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Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell

(*Space ship in trouble with meteor swarm; Europa and Jupiter in background*)

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"*It is easy to understand why science fiction, and more particularly space-travel-fiction, should be enjoying a revival of popularity at the present time. Faced by probable destruction in a third world war, we turn naturally to dreams of escape from this age and this threatened planet. But that is not the whole of the explanation. For, while the* realistic *two-fisted action-story is going through a phase of imaginative bankruptcy, the science-fiction story grows more prodigious, more ideologically daring. . . .*"

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brings you in its next issue a short novel, an unknown early masterpiece by that greatest of modern spine-chillers, CORNELL WOOLRICH — his only venture into science fiction and one of the finest of all his studies in pure suspense. We don't think you'll forget the exciting power of *Jane Brown's Body*. Among other stories in this issue:

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Superiority

by **ARTHUR C. CLARKE**

IN MAKING THIS STATEMENT — which I do of my own free will — I wish first to make it perfectly clear that I am not in any way trying to gain sympathy, nor do I expect any mitigation of whatever sentence the Court may pronounce. I am writing this in an attempt to refute some of the lying reports published in the papers I have been allowed to see, and broadcast over the prison radio. These have given an entirely false picture of the true cause of our defeat, and as the leader of my race's armed forces at the cessation of hostilities I feel it my duty to protest against such libels upon those who served under me.

I also hope that this statement may explain the reasons for the application I have twice made to the Court, and will now induce it to grant a favour for which I can see no possible grounds of refusal.

The ultimate cause of our failure was a simple one: despite all statements to the contrary, it was not due to lack of bravery on the part of our men, or to any fault of the Fleet's. We were defeated by one thing only — by the inferior science of our enemies. I repeat — by the *inferior* science of our enemies.

When the war opened we had no doubts of our ultimate victory. The combined fleets of our allies greatly exceeded in number and armament those which the enemy could muster against us, and in almost all branches of mili-

tary science we were their superiors. We were sure that we could maintain this superiority. Our belief proved, alas, to be only too well-founded.

At the opening of the war our main weapons were the long-range homing torpedo, dirigible ball-lightning and the various modifications of the Klydon beam. Every unit of the Fleet was equipped with these and though the enemy possessed similar weapons their installations were generally of lesser power. Moreover, we had behind us a far greater military Research Organisation, and with this initial advantage we could not possibly lose.

The campaign proceeded according to plan until the Battle of the Five Suns. We won this, of course, but the opposition proved stronger than we had expected. It was realised that victory might be more difficult, and more delayed, than had first been imagined. A conference of supreme commanders was therefore called to discuss our future strategy.

Present for the first time at one of our war conferences was Professor-General Norden, the new Chief of the Research Staff, who had just been appointed to fill the gap left by the death of Malvar, our greatest scientist. Malvar's leadership had been responsible, more than any other single factor, for the efficiency and power of our weapons. His loss was a very serious blow, but no one doubted the brilliance of his successor — though many of us disputed the wisdom of appointing a theoretical scientist to fill a post of such vital importance. But we had been over-ruled.

I can well remember the impression Norden made at that conference. The military advisers were worried, and as usual turned to the scientists to help. Would it be possible to improve our existing weapons, they asked, so that our present advantage could be increased still further?

Norden's reply was quite unexpected. Malvar had often been asked such a question — and he had always done what we requested.

"Frankly, gentlemen," said Norden, "I doubt it. Our existing weapons have practically reached finality. I don't wish to criticise my predecessor, or the excellent work done by the Research Staff in the last few generations, but do you realise that there has been no basic change in armaments for over a century? It is, I am afraid, the result of a tradition that has become conservative. For too long, the Research Staff has devoted itself to perfecting old weapons instead of developing new ones. It is fortunate for us that our opponents have been no wiser: we cannot assume that this will always be so."

Norden's words left an uncomfortable impression, as he had no doubt intended. He quickly pressed home the attack.

"What we want are *new* weapons — weapons totally different from any that have been employed before. Such weapons can be made: it will take time, of course, but since assuming charge I have replaced some of the older

scientists by young men and have directed research into several unexplored fields which show great promise. I believe, in fact, that a revolution in warfare may soon be upon us."

We were sceptical. There was a bombastic tone in Norden's voice that made us suspicious of his claims. We did not know, then, that he never promised anything that he had not already almost perfected in the laboratory. *In the laboratory* — that was the operative phrase.

Norden proved his case less than a month later, when he demonstrated the Sphere of Annihilation, which produced complete disintegration of matter over a radius of several hundred meters. We were intoxicated by the power of the new weapon, and were quite prepared to overlook one fundamental defect — the fact that it *was* a sphere and hence destroyed its rather complicated generating equipment at the instant of formation. This meant, of course, that it could not be used on warships but only on guided missiles, and a great program was started to convert all homing torpedoes to carry the new weapon. For the time being all further offensives were suspended.

We realise now that this was our first mistake. I still think that it was a natural one, for it seemed to us then that all our existing weapons had become obsolete overnight, and we already regarded them almost as primitive survivals. What we did not appreciate was the magnitude of the task we were attempting, and the length of time it would take to get the revolutionary super-weapon into battle. Nothing like this had happened for a hundred years and we had no previous experience to guide us.

