine counting clouds, oblivious of the grass stains soaking into her pretty new white dress. "Just think," she said, "two thousand per cent profit! That'll teach the hicks to overfeed their big fat mouths. You know we got to expand fast. We're almost swamped already."

Dad said, "We'd better go slow. Takes cash to expand."

"We have it," I told him.

Toby raised her head. "Who has it?"

"We," I said. "You and I, partner. Remember the dowry?"

"Yeah," she drawled. "The dowry that freckled-face little me would sure need some day. Now I suppose you think you're man enough to collect it?"

I was. But I had to chase her clear up to the top of the old elm tree to demonstrate it.



THE OLDEST BOOK ON MEDICINE

THE world's oldest book on medicine was discovered in Egypt some years back. It is estimated to be at least 3,600 years old and is remarkable in that it contains no reference to magic. Its methods of therapy do not include either prayers or chants.

It is organized according to subject matter and lists forty-eight case histories. Each is a careful study of the type of ailment and its individual peculiarities in the patient concerned. The discussions are based wholly on fact, and their manner is scientific—comparable to case histories in modern medical journals, allowing for a smaller store of knowledge.

The book also has numerous illuminated descriptions of the heart and blood vessels, as well as data suggesting that the author (or authors) knew much more about the heart and blood stream than the rest of the world knew up to a few centuries ago.

—Bess Ritter

Illustration by F. K. FREAS



My Fuzzy Cousin, Reamer

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

ALL OF US gawked some; you can't take that out of human nature. But my girl, Mary Ellen's pretty little mouth was sagging like a tired trumpeter's, and in her queenly blue eyes I detected a glassiness that was horrible, let me tell you. It was the glassy look that disturbed me. I nudged her with my elbow and whispered, "Let's don't

be rude, Mary Ellen. Let's don't be rude to my cousin, Reamer."

Reamer was the first Martian that Mary Ellen, or any of us, had ever seen. Half-Martian, really, since his father happened to be my Uncle Frisley, who is a mining engineer on Mars.

We had not seen Uncle Frisley in twenty-five years. When the family

Blood is thicker than almost anything—

even when your relatives come from Mars

heard about his taking a Martian wife, they had just stopped talking—but not necessarily thinking—about Uncle Frisley. Nobody could have predicted that anything like this would happen. It was simply too awful to contemplate.

When we got the message that we were supposed to meet Reamer at the spaceport, my mother flipped her lid, the way women are privileged to do. She yelped a couple of yips to attract our attention, and then fainted.

When we had revived her, she started screaming again, right in mid-scream, where she had left off. "What *are* we going to do, Arnold? We'll be ruined socially! Imagine a shaggy ape-thing living in the same house with us, calling us aunt and uncle! What will our friends say? We'll have to leave town—to move out of the country. We can't ever live it down. Oh, Ar-r-rrnold!" This last in a long-drawn-out banshee wail.

"Now Milly," my father said. "We've got to be civil to him. He's our kinsman. Besides, maybe the boy will take after Frisley."

"Your kin, not mine!" Mother said. "If you think for a minute that *my* family would claim any relationship to a—"

"*Milly!*" said Father, in the ice-water tones of a card shark who has just discovered three aces up his opponent's bib. My mother shut up.

Well, I didn't even want my girl friend, Mary Ellen, to come along with us to the spaceport, but she said she wanted to see a Martian once, and she would promise not to make fun of Reamer.

Mary Ellen worked down at Baccardo's, where I played the slip-horn with Skip Sorrenson's Un-Swedish Six. She was our thrush, and while her head was not much good for thinking, it was a nice, blonde head, and it had a fine set of pipes and a sense of pitch. She could sing, Mary Ellen could.

All too soon, the passengers had disembarked, and the first thing you know, there he was, with his pile of matched *djaga* hide luggage, and making the Martian gesture of friendship by touch-

ing his forehead to my mother's hand.

It was really too bad, but the fact was, Cousin Reamer took after his mother.

IT IS a curious thing, but my mother, I after the first, startled glance, didn't seem to notice that the blond—reddish hair that seemed to completely cover Reamer's huge, angular body was over three inches long—that his cranium sloped back to a perfect point behind, and his arms hung well below his knees. She was really the bravest, kindest person in the world. She said, "We're very happy to have you, Reamer. That's your uncle Arnold there, Reamer, and this is my son, Harvey. Shake hands with Reamer, Harvey."

I shook, and said, "How do you do, Reamer, old boy." It seemed that he fractured every bone in my hand.

And then I went over to Mary Ellen and grated into Mary Ellen's ear. "Come off it, Mary Ellen; you've got to stop that."

"Mind your own business," Mary Ellen said. Later on I learned that all women looked at Reamer like that. I guess he must have been used to it.

We had arrived home, and were climbing out of the autocopter when my dog, Teddie, came running out to meet us. Teddie is a sociable dog. He began to lavish his usual display of affection upon all of us:

Then he seemed to sense Reamer. He turned and gave Reamer the once-over for a long moment, with his glistening, brown eyes. He stood there, nose-testing, with his head low to the ground, and then he howled in sheer terror, and bounded out of sight around the corner of the house. It was the last we saw of Teddie for two days.

Mary Ellen hung around and had dinner with us. She and Reamer got along very well, a perfect case example of beauty and the beast. I took her down to the Club early to get her away from him, and on the way down we had our first serious quarrel. I forgot what the

argument was supposed to have started over, but we both knew what it was really about.

It was two o'clock in the morning when I got home. Everyone else in the house seemed to be asleep, so I had had a quick snack and went quietly up to bed to keep from disturbing anyone.

I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking a lot of crazy, moody thoughts, most of them centering around Reamer. Reamer made me uneasy. I had been prepared to patronize Reamer, to feel sorry for him, but now I wasn't so sure he needed it. There was something about the penetrating blackness of his eyes. Something about the careless grace of his apish body. There were some strange stories told about the Martians. Besides, Reamer was half Terran, and he was certainly no square. I had a premonition that things wouldn't be too peaceful during his visit.

The dogs around the community were howling dismally, as they were to do all night. About two-thirty I got up and put my robe on.

I decided to walk around a bit, since I couldn't sleep.

The hallway light was burning dimly. Coming up the stairs was my kid sister, Minnie. Minnie's eyes were half closed, as she stumbled on the last step and almost dropped the covered tray she carried.

I waited for her. "Where do you think you're going?" I said. "A twelve-year-old girl ought to have been asleep six hours ago. You know you're not allowed to eat in bed."

She gazed at me with bleared, slitted eyes, and said nothing.

"Well."

"It's for cousin Reamer. I'm taking it up to Reamer."

I lifted the napkin. There were several carrots and three pork chops on the tray.

Raw pork chops.

"That's a fine thing," I said. "What's the matter with you, Min, have you been walking in your sleep again?"

MINNIE'S lower lip began to quiver ominously. "I'm *not* asleep. He likes them this way. The pork chops, I mean."

"All right, all right," I said. "Don't start yelling." I took the tray out of her hands. "Now run and hop back into bed. You've been having a nightmare."

She didn't move. I balanced the tray on the newel post, and took her by the hand. I took her to her room, tucked her in bed, and shut the door behind me. During all this time she didn't make a sound of protest. I went back, picked up the tray, and started downstairs. Then, I thought I could feel eyes boring into my back; upon impulse I glanced behind me.

I must have jumped a foot. Cousin Reamer's shaggy head was poked around the edge of his door, and his eyes were glittering with a dark, preternatural interest in what was going on.

"What's the matter?" I said, with some irritation.

"Sorry if I startled you," Reamer said. "Having a snack?"

"Well, no. I—that is—yes, I suppose so. I was going to, but I changed my mind."

"Let me have it, then," said Reamer eagerly. "I'm starved. That is, if you don't mind. Say, why not bring it into my room, and we'll both make short work of it."

"Well, I don't know. I—"

But Reamer was already holding the door open for me, looking clownish in his plaid pajamas.

I set the tray down upon his night-table, and he whisked the napkin off quickly. He gave the chops and the carrots a quick look.

"It was dark," I said, trying to explain the raw chops. "I must have . . ."

"Oh, boy!" Reamer said. He picked up a chop by its handle and bit into it. A trace of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth, and he wiped it daintily with his napkin.

I figured it was about time for a show-down. I said, "Did you by any chance

order three raw pork chops and five carrots to be brought up to your room by my little sister, Minnie?"