The conversion problem proved far more difficult than anticipated. A new class of torpedo had to be designed, as the standard mark was too small. This meant in turn that only the larger ships could launch the weapon, but we were prepared to accept this penalty. After six months, the heavy units of the Fleet were being equipped with the Sphere. Training manœuvres and tests had shown that it was operating satisfactorily and we were ready to take it into action. Norden was already being hailed as the architect of victory, and had half promised even more spectacular weapons.

Then two things happened. One of our battleships disappeared completely on a training flight, and an investigation showed that under certain conditions the ship's long-range radar could trigger the Sphere immediately it had been launched. The modification needed to overcome this defect was trivial, but it caused a delay of another month and was the source of much bad feeling between the naval staff and the scientists. We were ready for action again — when Norden announced that the radius of effectiveness of the sphere had now been increased by ten, thus multiplying by a thousand the chances of destroying an enemy ship.

So the modifications started all over again, but everyone agreed that the

delay would be worth it. Meanwhile, however, the enemy had been emboldened by the absence of further attacks and had made an unexpected onslaught. Our ships were short of torpedoes, since none had been coming from the factories, and were forced to retire. So we lost the systems of Kyrane and Floranus, and the planetary fortress of Rhamsandron.

It was an annoying but not a serious blow, for the recaptured systems had been unfriendly and difficult to administer. We had no doubt that we could restore the position in the near future, as soon as the new weapon became operational.

These hopes were only partially fulfilled. When we renewed our offensive, we had to do so with fewer of the Spheres of Annihilation than had been planned, and this was one reason for our limited success. The other reason was more serious.

While we had been equipping as many of our ships as we could with the irresistible weapon, the enemy had been building feverishly. His ships were of the old pattern, with the old weapons — but they now outnumbered ours. When we went into action, we found that the numbers ranged against us were often 100 per cent greater than expected, causing target confusion among the automatic weapons and resulting in higher losses than anticipated. The enemy losses were higher still, for once a Sphere had reached its objective, destruction was certain, but the balance had not swung as far in our favour as we had hoped.

Moreover, while the main fleets had been engaged, the enemy had launched a daring attack on the lightly-held systems of Eriston, Duranus, Carmanidor and Pharanidon — recapturing them all. We were thus faced with a threat only fifty light-years from our home planets.

There was much recrimination at the next meeting of the supreme commanders. Most of the complaints were addressed to Norden — Grand Admiral Taxaris in particular maintaining that thanks to our admittedly irresistible weapon we were now considerably worse off than before. We should, he claimed, have continued to build conventional ships, thus preventing the loss of our numerical superiority.

Norden was equally angry and called the naval staff ungrateful bunglers. But I could tell that he was worried — as indeed we all were — by the unexpected turn of events. He hinted that there might be a speedy way of remedying the situation.

We now know that Research had been working on the Battle Analyser for many years, but at the time it came as a revelation to us and perhaps we were too easily swept off our feet. Norden's argument, also, was seductively convincing. What did it matter, he said, if the enemy had twice as many ships as we — if the efficiency of ours could be doubled or even tre-

bled? For decades the limiting factor in warfare had been not mechanical but biological — it had become more and more difficult for any single mind, or group of minds, to cope with the rapidly changing complexities of battle in three dimensional space. Norden's mathematicians had analysed some of the classic engagements of the past, and had shown that even when we had been victorious we had often operated our units at much less than half of their theoretical efficiency.

The Battle Analyser would change all this by replacing operations staff by electronic calculators. The idea was not new, in theory, but until now it had been no more than a utopian dream. Many of us found it difficult to believe that it was still anything but a dream: after we had run through several very complex dummy battles, however, we were convinced.

It was decided to install the Analyser in four of our heaviest ships, so that each of the main fleets could be equipped with one. At this stage, the trouble began — though we did not know it until later.

The Analyser contained just short of a million vacuum tubes and needed a team of five hundred technicians to maintain and operate it. It was quite impossible to accommodate the extra staff aboard a battleship, so each of the four units had to be accompanied by a converted liner to carry the technicians not on duty. Installation was also a very slow and tedious business, but by gigantic efforts it was completed in six months.

Then, to our dismay, we were confronted by another crisis. Nearly five thousand highly skilled men had been selected to service the Analysers and had been given an intensive course at the Technical Training Schools. At the end of seven months, 10 per cent of them had had nervous breakdowns and only 40 per cent had qualified.

Once again, everyone started to blame everyone else. Norden, of course, said that the Research Staff could not be held responsible, and so incurred the enmity of the Personnel and Training Commands. It was finally decided that the only thing to do was to use two instead of four Analysers and to bring the others into action as soon as men could be trained. There was little time to lose, for the enemy was still on the offensive and his morale was rising.

The first Analyser fleet was ordered to recapture the system of Eriston. On the way, by one of the hazards of war, the liner carrying the technicians was struck by a roving mine. A warship would have survived, but the liner with its irreplaceable cargo was totally destroyed. So the operation had to be abandoned.

The other expedition was, at first, more successful. There was no doubt at all that the Analyser fulfilled its designers' claims, and the enemy was heavily defeated in the first engagements. He withdrew, leaving us in posses-

sion of Saphran, Leucon and Hexanerax. But his Intelligence staff must have noted the change in our tactics and the inexplicable presence of a liner in the heart of our battlefleet. It must have noted, also, that our first fleet had been accompanied by a similar ship — and had withdrawn when it had been destroyed.

In the next engagement, the enemy used his superior numbers to launch an overwhelming attack on the Analyser ship and its unarmed consort. The attack was made without regard to losses — both ships were, of course, very heavily protected — and it succeeded. The result was the virtual decapitation of the fleet, since an effectual transfer to the old operational methods proved impossible. We disengaged under heavy fire, and so lost all our gains and also the systems of Lorymia, Ismarnus, Beronis, Alphanidon and Sideneus.

At this stage, Grand Admiral Taxaris expressed his disapproval of Norden by committing suicide, and I assumed supreme command.

The situation was now both serious and infuriating. With stubborn conservatism and complete lack of imagination, the enemy continued to advance with his old-fashioned and inefficient but now vastly more numerous ships. It was galling to realise that if we had only continued building, without seeking new weapons, we would have been in a far more advantageous position. There were many acrimonious conferences at which Norden defended the scientists while everyone else blamed them for all that had happened. The difficulty was that Norden had proved every one of his claims: he had a perfect excuse for all the disasters that had occurred. And we could not now turn back — the search for an irresistible weapon must go on. At first it had been a luxury that would shorten the war. Now it was a necessity if we were to end it victoriously.

We were on the defensive, and so was Norden. He was more than ever determined to re-establish his prestige and that of the Research Staff. But we had been twice disappointed, and would not make the same mistake again. No doubt Norden's twenty thousand scientists would produce many further weapons: we would remain unimpressed.

We were wrong. The final weapon was something so fantastic that even now it seems difficult to believe that it ever existed. Its innocent, noncommittal name — the Exponential Field — gave no hint of its real potentialities. Some of Norden's mathematicians had discovered it during a piece of entirely theoretical research into the properties of space, and to everyone's great surprise their results were found to be physically realisable.

It seems very difficult to explain the operation of the Field to the layman. According to the technical description, it "produces an exponential condition of space, so that a finite distance in normal, linear space may become

infinite in pseudo-space." Norden gave an analogy which some of us found useful. It was as if one took a flat disc of rubber — representing a region of normal space — and then pulled its center out to infinity. The circumference of the disc would be unaltered — but its "diameter" would be infinite. That was the sort of thing the generator of the field did to the space around it.

As an example, suppose that a ship carrying the generator was surrounded by a ring of hostile machines. If it switched on the field, *each* of the enemy ships would think that it — and the ships on the far side of the circle — had suddenly receded into nothingness. Yet the circumference of the circle would be the same as before: only the journey to the center would be of infinite duration, for as one proceeded, distances would appear to become greater and greater as the "scale" of space altered.

It was a nightmare condition, but a very useful one. Nothing could reach a ship carrying the field: it might be englobed by an enemy fleet yet would be as inaccessible as if it were at the other side of the Universe. Against this, of course, it could not fight back without switching off the field, but this still left it at a very great advantage, not only in defence but in offence. For a ship fitted with the Field could approach an enemy fleet undetected and suddenly appear in its midst.

This time there seemed to be no flaws in the new weapon. Needless to say, we looked for all the possible objections before we committed ourselves again. Fortunately the equipment was fairly simple and did not require a large operating staff. After much debate, we decided to rush it into production, for we realised that time was running short and the war was going against us. We had now lost almost the whole of our initial gains and enemy forces had made several raids into our own solar system.

We managed to hold off the enemy while the Fleet was re-equipped and the new battle techniques were worked out. To use the Field operationally it was necessary to locate an enemy formation, set a course that would intercept it, and then switch on the generator for the calculated period of time. On releasing the field again — if the calculations had been accurate — one would be in the enemy's midst and could do great damage during the resulting confusion, retreating by the same route when necessary.

The first trial manoeuvres proved satisfactory and the equipment seemed quite reliable. Numerous mock attacks were made and the crews became accustomed to the new technique. I was on one of the test flights and can vividly remember my impressions as the field was switched on. The ships around us seemed to dwindle as if on the surface of an expanding bubble: in an instant they had vanished completely. So had the stars — but presently we could see that the Galaxy was still visible as a faint band of light around the ship. The virtual radius of our pseudo-space was not really infinite, but

some hundred thousand light-years, and so the distance to the furthest stars of our system had not been greatly increased — though the nearest had of course totally disappeared.

These training manoeuvres, however, had to be cancelled before they were complete owing to a whole flock of minor technical troubles in various pieces of equipment, notably the communications circuits. These were annoying, but not important, though it was thought best to return to Base to clear them up.

At that moment the enemy made what was obviously intended to be a decisive attack against the fortress planet of Iton at the limits of our solar system. The Fleet had to go into battle before repairs could be made.

The enemy must have believed that we had mastered the secret of invisibility — as in a sense we had. Our ships appeared suddenly out of nowhere and inflicted tremendous damage — for a while. And then something quite baffling and inexplicable happened.

I was in command of the flag-ship *Hircania* when the trouble started. We had been operating as independent units, each against assigned objectives. Our detectors observed an enemy formation at medium range and the navigating officers measured its distance with great accuracy. We set course and switched on the generator.