He stared at me. "Of course not. I'll admit I was thinking about it. I woke up a moment ago, ravenously hungry, and—"

"Minnie said you were. But it doesn't explain how she knew."

"So that's it," said Reamer after a moment. "That explains it. I should have been more careful. Have a pork chop, will you?"

"No thanks. Maybe it explains it to you, but it doesn't to me."

He shrugged his shaggy shoulders. "A thing called '*natural empathy*,'" he said.

NATURAL empathy? That's the same thing as thought transmission, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. More of a wish transference, you might say. It's common among the Martian males. It's how we control the females. Within a given radius about any male, the females are obliged to—but I say, haven't you heard of this before?"

"I'd heard some stories," I admitted, "but I don't like the sound of this thing. On Earth, men and women are created free and equal."

Reamer took a bite of chop. He looked slightly amused. "An odd system," he said. "On Mars, the females live expressly for the pleasure and convenience of the males. They are attracted to the males at all times by the empathic aura, and are emotionally drawn to them. They sense the male's incompleteness and strive to give him what he wants."

"The howling dogs?" I said.

"Animals are very sensitive. I must be more careful."

"Hah!" I said.

"I'm really sorry that my thought emanations awakened your sister. Naturally, I had no way of knowing. I will try to control myself after this." He reached for the last chop and then drew back. "Are you sure you won't—?"

"No," I said. He took the chop.

"I don't think you'll like it on Earth, Reamer," I told him. "Of course, you're welcome to stay with us, and we'll try to make your visit pleasant, but—"

Reamer stopped eating, and delicately licked the fur on his forearm with his pink tongue. He said, "But it isn't a visit, you know."

"It isn't?"

"I have come to stay." He dropped his eyes to his coverlet and looked very sad and alone for a minute or so. Then he said, "I had heard that the people of Earth were very tolerant of aliens; that is why I came here. You see, I am an alien on Mars too, and Martians can be very cruel to one who is different. Merely because one's fur happens to be a different color—"

And all of a sudden I felt sorry for Reamer. I had never thought of it that way before. To full-blooded Martians he must appear as freakish as he did to us. And his male empathy would be no special advantage there, where it was so common.

"One other thing," I said. "Do all Martians eat raw—"

"Raw carrots?" said Reamer, picking up one and biting the end off it. "No, I'm afraid it's a rather disgusting habit that I picked up from my father. If it offends you—" He laid the carrot down.

While I was trying to think up an answer to that one, the knock at the door came.

"Now who would that be?" asked Reamer.

I went over and opened the door.

Mother was standing there. She looked sleepy, but resolute. She was carrying a tray. On the tray was the only t-bone steak in the house. It was uncooked.

MY FATHER was a quiet man with peptic ulcers and a conventional belief about homes being castles, and the like. I had never seen such a desperate look on his face as that evening when he called me into his study. He said, "Son, we've got to do something about

it. Things have gone as far as they can go if I keep my sanity."

I knew what he meant, but I wanted to hear him say it.

"Your cousin, Reamer, has usurped this household, lock, stock and inmates. Your mother pays about as much attention to me these days as if I were Teddie there. Minnie, your sister, has gotten to be completely incorrigible. Whenever Reamer is around, I simply can't do a thing with her. She won't mind me.

"And *he* sits around smoking my cigars, and being oh-so-damned civil and polite! Got to give him credit for that, you know. The boy's got proper manners. Learned it from Frisley, I'll warrant, (and look where it got Frisley!). We've got to do something about this confounded business. This 'empathy,' as he calls it, has gone far enough. Yesterday I saw your mother search out my last bottle of medicinal whisky, and—well it's just got to stop, that's all. A good thing I am a moral man, son, or I'd be staying out at nights myself. Yes, and I think I will, by George, if there is ever a night that Reamer doesn't borrow the car."

"I know how you feel," I said. "It's the same way with Mary Ellen, but what can I do?"

"Get him a job."

"Me? But why don't you get him one?"

He snorted. "I'm an architect. The carpenters' and joiners' union would never allow me to hire an alien—especially one who looks like an outsized Barbary ape. But it's different with you. That drummer in the band, for instance, is almost a dead ringer for Reamer. Swing bands cater to odd types like Reamer."

"But what could Reamer do?"

"How the hell should I know."

"Reamer doesn't have much sense of humor," I said, "but I'll see Skip Sorrenson about it."

Skip Sorrenson, who is a right guy all the way through, listened while I told him the whole story. He thought it over.

"We might be able to use him," he said, "if he's willing to stooge, and take a few pratfalls. We might even double him in the band—for novelty—if we can teach him to play some instrument. People will come to see a Martian. It ought to be a great drawing card."

"Thanks," I said. "That's swell, Skip. I'll tell cousin Reamer about it."

And I did. I broke it gently to Reamer that he was going to have to go to work if he wanted to keep eating regularly. I expected him to take it a little hard. I certainly didn't expect it to have the effect on him that it did.

Reamer was tickled to death. He preened himself. He strutted up and down in his blue silk lounging robe, with the Martian ghaza-birds on it.

"I'll do it," he said. "My baritone isn't so bad, if I do say so. Maybe they'd like me to do a number with Mary Ellen. I could learn to blow a trumpet, too. Why this is great!"

He hadn't quite got the idea, but I thought it was better for Skip to fill him in. That Mary Ellen business was a sore spot with me anyway. Mary Ellen was still indulging in an unseasonable coolness toward me, and I knew that Reamer had taken her out a couple of times this week. You put Reamer in a tux, and clip the hair on his face, the way he clipped it now, he wasn't so bad looking, even without this devil's advantage he had of being able to influence female ids. I was beginning to be annoyed with Reamer.

"Come on down tonight," I said. "You'll have to get there by six to work out something with Skip for the first floor show."

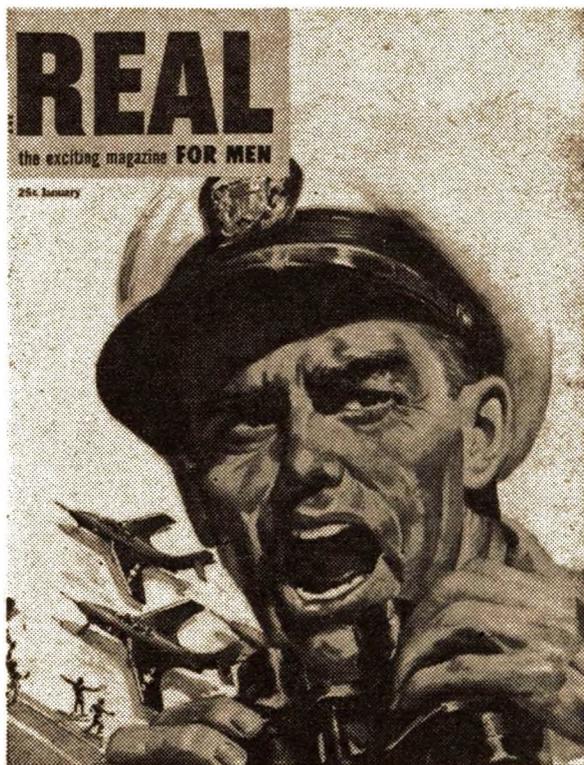
THE way it turned out, Reamer insisted on singing, and Skip tried him out. We didn't have a male singer, and it turned out that when Reamer growled it wasn't half as bad as we had expected.

"Sure," whispered Skip to me, kindly, "let him go ahead. I hate to break his

(Turn to page 96)

“I ESCAPED DEATH BY FIRE”...

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heart. And if the customers think it's funny a gorilla should be singing, we can always turn it into a comedy act. He might not like that, but we'd have to do it. Okay?"

"It's your show," I said. "Either he makes good, or he gets pie in his face."

I guess you would say that Reamer made good with a vengeance. When he first shuffled out on the stage, a woman at one of the front tables screamed. The house was packed, and we had ballyhooed him as a great artist from Mars, but you could tell they didn't believe it. They thought it was a gag. Until he started to sing.

After a moment of awe-struck silence, a man at a corner table guffawed. His wife slapped him across the face.

That was the only sound that was made. When Reamer finished, they applauded wildly. Reamer bowed and showed his inch-long yellow fangs. He was already becoming quite a ham.