The Exponential Field was released at the moment when we should have been passing through the center of the enemy group. To our consternation, we emerged into normal space at a distance of many hundred miles — and when we found the enemy, he had already found us. We retreated, and tried again. This time we were so far away from the enemy that he located us first.

Obviously, something was seriously wrong. We broke communicator silence and tried to contact the other ships of the Fleet to see if they had experienced the same trouble. Once again we failed — and this time the failure was beyond all reason, for the communication equipment appeared to be working perfectly. We could only assume, fantastic though it seemed, that the rest of the Fleet had been destroyed.

I do not wish to describe the scenes when the scattered units of the Fleet struggled back to Base. Our casualties had actually been negligible, but the ships were completely demoralised. Almost all had lost touch with each other and had found that their ranging equipment showed inexplicable errors. It was obvious that the Exponential Field was the cause of the troubles, despite the fact that they were only apparent when it was switched off.

The explanation came too late to do us any good, and Norden's final discomfiture was small consolation for the virtual loss of the war. As I have explained, the Field generators produced a radial distortion of space, distances appearing greater and greater as one approached the center of the

artificial pseudo-space. When the field was switched off, conditions returned to normal.

But not quite. It was never possible to restore the initial state *exactly*. Switching the Field on and off was equivalent to an elongation and contraction of the ship carrying the generator: but there was an hysteresis effect, as it were, and the initial condition was never quite reproducible, owing to all the thousands of electrical changes and movements of mass aboard the ship while the Field was on. These asymmetries and distortions were cumulative, and though they seldom amounted to more than a fraction of one percent, that was quite enough. It meant that the precision ranging equipment and the tuned circuits in the communication apparatus were thrown completely out of adjustment. Any single ship could never detect the change — only when it compared its equipment with that of another machine, or tried to communicate with it, could it tell what had happened.

It is impossible to describe the resultant chaos. Not a single component of one ship could be expected with certainty to work aboard another. The very nuts and bolts were no longer interchangeable, and the supply position became quite impossible. Given time, we might even have overcome these difficulties, but the enemy ships were already attacking in thousands with weapons which now seemed centuries behind those that we had invented. Our magnificent fleet, crippled by our own science, fought on as best it could until it was overwhelmed and forced to surrender. The ships fitted with the Field were still invulnerable, but as fighting units they were almost helpless. Every time they switched on their generators to escape from enemy attack, the permanent distortion of their equipment increased. In a month, it was all over.

This is the true story of our defeat, which I give without prejudice to my defence before this Court. I make it, as I have said, to counteract the libels that have been circulating against the men who fought under me, and to show where the true blame for our misfortunes lay.

Finally, my request, which as the Court will now realise I make in no frivolous manner and which I hope will therefore be granted.

The Court will be aware that the conditions under which we are housed and the constant surveillance to which we are subjected night and day are somewhat distressing. Yet I am not complaining of this: nor do I complain of the fact that shortage of accommodation has made it necessary to house us in pairs.

But I cannot be held responsible for my future actions if I am compelled any longer to share my cell with Professor Norden, late Chief of the Research Staff of my armed forces.

Science fiction doesn't always have to explore possibilities of the future. A curve may be extrapolated from known data in either direction; and there are moving story-possibilities in those supreme moments of the past when the fumbling hand of primitive man first reached out to grasp a revolutionary technique.

Prolog

by JOHN P. MCKNIGHT

A SHARP SOUND crackled in the quiet of the morning, and the hairy man-creature drowsing before his cave came abruptly awake.

In one swift movement, he was on his feet. He swung to the young one, where it lay on the deerskin at the cave mouth. But the child slept peacefully, no danger near it.

Ungainly, the man shambled then to the lip of the narrow stone ledge and, blinking against the spring sunlight, peered out across the tall trees to the river below. There at dawn and at dusk the animals came to drink. But now, its bank was deserted. In the glade . . .

In the glade a sapling bent. A moment after, the crack of its breaking reached the man. A great dark shape bulked momentarily in the dappled shade. The biggest beast was feeding.

Instinctively, the man reached for the sharp stone he had found at the river bank two winters ago. He cuddled it in his hand; his palm fitted snugly against it; his fingers found good purchase. It was a good thing, this stone. With it, he had flayed the deer the evening before, and killed the creeping thing coiled before the cave this morning. In some ways, it was a better thing than a club. If he had a club, with a stone like this at its end . . .

The man looked about him once more, and went back to his place near the child. He squatted there; and almost at once his eyes closed again.

The man idled in the sun because he had fed to his full the night before, and there was yet meat in the cave. Coming back empty-handed from the hunt, he had chanced upon a saber-toothed tiger's leavings a moment after the gorged killer lazed off to a cane-brake to sleep. He had packed the torn carcass of the deer up to the cave, and the woman had charred gobbets of the sweet tender flesh over the fire they kept always burning, and they had eaten until their swollen stomachs would hold no more.

Awaking in the bright dawn, the man was still surfeited. A cold marrow bone and some grubs he found under stones at the brookside had sufficed to break the fast of the night. So he sat somnolent in the sunshine, motionless but for his fingers, that ceaselessly explored the mat of hair covering his chest and belly. Now and then the searching fingers routed out lice; and these the man, grunting in sleepy triumph, cracked between powerful jaws and ate: despite his satiety, the morsel was tasty; and satisfaction at disposing of an old enemy sauced the tidbit.

Beside him, now, the young one woke. It moved on the deerskin, waving its hands and kicking its feet. It made little gurgling sounds. Across the man's mind, as he listened sleepily to the liquid syllables, there flitted pictures of the brook that bubbled from the hillside high above the cave to go chuckling down to the river. "Wa, wa, wa," the child babbled: the man thought of the clear cool water plashing over the big rock where he sometimes sat to watch the slender fish skittering about the green depths of the pool below. "Coo, coo," the child piped: the man thought of the birds in the tall trees calling to each other at nightfall.

But then, the child's noises changed. They grew fretful. Its lips, moving loosely against toothless gums, made the sound, "Ma, ma." Over and over, it whimpered, "Ma, ma; ma, ma."

Disturbed, the man made to rise. But the woman was there before him, swift and silent on bare feet, taking the child up from the skin, holding it to her breast. At once, the child's wails stopped: there was the soft slup-slup of its lips as it suckled.

In the man's brain, memory stirred. Dimly, he recalled another child — the child that the great soft-padding sabertooth had carried off before their eyes. That child, too, had fretted and whimpered, and made the sound "ma, ma" when it hungered. And at the sound, he remembered, the woman, leaving her tasks in the cave, had gone to it and given it suck.

The man took up the sharp stone again and began scratching aimlessly at the rock of the ledge. Something about the pictures his brain made excited and disturbed him. They roused in him the same vague uneasiness he had known the day he climbed all alone to the top of the highest hill and gazed out across the unimagined vastness of the plains beyond the river. In his perturbation, he got to his feet, tossing lank black hair back from his sloping forehead, and went to the rim of the ledge to stare down toward the river. But its bank was deserted; the glade too was empty, the saplings still in the tranquil morning; in the cane-brake, nothing moved.

Behind him, the woman put the child down and, noiselessly, went back into the cave. The child cooed, and burbled, and was at last silent. The man turned to look at it. It was sleeping again.

In the growing warmth, the man mused. On a time many winters past, memory told him, he himself had been a child; and so he must once have been a tiny helpless creature like this one, that wailed when it was hungry and fed at a woman's breast. He wondered idly if he had made the same noises that this baby, and the other, made when they hungered. Tentatively, silently, he shaped his thick lips to form the sounds . . .

A leaf rustled behind him. He wheeled, in sudden prescience of danger.

In a low thicket beside the cave mouth, a great wild dog crouched. It was mangy, gaunt from hunger. Its red-rimmed eyes were fixed on the sleeping child.

Stealthily, belly to ground, the dog inched upon its tiny prey. In the instant after the man turned to see, it was near enough. It gathered for the spring.

The man's eyes measured quickly. He was too far away.

He could not reach the child in time.

Before he could traverse half the distance, the dog would pounce, clamp slavering jaws on the infant, and be off into the underbrush.

A moment the man stood frozen, in the paralysis of helplessness.

Then his lips shaped to remembered sounds. To his surprise the great roar of his voice shattered the stillness.

"Ma-ma!" he bellowed. "Ma-ma!"

The dog started. It jerked bared fangs at the man. Then its eyes went back to the child; it tensed again.

But as it did, the woman appeared in the cave mouth. Old practice of peril schooled her. In an instant, she scooped up the child, and stepped back to safety.

The dog's spring fell on the empty deerskin, and at the man's rush it skulked off into the thicket.

Carrying the child, the woman came back.

The man's brain at last reached the end of the thing that had disturbed it.

He put out one hand and pointed it at the woman.

"Mama," he said. "Mama."

Something over a year ago we reprinted one of Robert Arthur's Murchison Morks stories from the old "Argosy": Postpaid to Paradise; *and few stories we've published have brought in so much mail from sheerly delighted readers. Mr. Arthur is known to millions of radio listeners as a master of chills and suspense on such programs as* The Mysterious Traveller *and* Murder by Experts; *but he also has a fine understanding of, to coin a critical term, the Envy-Fantasy, the plausible inventing of an impossible situation so entrancing in its possibilities that the reader is seized with envy of the fantastically endowed protagonist — and gains a fresh imaginative frame for his own daydreams of escape. So here's another specimen of Murchison Morks's enviable improbabilia (also from "Argosy"); and we hope to bring you more soon.*

Wilfred Weem, Dreamer

by ROBERT ARTHUR

"LAST NIGHT I had the most remarkable dream," Nichols, who manufactures saxophones, was saying as Morks and I entered the club reading room. "I was in a rocket ship that had just landed on the moon, and a herd of beasts as big as elephants, but with wings, were flapping around, trying to break in and get at me. I knew it was just a dream, of course, but it was so real it frightened me into waking up."

"I knew a man," Morks — his full and unlikely name is Murchison Morks — said in a thoughtful voice as we came up to the little group, "whose dreams were much more remarkable than that. And they were so real they frightened his wife."

"Into waking up?" Nichols asked, puzzled. Morks shook his head.

"No. Into running away and leaving him, gasping with terror. She was a very strong-minded and unscrupulous woman; very hard to frighten, too."

Nichols got red in the face.

"As I was saying," he went on, tight-lipped, "after I got back to sleep, I dreamed that I had found Captain Kidd's treasure. The money was so real I could hear it chink when I dropped it, and —"

"When my friend dreamed of money," Murchison Morks put in, in that soft voice which carried so remarkably, "it was so real you could spend it."