After that night the weeks passed even more drearily for me than before. Mary Ellen had forgotten that first, silly quarrel, but it seemed that every time we spoke to one another we got into some kind of argument about Reamer, so we just stopped seeing each other, except at the club. I had an idea that Reamer was seeing her more often than that, and I had to do something about it. But what?

I was a long time getting the idea. Reamer was becoming well known, but he had still sung only before small night-club audiences. If I could book him on a tour, then he'd have to travel and leave Mary Ellen behind. Also, he wouldn't be underfoot around the house any more.

But it didn't work out that way. Plans hardly ever did for me. Reamer liked the idea well enough, but he said he wouldn't have anybody but me for a manager. I was flattered enough to accept, and the way it finally turned out, we booked the whole gang, Mary Ellen, and Skip Sorrenson's Un-Swedish Six for a six month tour.

I still hadn't got them apart, but we

were so busy after that, there wasn't much time to think about anything but business for a while.

We had leaped, somehow, right into big-time. Our fame spread on ahead of us and it grew in each new town. We drew record crowds, and we added novelty acts to our group until we grew bigger and richer with each mile. We had three copterbuses with our name printed on the sides in gold letters.

Reamer's head swelled so that he would hardly speak to the band members—with the exception of Mary Ellen, who was still hexed, when she had time to think about it, by Reamer.

When Reamer went on the stage, you could hear the women screaming and yelling. It was sickening, but he loved it. He played it up for all he was worth, sending his emphatic aura full strength over the audience, playing them like fish. If it hadn't been for restraining men in the audience—but I'll get to that presently. . . .

When I got around to it, I still had my original problem, and it was growing worse. If I won Mary Ellen back, I'd have to take some really drastic action.

I wasn't mad at cousin Reamer, but I wished I had never set eyes on him. He meant no harm—he never did—but he couldn't stand the sudden flux of prosperity and fame, I suppose. There was a lot of unrest in the band because, as it was with Mary Ellen, so it was with all the other eligible females we happened to run across, and the Un-Swedish Six, after all, were men, with normal male instincts. With Reamer around, the rest of us might as well have been in Timbuktu.

We grumbled among ourselves, and let it ride.

IT WAS the fifth of April that we played at the Platt Women's College at Stockwell, Pennsylvania.

It was the biggest audience we had ever had, and likely to be the rowdiest. I had misgivings about that audience from the first. Ten thousand females

without the moderating influence of a single male.

I tried to persuade Reamer to cancel this one, or at least underplay his act here, but he said he didn't have anything to do with his personality. The empathy just worked automatically, and he couldn't help the way it affected women. He was going to give it all he had.

"All right," I said. "Remember that I warned you." It occurred to me that this might be an opportunity to be rid of Reamer once and for all, if things happened the way I thought they would.

I went out and made an investment that I thought might come in handy, and when I got back it was time to go on.

They were howling for Reamer before our introductory number was half finished. The audience was so noisy that it was hard to play. There were catcalls and screams. Rennie Masters, the drummer, got so rattled that he dropped both his sticks, stood up to get them and fell flat on his back when they rolled under his feet.

When Reamer came on, the deafening noise died. Reamer spread it on a bit thick, with all the flourishes and gestures that he had picked up from the cinema stars. But they didn't laugh. You could almost see the thick, cloying magnetism of Reamer, wafted over that hall.

Reamer growled and groaned. He mumbled and crooned. He boiled and simmered. He clutched the mike in his hand and bent like a reed in a stiff wind.

And when he finished they didn't clap. They poured purposefully out into the aisles, a roiling river of maddened females, screaming, clamoring, shoving one another. It was just as I had known it would be. They made for Reamer.

Reamer turned to me; I had come to stand beside him in this climactic moment.

"What's the matter with them?" said Reamer, sounding scared.

"They liked you," I said. "They love you, Reamer."

"Then what are they going to do?"

"What they always do to great stars.

You've become a great star tonight. They're coming to get souvenirs and autographs, Reamer."

"Souvenirs?"

"Your tie. Pieces of your coat and trousers. Your colored vest. Swatches of your fur and small patches of your skin."

"No!" bleated Reamer in horror.

"But you must let them; they're your public. A star belongs to his public."

"I won't do it," Reamer said. "You can't make me. I knew that Earth women were crazy, but you're crazy too, Harvey, if you think I'm going to stand here and let them tear me apart. You've got to get me out of here. You hear me, Harvey?"

THAT was where my plan came in. I had seen this kind of thing happen before. I hated to do what I was about to do, even to Reamer, but it had come to a matter of self-preservation.

"Okay," I said. "Follow me, and make it snappy." We ran toward the wings. I turned and shoved a rather large, blonde young woman, who threatened to block our way, so hard that she fell off the stage. I hated to do it, but I couldn't let her spoil everything.

The side door was closed. It could only be opened from the inside.

"Now, Reamer," I said. I opened the door and gave him a push. Then I slammed it behind him, while I stayed there to fend off the mob as long as possible.

But a thunderous sound was swelling up behind me, *outside* the door. It was even louder than the noise within. For just as I had suspected, while ten thousand women were inside the auditorium, fully half the turn-away crowd had lingered outside the stage door to waylay the escaping quarry if he should come that way. They had played this game before.

Poor Reamer!

I waited in the auditorium for Reamer. Everyone else had gone home. Even Mary Ellen, who didn't know what

had happened, and thought that Reamer had stood her up.

It was very quiet in there, and I had almost begun to doze. Three hours had gone by. Then I saw him—a vague dark shape slinking across the back of the stage.

"Hey, Reamer!" I said. He sprang into the air.

"Oh, it's you," he said, relieved. He came forward and sat down with his legs dangling over the footlights beside me. He was almost naked. Great tufts of fur had been torn out, and he looked inexpressibly weary. His eyes were red, forlorn and hopeless. A stranger would have mistaken him for a very discouraged ape.

"What happened, Reamer?"

He gave me a penetrating look. For a moment I thought that he had guessed that I betrayed him. But apparently not, for he began to tell me all that had befallen him.

After losing his clothing and much of his fur, he said, he had wrenched loose from them and fled down the street. Seeing a high stone wall, he had pulled himself over it. He shook his head sadly. That had been the final straw, the thing which had broken his spirit forever and eternally.

He had landed in the middle of a sorority lawn party.

"Well," I said, "it's too bad, but you've got to expect this sort of thing from now on. You're a celebrity, Reamer, and you belong to the people, like I said. There's nothing we can do about it."

"I won't put up with it," Reamer said. "I'll go away."

"But where can you go unless you go back to Mars? You're too well known on Earth. You're a star, and I'll bet you get your name in *Who's Who*, and the *World Almanac* next year."

"Mars is out," he said. "Father wouldn't have me back anyway. I never told you before, Harvey, but I got into a little trouble up there. I haven't got time to go into detail about it now. No, I've got to find someplace where I can

get away from them all."

"Well," I said, "if you insist, Reamer. Have you got any money?"

"Fifteen dollars," Reamer said. "I lost the rest playing poker with that crowd in Aubon City last night."

"Here," I said, taking the ticket from my pocket that I had bought for this purpose. "Here is air-fare to the West Coast, where you can maybe start over, Reamer. I bought it to go on a vacation, but you can have it and pay me later. I sure hate to see you leave us."

Reamer took it. He said that he was much obliged.

IT WAS a couple of years before I saw Reamer again. At least I *think* I saw him. It was only for a few seconds, you understand, so I couldn't be certain.

I got this letter from Reamer one morning which said,

"Dear Harve,

I'm writing this to let you know I'll be in your town for a one-night stand next Thursday. I'm still in show business. I guess once it gets in your blood there's nothing you can do about it. This time it's the Carney circuit. A real good job, and nobody knows who I am. I'd appreciate it if you didn't tip anybody off that I'm in town, but maybe you could bring Mary Ellen down so that I can see her. I wouldn't want her to know, but I'd like to see her. I thought a lot of her, you know. Sorry I tried to cut you out, but I guess you've made up for lost time.

"Just walk down the midway, Thursday night, for old time's sake, Harve. That's all I ask. I'll see you even if you don't see me. I like this work fine but I get a little lonesome sometimes. How about it?"

Your cousin,
Reamer."

I could hardly refuse Reamer, and I figured that it wouldn't be too risky to bring Mary Ellen along. After all, we had been married more than ten months.

So we did it. We went down and we bought cotton candy, buttered popcorn, some flat-tasting ice-cream, and hot-dogs. We shot at the Venusian lizard horses on the rack with stopper guns, rode the Rocket, played a dollar pitching

game and the Moon lottery. We had a hell of a time.

But I didn't see anything of Reamer.

Once Mary Ellen noticed me looking, and she asked me what I was trying to find.

"Nothing much," I said.

We had crowded up close to listen to a talented talker. He was yelling it up. ". . . twenty-five cents, one fourth part of a dollah, ladeeze and gentlemen! Come in and see the five-legged pony, see the moon maidens; see the wild *gheks* from Venus. The giant, three hundred pound rats from Saturn. Step right up, you good people! Only two-bits. Hurreh, hurreh, hurreh! See the whiskered woman . . . see the Mercurian wild man . . . hurreh. . . !"

We bought two tickets and went in. We walked along the sawdust aisles, hand in hand. It was pretty dark. They kept it that way so that discerning customers would not become too critical of the marvels.

I was looking at a thing that seemed to be a cross between a giraffe and a musk ox, with an obviously puttied-on human face, when I noticed that Mary Ellen was standing stock-still, and quivering slightly, like a sensitive bird dog come to point.

"What's the matter, Mary Ellen?" I

asked. She was staring at a dark cage over to the left.

She didn't answer, but that far-off glazed look in her eyes was reminiscent. She took a slow step toward the cage, seeing, apparently more than I could see. She took another step. She was close now. Too close.

Something huge and furry flung itself against the bars, growling a low, bestial growl at us, ravening at the intruders. I could not make out the form of it, but it was blue—a brilliant blue, and it was most certainly savage. The blue could have been dye, but the savagery was real enough.

Mary Ellen fell back into my arms, in alarm. I held her there for an instant, with her head buried in my lapel, and I looked over her shoulder at the thing, which had now become quiet. It had its face pressed against the bars—a not unhandsome face. One dark eye was plainly visible. And then—I swear—it happened.

The eye winked at me!

I swear it did.

What could I do? I winked back of course, and I nodded and tried to smile. But I got something in my eye just then, damnit. I had to take Mary Ellen and get out of there, into the fresh, cool night air.

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Backlash

By GUY DeANGELIS

AFTER the red thunder of our escape velocity had blasted us free of Mars we should have been able to relax and wait until Earth came rolling across our trajectory to suck us in out of nowhere. But this wasn't like any other voyage I'd ever been on, and I prowled the ship at all hours.

Wherever I went, Monk went with

me. If I was the one who could find trouble, he was the one who could take care of it. Finally he said, "Lucky what's eating on you?"

"What do you think?"

He shrugged. "That's what I'm asking you. I've seen you in the clutch plenty of times but it's never hit you like this before. I've got a hunch you know

They'd laugh him out of the service if he dared to tell the truth

something the rest of us don't."

He didn't know how right he was. Everybody on board had an idea that we were carrying something important, but I knew just how vital it actually was. What was more, I knew the enemy had a man on board who wasn't going to let us get home with it, if he had to scuttle the ship to stop us. I knew who he was too. But there wasn't anything I could do about it.

Monk grabbed my arm. "Lucky—that thing in the strongroom! Is it the key? Is that what we've got on board? Is that what's bothering you?" We had stopped for some coffee in the supply room of my section, a place not much bigger than a closet. I jerked my head at the door and he closed it.

"Yes, it's the key," I said, after a moment. "The thing everybody has been looking for ever since the first Martian expedition."

"What do you know! What kind of a thing is it?"

"Remember the Rosetta stone in our own Terran history?"

He shook his head. "You know I haven't any brains except in my fingers."

"Well, roughly, it was a stone left by an ancient people and the effect of it was to explain their written language. And this one the Martians left is enough like it to give you the creeps. Three sided, with simple pictures on one side, the written symbols for the pictures on another side and the phonetic symbols for the same objects on the third side. You know—vocal chord diagrams and layouts for the position of the lips and tongue. The Martians must have been a lot like us."

Like us, yes—but the writings they had left behind looked like cobwebs and the spools of crystal thread they had recorded their speech on were nothing but gibberish when we played them. And since the Martians hadn't been a picture-minded people we had no reference points at all. But now we could decipher the cobweb writing, and trans-

late the alien Martian speech.

"Hey!" Monk was saying. "That means we get first crack at the Martian science, doesn't it? And the drive! They had it, didn't they?"

"That's what the experts say," I told him. "There wasn't any decline and fall of the Martian empire. They just put the whole darned planet in order when it got too old and took off into the wild black. They must have had some sort of star-travel drive, because there isn't any sign of their civilization anywhere else in the solar system."

And that was more than we had been able to develop. The time element had us trapped in our own little system. We couldn't even beat the speed of light with direct rocket drive, no matter what we powered the tubes with.

"A subspace drive," Monk breathed. "Man, what we couldn't do with that. We could outmaneuver anything the Sinatics could put in space. The stars would belong to us, Lucky! The whole darned galaxy and more. And we could put the lid on this damned cold war for good and breathe slow and easy for a change!"

"I hope so," I said. For seventy-five years there had been an uneasy truce between the Atlantic Federation and the Sinatic League—the Sino-Asiatic powers headed by what had been Red China before China had absorbed Russia. Or what was left of Russia after the First Atomic War. Earth itself was split into two armed camps and there were outposts on every habitable planet and satellite in the system. Including some which were habitable only by a wide stretch of technology.

"Wait a minute," Monk said. "How do you know this thing is the key, and how do you know what it's like? I thought the F.S.S. man we got aboard and maybe the captain were the only ones who had the complete dope on this mission."

"They're supposed to be," I admitted. "But I know too. I can't tell you how I found out."

HE WOULDN'T have believed me if I had told him. Nobody would believe me if I told them I could send my invisible consciousness into the strongroom—or any other secret place—to see everything with an inner sight and to know its touch with intangible fingers. That was the way I had managed to build a reputation as a safety engineer. I could sense my way through solids as easily as I could see through a pane of glass, so that I knew when things were going wrong long before others could detect any sign of it.

"Lucky" Hammond they called me. I was lucky like a black cat walking under a ladder on Friday the thirteenth, because I was born a mental freak and my whole life had been one long lie. People with extra-sensory perception weren't too rare. But I had more than that. I was what psychiatrists were beginning to call a "paradept." It was a new term because it was a newly discovered aberration. There were only two others like me in the whole Federation, that I had ever heard of. One of them had gone raving crazy two years before and the other was an invalid who lived the life of a laboratory guinea pig.

In addition to my ability to sense the very pattern of matter, I had limited telekinetic power over it. Particularly with electronic equipment. I could receive and send radar and trivid signals and images over short distances without any equipment at all. It was logical enough, since the encephalograph had proved centuries before that thought was electronic and could even be measured with almost primitive equipment. Worst of all, I could do just that: read thought. I could peer into people's minds when they didn't know I was looking, but I did darned little of it. I found out pretty young that that kind of thing could turn you into a madman or a saint. Or both, in a hurry.

And I didn't want to be either. I had wanted out into space since I was a kid. So I had followed a kid's normal instinct to conform to the herd. And I had coun-

terfeited normality well enough to make the Federation's academy and to get a commission in the space service—the last place in the universe where an off-type would be tolerated. But I had to hold onto that commission now.

Once a man has watched the whole earth dwindle away to a pinpoint in the void, you can't tie him down to it any more. It would be more merciful to stake him out on an anthill to be eaten to bits. Every time a grounded spaceman sees a ship take off into the black a part of him goes with it until, after a while, there's nothing left of him at all. . . .

"What do you think of Jerold Frontenac, Monk?" I asked.

He stared. "Who, me? I think he's captain of this hooker. That's all I have to know."

I knew a little more than that. I wondered whom we had planted in the Sinatic fleet. A couple of admirals, I hoped. Because Jerold Frontenac—the D'Artagnan of Space, the facsipapers called him—belonged to the enemy. And I hadn't found out until it was too late. Until we had reached Mars, picked up the Martian stone, and blasted off for Earth again.

I suppose that as soon as the exploration party at Little Atlantica had found the stone on Mars, they had alerted home base. And a warship had been sent out from Earth to ferry it home. She was a beautiful craft—a brand new Annihilator Class cruiser fresh from a moonside shakedown cruise. Being tapped for the voyage had seemed like an honor at the time. Now I was willing to let anybody have my share of the glory.