Nichols, crimson with anger, tried to ignore him.

"I wish you could have seen the beautiful girl who came up then," he said. "She —"

But Morks is a hard man to ignore.

"When my friend dreamed of a beautiful girl," he murmured, a faraway expression on his long, sad face, "you *could* see her.

"Perhaps I ought to explain, though," he said courteously. "So no one will think that I am exaggerating. About my friend's dream, I mean."

And he began:

This friend of mine was named Weem — Wilfred Weem. He was a small man, with a friendly manner and a pleasant voice, and I once heard a woman say he had nice eyes. But he was very quiet, and I guessed he was henpecked. In this I proved to be right.

Weem was an accountant, and made a good income, which his wife, whose name was Henrietta, spent on herself as fast as he made it. His was not a very exciting occupation, and perhaps it was for that reason Weem took so much pleasure in his dreams. For they were, he explained to me later, very clear-cut and pleasant dreams about traveling through foreign lands, meeting interesting people, and such: things which in his waking life his wife certainly never permitted him to do, or even to think about.

It seems to have been shortly after moving to the Jersey suburbs that Wilfred Weem's dreams began to grow extraordinarily vivid. He himself suggested that his house being located within a hundred yards of the transmitter for the world's most powerful radio station might have had something to do with that. You know — the air full of curious energy currents, and so forth.

It's a fact that the antique iron dog on the lawn in front of the house could be heard singing torch songs, or giving the latest European news, almost any clear cold night. Radio experts explained it easily, but it was eerie to hear, and I have no doubt the other phenomenon I'm about to tell you of had some connection with the radio station.

I was sitting in the park one fine, sunny day, watching the swans, when Wilfred Weem came walking along in a somber manner. Seeing me, he sat down.

We conversed politely; then suddenly he burst out: "Morks, have you ever had a dream so real that — damn it, so real that somebody else could see it, too?"

I considered the matter, but was forced to say no. Weem mopped his brow.

"Well, *I* have," he said. "The night before last. And I've got to talk to

somebody about it. Besides my wife, I mean, and that phoney doc. Alexander Q. Brilt, he calls himself, mental specialist; but he's a quack. He's a smooth-faced guy with big popping eyes and a black-ribbon pince-nez, and he's a phoney-doney."

Weem snorted. "But I'll tell you what happened," he said.

Two nights before he had gone to bed as usual in his tiny cubbyhole of a room, off the bedroom of his wife, who let him have a room to himself because he was allergic to her face powder, and got asthma when occupying the same bed.

He had been rather tired, so after glancing through a magazine had retired a bit earlier than usual. Henrietta had stayed up to curl her hair.

He had been asleep perhaps half an hour, and was dreaming of a prize Persian kitten he'd seen a photograph of in the magazine a short while earlier, when all of a sudden he realized that he was not only dreaming about the kitten, but stroking her as well.

He lay still for some seconds, as this realization came to him. The dream of a fluffy gray Persian kitten curled up on his bed, purring, continued. But as he dreamed, he could actually feel the soft fur beneath his moving fingers.

Then he knew he was in that curious condition we all achieve sometimes, of being both asleep and awake — asleep and dreaming with half our mind, I might say, awake with the rest.

He heard his watch ticking. He heard an automobile go past the house. And he heard the kitten purring.

He did not open his eyes, lest that wake him completely, but nevertheless a part of his mind was fully conscious. In his dream he could see the curled-up kitten perfectly. With his hand he could feel her. Stroke her back, smoothing the fur, and feel the small, rough tongue lick his finger.

It came to him then, in a vague sort of way, that something very strange was happening. He knew they owned no kitten: Henrietta hated all animals, except a moulty canary she fussed over as if it were a baby.

Then the kitten mewed, quite plainly, as if hungry. Immediately Wilfred began to dream that a bowl of cream was on the floor beside the bed; and as if looking for it, the kitten under his hand got up, jumped down to the floor — he heard the thump as it landed — and then Wilfred Weem heard a lapping sound.

Puzzled, he let one hand slip down beside the bed, and there was the kitten, busily lapping up a bowl of cream.

He was so surprised that he sat up and opened his eyes. Naturally he stopped dreaming. He looked over the side of the bed for the kitten, but it wasn't there. No trace of it or the bowl of cream remained.

He was puzzled, and a little upset. But presently he told himself that it all had been a dream, unusual in its vividness as so many of his dreams had been since moving into this house where, likely as not, the faucets would broadcast hill-billy music when you took a bath. So he went back to sleep.

Presently he was dreaming again. This time, for no good reason — you know how dreams are — he seemed to find himself the owner of a very handsome, leather-cased, luminous-dialed clock that had been advertised on the same page of the magazine that had held the picture of the kitten. He could see it clearly, even the grain of the pigskin and the position of the luminous hands. They stood at eleven forty-four.

Then Weem became aware that he was again in that half waking, half sleeping condition — and he heard a clock ticking beside him.

Cautiously he stretched out a hand. On the table beside his bed was a clock which had not been there when he retired. It was a leather-encased square, with metal corner pieces.