FRONTENAC had called an officers' meeting as soon as we were clear of Mars. He had paced the bridge in front of us, elegant as a dress sword and twice as keen, smoothing his silver-gilt hair down on the back of his head with one palm. "I can't tell you anything about this voyage except that it's of vital im-

portance to every man, woman and child in the Federation," he had said. He stopped and looked at Fisher, the Federal Secret Service man, before he went on. "Commander Fisher has the authority to kill me where I stand if I said any more. And I suspect he would, too."

Fisher said nothing. He simply looked up at the captain and nodded. Frontenac grinned and bowed to him before he turned to me. "Have you any suggestions, Mr. Hammond?"

"No, sir."

"With your record as a safety officer, I'm sure I don't have to remind you that you're responsible for this ship between worlds."

"No, sir," I repeated, after a moment. I hesitated because I knew, all at once, that there was something abnormal about him: something menacing. My reaction was as definite as if he had pulled a knife on me, but I couldn't analyze it. So I forced myself to look into his mind, and I saw what he was thinking, as plainly as if it had been printed on his forehead.

This is the one I have to look out for, he was thinking. The one who's supposed to have eyes in the back of his head. It would be a lot easier if I could get rid of him.

And — because connected thought is almost impossible to an individual educated through the use of words, except in terms of words—I knew he was thinking in the wrong language. He was thinking in the new common language of the Sinatic League—colloquial Sinese.

Since then, I hadn't had a moment's peace.

My conscience wouldn't let me rest. *Tell them*, it demanded. Then I asked myself what good that would do. If I told them I was a paradept they'd only think I'd gone mad. I've got to have proof, I told myself. I've got to catch him red-handed. It's the only way. But my conscience said:

You're lying—and it's the same old lie. You won't tell because you're afraid

someone will believe you—not because you're afraid they won't. You're afraid you'll lose your ticket and be grounded. . . .

Suddenly, as I sat in the supply room drinking coffee with Monk, I knew that trouble had come aboard. It was a shrill, wordless sensation like a little alarm bell ringing far back in my mind. I got up.

"What now?" Monk asked, looking at the spilled coffee.

"Trouble," I told him.

He groaned. "Don't even use that word!"

"Shut up," I whispered, groping. But it was no use. "Come on," I said. "We'll check ship again." I headed for the strong room first. As usual, Fisher was there, looking out of the Judas window in the door. His lean, sharp face was so much like the edge of an ax I almost expected to hear his lids clank when he blinked at me.

"What's on your mind, Hammond?"

"Routine check, Commander."

"All secure here."

There was no one on the bridge except a communications officer conning a radar screen. He looked up at me and yawned. "Hi, Lucky. Want anything?"

"Routine check, that's all."

"All secure here."

IN THE engine room the pile sat in sanctum behind its shields, nothing but the governor heads on the converter showing. The man on watch was trying hard not to nod sleepily. "All clear, Chief?" I asked.

"All secure here, Lieutenant."

We headed forward again. "How you doing?" Monk asked.

"I've got a hunch it's all over the ship at once. I can't localize it, Monk!"

"Relax. You will."

I grunted and jammed my forehead against a bulkhead to see if bone conduction would do any good. But I couldn't smooth my mind out into a receptive blank. It was too full of conflict, and panic. Monk seemed all blurry when

I looked up and he was swaying on his feet. Then I caught on.

People blinking, yawning, nodding. All over the ship! I grabbed Monk by the shoulders and shook him, yelling in his face. "Monk! It's in the air ducts!"

When we got to tempcontrol, the man on duty was laid out cold on the deck. Monk stumbled toward the housing for the main filter at the base of the master conduit. My hands seemed to have turned into fingerless mittens of dead flesh as I wrenched the alarm box open. My knuckles clicked on a big yellow button and transcribed voices all over the ship began to yell, "Gas! Gas! Gas!"

"Cartridge canister!" Monk said.

"Check!" I took a canister from a rack, shook out the filter cartridge, and set the empty at his feet.

"Hold your breath!" he said thickly, and the housing clanged open. Monk managed to scoop out the poison cartridge, jam it into the canister, and lever the air-tight clasp shut. Then he fell. I stepped over him and fed the clean cartridge into the housing. I closed the housing and pushed the control over to forced draft. The blowers began to roar. I got hold of Monk's arm and the other man's foot and dragged them out into the companionway before I went down.

The hurricane I had started in the ducts took effect almost at once and I stayed down for a moment, sobbing in fresh air. Monk sat up. "You all right?" I asked.

"Yeah. Lucky, that was neuroform, that stuff. It belongs in the sick bay, not in the air filters. You know what I mean?"

"I know," I said. "In another couple of minutes everybody aboard would have gotten a lethal dose of it." All but one man, waiting in the privacy of a captain's cabin. One man, grinning behind the safety of a gas mask, probably.

Frontenac called another officers' meeting, but it didn't do any good. Everybody knew it couldn't have been an accident, so that the enemy had lost

some ground. Everybody knew we had a saboteur aboard now. An old Biblical phrase kept thrusting into my mind as Frontenac talked. It was "Thou art the man!" But I couldn't use it. I had nothing to back it up but the recurring suspicion that there was something wrong about him: some physical evidence which would betray him, if I could only discover what it was. Then he threw me off stride completely by saying:

"Well done, Mr. Hammond. Your name will be entered on today's log."

I wished I could tell him what to do with his log. "Chief Safetyman John Maxim was with me, sir," I told him.

"Maxim's name will be entered, too."

Then he gave orders to double the guard on the strongroom and to put the whole ship on orbital alert. I don't suppose he liked it, but it might have seemed peculiar if he hadn't.

It was a bad business, being on orbital alert while we were still twenty million miles from anything at all. None of us got much sleep. I caught a couple of men napping on watch and had to turn them in. Everyone on board must have been sick of my face. I know I was sick of theirs. Sick of Fisher's, framed in the Judas window of the strongroom. Sick of Frontenac's. There were moments when I almost hated Monk Maxim's face, with its round brown eyes, a little like a dog's.

But most of all, I think, I hated myself.

I was deep in the ship's core when the waiting finally came to an end. Monk and I were checking over a hold, when I felt a sore spot like a tiny burn blistering my brain tissue. I knew what that meant. "Hold it!" I said. "There's something hot aboard."

"Fission?" he asked.

"Yes. Near critical point. Too damned near."

"Where?"

"I can't fix it from here. We'll have to prowl."

He grabbed at me. "There may be no time for that. Lucky, try the strong-

room where the key is. That's what they're after!"

"I'll never know, now, how much Monk knew about me and how much he only suspected. But something told me he was right. I tried the strongroom as I stood there in the hold—not trying to visualize it but merely exposing my consciousness to it. In an instant the stone developed in my mind, clearly, even though I could sense that it was shut away in a vault. The little blister of sensation which had warned me still remained, and it was centered directly over my image of the stone.

"You tagged it!" I said. "Let's go."

THE two men on guard tried to stop us when we got there. This was no time for respectfully requesting permission—which we wouldn't get anyway. Monk rammed one man in the belly with his head and I stooped and sent the other flying over my back with a quick body block. Fisher rasped at me:

"Hold it right there, Hammond!"

His hand came out of the window with a blaster in it. That was his mistake. I was close enough to grab his gun wrist and pull it over my shoulder as I spun. My shoulderblades slammed into the door with all my weight behind them and Monk hit it at the same time. The door crashed open. Fisher yelped as I levered his arm down. His blaster hit the deck.

"Monk—it's in the vault," I gasped. "On top of the stone. Get it!"

Both guards were up again and charging at us. I got one in the middle with a savage kick and then pulled the other off Monk's back. Monk lunged into the strongroom and tried to fight his way past Fisher. I backhanded the guard and he fell. Monk was trying to dial the vault open and hold Fisher off at the same time. The F.S.S. man's gun arm dangled broken. I hauled him out of the strongroom and stiffened him with a short hook. But he had already tripped off an alarm and canned voices

[Turn page]

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were yelling, "Strongroom! Strongroom!" everywhere. I heard feet pounding on the deck, coming nearer and nearer, and I turned back to the strongroom to help Monk. I didn't get to him in time.

Later—much later—I learned that it was a hand bomb he had found. A fear-some grenade made secretly of half-inhibited junk from here and there on the ship. But it was inhibited only in a relative sense. Monk must have been holding it in both hands, shielding the Martian stone from it with his body, when it blew.

The concussion slammed the big steel door into me just as I reached it. There was a roaring and a blackness and then, after a while, a time like a dream suffered in a red mist. In that waking dream I was crawling into the strongroom on all fours. I crawled back out dragging Monk with me.

Some men were picking themselves up off the deck and others were standing there dazed. I put my hands on Monk here and there and one of the men watching me made a sick noise. I looked up at him. He didn't say anything but I read his thoughts.

Stop it—stop it! You can't put him back together like a doll. He's dead.

Frontenac was there, too, staring down at me and thinking: *Why couldn't you have been killed instead? Damn you and your lucky hunches! This makes twice!*

I got up and took hold of his throat. I put my thumbs on his windpipe, locking my fingers behind his neck, but I couldn't squeeze hard enough to kill him. I didn't have much strength left and there was something wrong with the back of his neck—something hard in his flesh or under it—which distracted me.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a watch stick swing up. Then the whole back of my head seemed to explode.

I WAS alone in a compartment and I knew I was in the sick bay. My head

itched and when I put my hand up I felt bandages on it. There were bandages on my ribs too. I tried to sit up but I couldn't make it. There was a buzzer clipped to my pillow and I pushed it.

A big surgeon came in. I saw another man outside my door, with a watch stick. The surgeon looked at the meters recessed in the head of my bed where I couldn't see them: temperature, pulse, respiration and what have you, all at a glance. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," I told him. Then, after a moment, I said; "Monk's dead, isn't he?"

"Never mind that. You just take it easy."

Then Fisher came in. His right arm was in a cast. "How is he?" he asked. The surgeon shook his head.

"I can't turn him over to you yet, Commander. He's still a sick man."

"Fisher!" I said. "Monk's dead, isn't he?" The F.S.S. man nodded. "You've got me under arrest, haven't you? Because I tried to kill the captain. But I didn't manage it, did I?"

"No."

I got my head off the pillow. The big surgeon said, "Hey, where do you think you're going?"

"I'm getting up. And this time I am going to kill him!"

But the surgeon's hands were firm and I couldn't get my shoulders off the bed and I knew I couldn't kill a fly and I began to laugh and blackness came down again. . . .

I WAS stronger now. I knew it wouldn't be long before they turned me over to Fisher and then I'd be locked up tight until they decided to court martial me. The door was open just a little and I could see the guard outside. This time I didn't thumb the buzzer. I just hissed at him.

He came to the door and opened it a little wider, to look in at me.

"Where are we? I asked softly. "What's the ship's position?"

"I'm not supposed to talk to you, Lieutenant. If you want anything, buzz for the surgeon."

"Lend a shipmate a hand, will you? Just tell me where we are. That's all I want to know."

He hesitated. Then he said, "Twenty-four hours from land, give or take a couple of minutes either way. And that's all you get from me!"

I groaned. If Frontenac was going to do anything at all, he'd have to do it fast. So that something was likely to happen any minute. Lying there, I began to test the ship for danger.

How can I describe that dark audition behind closed eyelids? None of the five senses entered into it, and memory itself had to be blocked out to prevent it from distorting my impressions of the here and now. If it was like anything familiar, it was like a synthesis of sound and touch. She was a full sized cruiser, and the job I had to do was as difficult as checking the pitch of every single instrument in a full symphony orchestra as they tuned up all at once.

I sensed the great basso booming of the hull, augmented by the fugue of the labyrinth within it—passageways for humans, for air, water, waste and communications, each with a tonality of its own, as distinct and separate as the sounds of flutes and violins and woodwinds. I had to identify the harplike complexity of radar equipment, the tiny pipings of an infinity of gauges, instruments and gadgets, and the muted clarion call of the power pile in the stern.

That was where I found discord. The converter itself rang true, but its governor gave back countless, tingling little reactions instead of one clear chime. I had come across that reaction before, and I knew it could mean only one thing. The governor had been crystallized!

I started to get up. Then I made myself lie back again. I wasn't in any condition to fight my way to the engine room nor anywhere else. All right, so you don't have muscles, I told myself.

[Turn page]

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Use your head!

The door was still open just a little and I could see the guard. I could see a loudspeaker on the bulkhead just beyond him, too, and it gave me an idea. More than once I had made people jump by tuning my mind in on a speaker and agitating its diaphragm into giving a high frequency shriek just as they passed it. What I was trying to do now was a lot more difficult.

Very faintly, the speaker said: "Now hear this. This is Commander Fisher speaking." It sounded like Fisher even to me, and I knew better. The guard turned and looked at it. "This is Commander Fisher speaking," it repeated, and this time I managed to get more power into it. "The guard on duty in the sick bay will conduct Lieutenant Hammond to the bridge. Conduct Lieutenant Hammond to the bridge at once!" The man shrugged and started toward my door.

There were guards everywhere along our route, armed with watch sticks. They don't issue firearms to people on Hammond. I wouldn't say anything spaceships except in trivideo dramas. People in space don't have anything to shoot at except each other, and if the voyage is long enough they're likely to start doing just that. Fisher had the only blaster aboard that wasn't locked away in the armory, but he was F.S.S. and the secret service makes rules to suit itself.

Jerold Frontenac was there on the bridge, at the projection table, with his staff around him. He stared when he saw us, and said, "I didn't send for the prisoner!"

"Commander Fisher's orders, sir," the man said uncomfortably.

"Ask Commander Fisher to report to me at once!" The guard was gone before I could open my mouth. Then I said:

"Fisher didn't give any order. I just tricked the man into thinking he did."

VERY gently, Frontenac said, "You look like a pretty sick man to me,

more until a defense counsel has been appointed, if I were you."

"I didn't come up here to talk to you," I told him. "I'll take care of you later. Right now I want to talk to the rest of the staff." I turned to look at them, but none of them would look back at me.

"You'd better take the captain's advice, Hammond," our executive officer said.

"Listen to me!" I took hold of a chair, because the journey up to the bridge had taken a lot out of me. "If you don't listen, this ship will never reach the ground. In just about twelve hours you're going to have to start preliminary braking action with the jets. And if you do that without installing a new governor, this ship is going to blow up in a million pieces!"

The chief engineer's jaw dropped. "Man, it would be almost impossible to damp down behind the shielding and change governors in twelve hours."

Frontenac shrugged. "Fortunately, it's a theoretical problem."

"The governor in our converter right now has been crystallized!" I snapped. "It won't control the output properly. And if we get an accumulation at the tube intakes it will backlash right through the converter into the pile. The whole business will go critical in a fraction of a second, and that will be the end!"

No one said anything for a moment. Then Frontenac said, "Very dramatic. But how could our governor have become crystallized? This is a brand new ship."

"I don't know how! It doesn't matter. It could have been done with a shell-circuit breaker. It doesn't take a genius to rig one up that would be small enough to hide in one fist. Anybody could have played it on the governor heads a few seconds at a time until the damage was done."

He leaned back lazily in his chair. "What makes you so sure of this, Hammond? You haven't even been in the engine room, have you? Before you an-

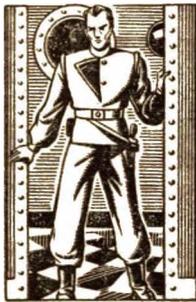
swer, remember that I can get the duty officer on the screen and cheek up on you."

Now I saw where he was going. I'd used my head, all right. I'd used it to sign my own death warrant and everyone else's. "No, I haven't been in the engine room," I admitted.

"Then how do you know the governor is crystallized?"

"I know it because I have extra-sensory perception," I said desperately. "I'm a paradept."

Frontenac began to laugh. But I noticed that no one laughed with him. I had shipped out with most of the officers



on the staff before, and while he had convinced them I was mad, they didn't like to see me laughed at because of it. He noticed their silence. In an instant he was all charm again, smoothing his hair down on the back of his head in that way of his. For some reason that gesture reminded me of the moment when I had tried to choke him, with Monk's blood on my hands.

Now he was looking past me and saying, "Commander Fisher, will you escort Lieutenant Hammond back to the sick bay? Try to forgive me, gentlemen. I've been inexcusably rude to a man who isn't responsible for his actions. I'm afraid we've all been under a terrific strain."

WITHOUT turning to look at Fisher I said, "Just a minute, Captain. There's one more thing. If I'm crazy enough to think the governor is crystal-

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lized, maybe I'm crazy enough to think I know who did it! Why don't you ask me who did it, Captain?"