Realizing now that something highly unusual was indeed occurring, Weem risked opening his eyes slightly. He managed to do it without disturbing that segment of his mind which was still dreaming, and he saw the clock. Standing there on the table, as it did in the dream, glowing dimly in the darkness, the hands at eleven forty-four.

Weem opened his eyes wide then, and the dream faded at once. And at exactly the same instant, the clock faded away too. By the time he was wide awake, it was quite gone.

"You see?" Weem asked me anxiously. "You understand? I was not only dreaming that kitten and that clock — *but while I dreamed them, they actually existed!*"

I nodded. I understood. It was an upsetting thought. It's all very well to dream about a kitten and have one come to life on your bed. But suppose you had a nightmare instead? Nightmares are very different matters. The thought of dreaming into existence certain nightmares of my own gave me rather a nasty turn. I mentioned this, and Weem nodded.

"That's worried me, too, Morks," he admitted. "Now I don't think there's much danger, though. I believe that I can dream only real things: things that actually exist, or have existed. But of course, there in the darkness, I was in a cold sweat at the thought of having a nightmare. I tried to stay awake. I pinched myself, and pulled my hair. But I seemed to be exhausted. I couldn't keep from dozing off. And then — then the worst possible thing happened."

"You did have a nightmare?" I asked.

"No." He shook his head. "I dreamed about a girl. A very pretty girl, with nice blue eyes and honey-colored hair. She was the image of a girl

whose picture was in the magazine. It was a page showing what was in style at Palm Beach, and she was wearing a bathing suit. A two-piece lastex suit, quite brief. She was young, and very pretty, and in my dream she was smiling at me, as she had been in her picture."

"And —"

"Yes," Weem said. "Just like the kitten and the clock. She was really there. I reached out and she took my hand. Her fingers were warm, exactly as any living person's would be, and I could even hear her breathing, very softly. I could smell a faint odor of perfume. And she started to speak. I heard her plainly. She said, 'My name is —' "

Wilfred Weem paused. "And then," he groaned, "Henrietta burst into the room!"

He ran his finger slowly around inside his collar.

"She'd been curling her hair," he said. "And she'd heard me tossing about, as I was trying to stay awake. So she peeked in the keyhole, to see what was the matter. And — she saw the girl."

He shuddered a little at the recollection.

"Of course," he told me, "when she burst through the doorway, I came fully awake and the girl was gone. Henrietta was in a fury. It was only when she saw the screen was in place, and nobody was hidden in the room, that she'd let me get a word in. Even then it was almost morning before she'd half believe the truth about it being only an extraordinary dream.

"But I showed her the picture in the magazine, so she could see for herself it was the same girl. That at least made her realize I might be telling the truth. So first thing in the morning she dragged me around to see this Dr. Brilt, this phoney psychoanalyst some of her silly friends had raved to her about."

Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt had tried to get him to demonstrate, there in his office, his peculiar dream-power. Weem was tired enough to sleep, indeed, but his dreaming produced no tangible results. Therefore, seeing the grim look of renewed suspicion gathering on Henrietta's features, he had insisted that the doctor come to the house in Jersey that evening.

"That was last night," Weem told me. "I had to convince him, you see, in order to convince Henrietta. I did think perhaps the power would be gone, that it had just been temporary; but it wasn't. It was easier than the night before. I just looked at a picture of a mink coat in the magazine, then lay down and went to sleep — half asleep, anyway; enough to set part of my mind to dreaming about the coat. I dreamed that it lay across the chair in the living room, and at once I heard a squeal from Henrietta.

" 'A mink coat!' she exclaimed. 'Good Heavens! I wonder how it would look on me?'

"I opened my eyes a little, and through the open door saw her trying the coat on. But then the phone rang — it was a wrong number — and I woke up entirely. The coat faded away, right off Henrietta's shoulders, and she became indignant.

"I might have stayed asleep long enough for her to see how she looked in it, she told me. Heaven knew, she'd never have any other chance to see herself in a mink coat, real or dreamed. And so on. But Brilt quieted her. He asked me if I could do it again.

"I was feeling awfully tired, so instead of punching him in the nose — I just didn't like anything about him — I proved that I could. I dreamed an overstuffed chair, a bowl of tropical fish, and a set of book ends, all of which were pictured in the magazine. I tried to dream something I hadn't seen a picture of, but nothing happened when I did.

"And after all that, Brilt just nodded as if he'd seen a hundred men do the same thing, and said it was a very interesting case. Interesting case, indeed!"

Weem snorted again.

"After that he asked Henrietta to come in and see him at his office today," he glowered. "She's there now. They're cooking up something, and I'd like to know what. I don't trust people who wear glasses on black ribbons and use big words."

Weem looked at his watch then, and jumped up, appearing agitated.

"I'll have to hurry or I'll be late meeting her," he stammered. "I'm glad I could talk to you, Morks. It's eased my mind some. But I've got to hurry now, or Henrietta will be angr —"

His voice faded out as he hurried down the path toward Fifty-ninth Street.

I did not see him again for several weeks. But one afternoon when I was sunning myself in the park again, he came hurrying up as if he had been looking for me. His first words proved he had.

"Morks," he said desperately, "I'm glad to see you again. I must — I want to ask your advice."

We sat down. He was thin and haggard, with dark circles of fatigue under his eyes. His hand shook as he held a match for my cigarette. He didn't smoke; his wife wouldn't let him.