"Very well, Lieutenant. Who did it?"

I leaned across the table and pointed at him. I knew what I had to do now. "You did it! You're the man who's been trying to wreck this ship!"

His mouth curved open and I think he was going to laugh again. But he never managed it. Instead, he cried out and leaped to his feet, almost tripping over his chair. Far above the UHF band my probing mind had found the frequency of the thing some plastic surgeon had buried in his flesh at the top of his spine. It was a miniature bone conduction signal receiver, and now I was exciting it to vibrations its wearer had never been meant to withstand. Frontenac tried to speak as he backed away from me, but I forced my gains higher, and he gave a gibbering sob instead.

SOMEONE said "Captain!" and went toward him. Others began to close in on me.

"Watch him!" I yelled. Frontenac scuttled away from us like a crab, bent almost double, his hands clawing at the back of his head until his nails drew blood. Whoever he was—whether he was actually Jerold Frontenac or whether the real Frontenac was long since dead—he had guts. He must have felt as if his brains were frying in hell, but he went reeling up the skeletal stairway to the flying bridge, still ripping at the back of his head and making sounds I hope never to hear again. I yelled once more. "He's after the big switch!"

If he managed to close the emergency circuit that tripped off the main tubes in our stern, the governor would fail just as I had said it would. And that would be all.

Somewhere in the din a blaster coughed and went off. Its beam sizzled past me and hit Frontenac's back, burning a big black pit there. He spun as he died, flopping over a railing, and came

crashing down to the deck at my feet. A wisp of reeking smoke curled slowly up from his body.

Fisher stepped out from behind me, awkwardly shoving his blaster into its holster. "That's pretty fair shooting, for left handed stuff," I said foolishly. I swayed, and for a moment everything blurred. Then I saw that he was examining the back of the dead man's neck.

"Concealed bone conduction receiver," he said. "A typical Sinatic espionage gadget. Secret communications. What did you do to him, Hammond?"

"Telekinesis," I explained. "Mental broadcasting, in a way. I kept throwing an overload into the thing at close range."

"How did you know about it?"

"I felt it under my fingers that day when I tried to choke him. But I was too stupid to realize what it was." Everything around me started to tilt into a slow spin and Fisher's grip was strong and comforting on me.

"Get a chair!" he ordered. Someone slid a chair into place behind me and someone else helped Fisher to lower me into it. Everyone wanted to help now.

"Thanks," I said. I heard myself trying to laugh and I wasn't making a very good job of it. "Might as well finish my last voyage in comfort. Come and see me in the zoo, boys. Or wherever they decide to put me. Come and see the freak who used to be a spaceman."

Fisher snapped his fingers for attention, and pointed to a panoramplate. Someone turned it on and I saw the whole galaxy spread out before me, except for the part hidden by Earth's great serene, welcoming curve, because we were almost home now.

"The stars!" Fisher said. "Sirius, Procyon and Regulus!" He called off the resounding, ancient names like a roll of honor. "Aldebaran! Rigel! Betelgeuse! There they are, Hammond—your personal gift to the human race. After today, do you think we'd dare to send our first ship out into the stars without you?"

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

causes such action, but rather their strict attention to a social tradition and pattern.

In most primitive cultures religion dominates group thinking. In a more civilized structure it may be either religion, or the state. The efforts of the state to replace God have thus far ended in failure. However, as Julian Huxley pointed out in his brilliant collection of essays, *Man In The Modern World*, it is the next logical step in the evolution of God. First there was the primitive gods. Fierce beast gods. Always ready to wreck ruin and havoc, unless appeased. Then came the Greek conception of God, or gods. The Greek gods were human; they made human errors. Yet at the same time they had a broader field of power than the early gods. The early gods might be confined to one district, or even one particular household. And while the Greeks had household gods, they were generally the same gods worshipped around each hearth. Not different, individual gods for each home.

Then came the Christian God. One God. A new idea. With only one God, that God, of necessity, must be all powerful. This God made man in his image. He appeared on earth as a man. And died as a man. And then, the story goes, arose.

*So the concept of divine authority has come from beast-gods powerful only in certain circumstances, or locally. To gods in the image of man with broader power. To a God who made man in his image. To an all powerful One God.

The evolution of God has reached a dead end. When any evolution comes to a *status quo*, the end comes quickly.

Attempts at a god-state have been unsuccessful, but the possible all-state of the future has been foreseen by George Orwell in 1984, and Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*.

It is my humble opinion that group thinking is a race heritage. When the first cave men banded together to kill an animal, then group thinking with all its tradition was born. And will continue so long as man must have a crutch to lean on.

One last thing to be taken care of; I wish to compliment Rita Whitney for her fine letter. When most women say how easily the male is conquered, they forget to leave out certain things that would give the female a bad mark. Congrats on setting down a fair discussion of Male, Female. —6438 E. 4th Place, Tulsa, Okla.

But isn't there any alternative to making a god out of the state? I think that both Orwell and Huxley intended their books to be taken as warning signals rather than prophecies, saying "This might happen if we don't watch ourselves." But enough of this controversy. Let's turn to a letter about the previous issue.

NO ROOM IN THE WOMB

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Dear Editor: I've already taken this up with
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Ted Sturgeon by letter, but I recalled the old adage that although it's nice to let the authors know you enjoyed their story, it's nicer to let the editors know. Then you may get more of 'em. So let me hasten to urge you to print more Sturgeon. *The Golden Helix* was one of the finest stories I can recall, in eight solid years of reading sci-fic in general and TWS and SS in particular.

I can recall few stories which have been more real to me while reading.

There is just one point on which I challenge the poor fish (no insult intended . . . the sturgeon is a royal fish, isn't it?) and this is a point on which I speak with unassailable dignity. Not so awfully long ago, I wrote and sold a novelette concerning itself with mutations and human birth and in the course of writing said novelette, I did all kinds of reading on the oldest science in the world . . . the study of obstetrics. Therefore I just don't buy that premise of multiple births being "the last major mutation of the human race."

It might happen . . . anything can happen in mutations . . . but the result wouldn't be human, as he specifically states that Tod and April and Carl and Moira and all of the rest of them were.

Let's examine the business of multiple *human* births. They do happen, of course, the Dionnes to witness that as many as five human infants can be simultaneously gestated and birthed, and survive the experience. But please note that the Dionnes weighed all together, a little more than thirteen pounds . . . about the extreme span of the weight range for a single normal infant, or the combined weight of normal twins. Marie, the smallest, weighed just over a pound, and their survival was crucial, demanding all kinds of special treatment. There were definitely *not* a "nice healthy bunch of brats." The present human womb just isn't suited to such crowded conditions, and a very large percentage even of twins are premature, while almost all triplets, quads and quints are prematurely born, making their survival a challenge to science.

So, in order for multiple births to become the rule rather than the freakish exception, let's see what kind of modifications would be necessary for those mutations of Sturgeon's.

First; the human female might develop a multiple uterus, like the cat or dog or most other mammals which have their young in broods and litters. This would be a major mutation, but is not unthinkable, since cases have been recorded of women with a double uterus, who produce non-twin offspring, either simultaneously or within a month or two of each other. This would eliminate the physical crowding which makes for early contractions and premature labor.

However, in this case, the offspring would have to be smaller in proportion to the size of the mature human.

Second, the human female should develop a stronger balance and more bony support in the pelvic region. As stated above, thirteen pounds is about the extreme of the weight limit for a single normal infant, and it's rare for multiple births to weigh more than that, when combined. "Normal" weight for a single infant is about 6.7 pounds. "Normal" for twins is about five pounds each; few triplets weigh more than four pounds, or

about twelve pounds all together, whereas, with quads and quints, the lower limit just doesn't exist . . . babies have been born and survived weighing as little as eleven ounces, whereas the whole litter seldom weighs more than twelve or thirteen pounds.

In other words . . . infants born in regular litters of six or seven would make the *normal weight* of a new born baby, about two pounds . . . and a baby that small isn't fitted for survival. Not under present conditions. And the human female organism simply is *not suited* to gestate and carry, for a full nine months, six normal five-pound babies . . . five pounds being the hospital rule-of-thumb dividing normal infants from premature or immature embryos.

As I say, speaking of mutations anything can happen, but it would need a lot of mutation; the development of a multiple uterus, the modification of pelvic structure, the increase in the glandular secretion of progesterone (the anti-premature-labor hormone) and some sort of breast modification as well. Mammals must be fitted by nature (in spite of the increase of bottle-feeding) to nourish their normal brood. Hence the double breasts on the female; twins are semi-normal. Triplets and more have always been an anomaly (freak to you.) Women who *normally* had six or seven infants would have to be supplied, by mammalian nature, with the wherewithal to nourish these many infants; notice the many breasts on a nursing cat or bitch. And I doubt if, by our present standards, a six-breasted woman could be described in the aesthetic terms Sturgeon used for his females.

Sturgeon is a darned excellent writer. But he is no mammalogist.

Not to mention the psychological modifications which would be necessary in the human female to permit her to divide the maternal attention (I speak of instinctive, subconscious attention, on the level which permits a human female mammal to sleep through a thunderstorm and instinctively wake up when her baby whimpers or turns over, even if she has a nurse to look after him) among six infants. It would mean that the human female mammal would have to be a mammal with the implication thereof, that she is wrapped up in her biological functions and cannot divide her subconscious attentions to take in aesthetic and ethical studies. The main cause for the rise in civilization among the human (and this is theory, of course, not facts as the above statements are) lies only partly in the human opposing thumb and upright posture; it lies also in the single offspring which permits some division of attention on the part of the parent.

On the other hand, if women of the human race became conscious of themselves as female mammals *first* and egocentric personalities second, it might be a lot better for the human race. As I've repeatedly stated in these columns, woman is getting beyond her own biology, and it isn't a good idea to get too far away. Questions, anyone?—
Box 246, Rochester, Texas.

This letter arrived too late to be included in the previous issue, but we thought readers would be interested in what author Bradley has

to say to author Sturgeon. But to turn again from the clangor of controversy, we have a . . .

BRADBURY FAN
by Rudolph Franchi

Dear Editor: In your Summer 1954 issue of FSM you published a list of stories by Ray Bradbury.

Concerning five of these:
The Piper, Promotion To Satellite, Rocket Skin, Square Pegs and A Blade of Grass, I would appreciate the following information.

In what issues were they published and have any of them been published since under different titles? If so which stories under which titles.

I would also like to communicate with another Bradbury fan.

I am very sorry to trouble you but I find myself in dire need of this and much more information on Bradbury. Any help you can give will be appreciated. —434 E. 67th St., New York 21, N.Y.

TWS Feb. 1943; TWS Fall 1943; TWS Spring 1946; TWS Oct. 1948; TWS Dec. 1949. Those are the dates, respectively, for the stories you mention. If you want to read (or re-read) *The Piper* watch for the next issue of FSM.

Could any other Ray Bradbury fans sup-
[Turn page]

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travel throughout the world. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power, which there came to him.

Within ten years, he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the world's leading geographical societies, for his work as a geographer. And today, 43 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this paper a 9,000-word treatise. He says the time is here for it to be released to the Western World, and offers to send it, free of cost or obligation to sincere readers of this notice. In addition he will give to each of them a 64-page book showing the astonishing events the world may soon expect, according to great prophecies.

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ply the rest of the information this reader wants?

FEN DIFFICULT TO ANALYZE

by A. A. Gilliland

To the illustrious and Honorable Editors of TWS; Greetings: I wish to commend you on an unusually excellent issue. The best of any s-f mag I have read in the past six months. And I have the conceit to believe that I have discriminating tastes. (My first taste of S-F was, believe it or not, Murray Leinsters *First Contact*, published in '45.)

The Amateur Alchemist was well written, and well plotted. I appreciated these touches especially: (1) No attempt to explain the mechanism of moving from world to world. Very sensible. (2) The character of the warlock Gebhardt, reinforced, surprisingly enough by the description of the castle and its interior decorations. (3) The painless interpolation of the Sleeping Beauty legend.

On the debit side. PhD's in Physics are very much in demand today, and *not* to bolster advertising claims. This was irrelevant to the story however, and could well be dispensed with.

"The Child-Goddess of Myr" was an entertaining enough story but lacked sociological understanding on an absolutely magnificent scale. Any culture with spaceships will have enough experience with heresy, apostasy, etc., to discard such obsolete, irrational and cumbersome taboos as the ones described.

No Place for Housekeeping was the weakest short story in the issue. *Trade-In* was the best. The characterizations are what made the story.

As for The Reader Speaks, fen are notoriously difficult to subject to analysis. The best of them are impossible, and the worst run off at the mouth, screaming about white coats with men in them.

So I will call a few as I see them.

Bill Deeck, for instance. From his letter (and, I admit, others) I would say that he is well above average intelligence, an extrovert, an exhibitionist, and is more than a little gregarious. With the last he is sadly, unable to get along with people. Asocial. And, I think, immature.

To give due credit, I enjoyed his letter.

John Courtois for another. He makes fun of the things he is afraid of. His sense of humor is (to my taste) a bit raunchy, to say the least. (To answer one of his questions, a magnetic field is useful for swinging elections and promoting hysterias). But when he calms down he, also, is quite entertaining. If he is still writing five years from now (which I doubt) he will be in your stable of authors.

Tom Pace, by way of contrast, combines intelligence with maturity. Some of his points I disagree with, but I don't despise them.

One deserves comment. It is true that only the man can change himself, but the army offers him some powerful inducements to do so.

Joe Gibson, also, has been around a long time. His letter is almost an essay, but I like his style.

Rita Whitney has some excellent points in her

missive, which is, I think, a bit overlong. However, at a conference table I do not think they (women) would make as good a showing as she expects. Cunning and fast talk are nonetheless weak weapons for all of their deadliness. Oppose them with force and intelligence, and what have you? A bundle from heaven.

And that is that. As the cat said, after being belled by the mice: "My tail is tolled." Adios amici.—420 Lingle Ave., Lafayette, Ind.

In reference to Courtois's writing, we've heard that he's at work on a story, but no manuscript has come in yet. Perhaps the rumor is unfounded.

As for briefer mentions, we have a letter from Wm. Deeck, 8400 Potomac Ave., College Park, Md., threatening dire consequences if we spell his first name William again. Okay. Never again.

Frank Arthur Kerr, 10100 W. Broadview Dr., Bay Harbor Islands, Miami Beach, Fla., says that if he were editor he would (1) Get the print off the cover picture, (2) Drop the science quiz, (3) Restore fanzine reviews, (4) Print a Captain Future Anthology, (5) Trim the edges.

James Kingston, 2521 Durant, Berkeley 4, Calif., didn't like the Leinster story and thought Mack Reynolds *A Dream Dying* was the best in the issue, with *Trade-In* by Win Marks runner-up.

On the other hand, Charles R. Maytum, 100 Wayne St., Providence, R. I., wasn't exactly pleased with the ending of *Trade-In*. "I like to see justice triumph. To think of the doctor murdering the hero, then cutting up his torso to repair someone else, I growled at that."

Thom Perry, 4040 Calvert St., Lincoln 6, Nebr., hopes we'll keep the letter column up to par. It all depends on the letter-writers, we say.

Kenneth C. Worley, Jr., Box 192, Kearney, Nebr., says he never likes anything except Deeck's letters. Okay, maybe we'll have an all-Deeck issue.

W. C. Brandt, 1725 N. Seminary Ave., Oakland 21, Calif., liked *The Amateur Alchemist* but still prefers space wars as his favorite story material.

J. H. Eveland, Box 291, Hope, Idaho, says he owns half a mile of Trestle Creek and that any of us who ever come out his way can pay him a visit. That's all for this time. See you next issue.

—THE EDITOR

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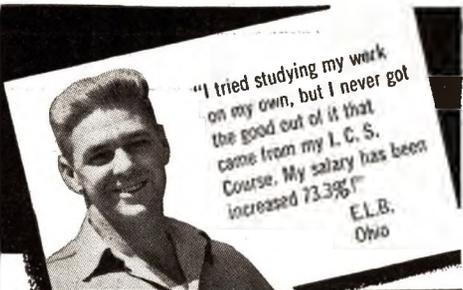
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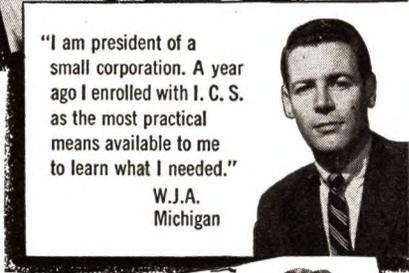
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