Then he told me of the developments since our previous conversation. . . .

He had been surprised when Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt had appeared at his home that evening after he had last seen me. But Henrietta seemed to be expecting him. Dr. Brilt explained suavely that he wished to make some additional notes on Wilfred Weem's case. He hoped Weem wouldn't mind.

Weem did mind, and a lot, but Henrietta overruled him. Of course Wilfred didn't mind, she said. Wilfred was only too glad to oblige.

Reluctantly, Wilfred lay down on the couch, and the doctor took from his pocket a green object, which he held out for Weem to gaze at. It was a ten-dollar bill.

"Please," he said, in a liquid tone, "gaze at this carefully. Impress it upon your mind. For curiosity's sake, I wish to see if you can reproduce it as you did the other objects."

Weem stared at the ten-dollar bill. He noted every detail of it, including the far-seeing, eagle stare of Alexander Hamilton's portrait. Then, fatigued from two nights without real rest, he drifted off to slumber. And began dreaming.

"But not about ten-dollar bills," Weem told me, with the ghost of a chuckle. "I already had a pretty good idea I could only dream things I'd seen *pictures* of, and not the real things themselves. The dreams are projections of the pictures, I guess you'd say, not reproductions of the reality. Anyway, I dreamed of Alexander Hamilton."

A faint smile quirked the corners of his lips.

"It was quite a shock to Henrietta and Dr. Brilt to find Alexander Hamilton in the room with them, giving them that proud, imperious stare. He looked at them, and didn't like them. He sneered. Sneered very plainly. They were so startled they couldn't speak. Alexander Hamilton took a pinch of snuff and sneezed loudly into a handkerchief.

"Of course, it wasn't *the* Alexander Hamilton. It was my dream projection of his portrait. Real, of course, as long as I dreamed him, but not the original.

"Just as, Morks, if you gave me a snapshot of yourself, and I looked at it before falling asleep, then dreamed of it, the Morks that would come into being wouldn't be *you*."

He was very anxious for me to understand this part of the curious phenomenon, and I assured him I did. So he went on.

"Then Henrietta recovered enough from her fright to screech, and that woke me up. So Alexander Hamilton vanished. But Brilt and Henrietta were thoroughly upset, and had had enough for one evening. Brilt hurried off, and I took a sleeping tablet and went to bed. I never dream when I take sleeping tablets.

"The next morning I told Henrietta that we would have to move. That away from that house I would be all right. But she said no. That it was nonsense. That we had signed a lease and would have to stay. She was very emphatic about it. So I knew we wouldn't move."

Wilfred Weem was silent for a moment, brooding.

Then he took up the story. "I thought we were through with that quack,

Brilt, though," he muttered darkly. "But that very next night he came around again, and Henrietta welcomed him like an old friend. This time he'd brought a *picture* of a ten-dollar bill, a glossy photograph.

"So naturally, when I dreamed — Henrietta made me try it — I dreamed a ten-dollar bill. Lying on the living-room table. Half awake, I saw Henrietta and Brilt feel it, stare at it; then Brilt looked at it through a microscope.

"They seemed excited, and they whispered together. Brilt took the ten-dollar bill and went out. I guessed he was going to try to spend it, to see if it was a perfect reproduction. So I waited a couple of minutes, then made myself wake up.

"Of course, when I did the bill vanished out of his pocket; and he came back ten minutes later hopping mad. Henrietta was mad, too. They said I'd spoiled an important part of an important scientific experiment. I said I couldn't help it. So Brilt put on his hat and left. Only, before he went, he whispered something to Henrietta. And the next evening he was back again."

Wilfred Weem took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. His eyes were dark wells of weariness and perplexity.

"Morks," he said unhappily, "what happened after Brilt arrived that time, *I don't know.*"

"You don't know?" I repeated.

"I can't remember a thing. Until I woke the next morning, feeling like the very devil. I had an impression I had dreamed something all night long, but I couldn't remember what. Henrietta insisted I'd just gotten sleepy and gone to bed, and that I hadn't dreamed a thing. I'd have believed her, but —"

Weem's eyes held mine with desperate intensity.

"But," he finished, "*the same thing has happened every night for ten nights now!*"

I pondered this. It was a highly significant fact.

"And I want to know what has been going on those nights I can't remember!" Weem said. "I am determined to know. Something most peculiar, Morks, because almost every morning when I wake up, Henrietta has some new luxury.

"The first time it was a mink coat. Then an ermine jacket. Next a string of pearls. Then a set of silverware. After that a flagon of highly expensive perfume. And yesterday morning it was an emerald bracelet."

I asked how his wife explained them.

"She says I dreamed them," Weem muttered glumly. "She says I dreamed them, and they — stayed. Didn't vanish. Because Dr. Brilt, the smooth-faced phoney-doney, has been helping me concentrate in my sleep by whis-

pering suggestions to me. She the same as says he's been hypnotizing me into dreaming them so hard they didn't go back when I woke up. But I don't believe her."

He gnawed his lip.

"Or maybe it's true after all!" he exclaimed wildly. "I don't know what to think. Morks, I'm going crazy. I wake up in the morning feeling a hundred years old. I sleep all day at my office and all night at home, and every day I feel worse. I've got to stop dreaming things. I've got to get away from that house, to some place where I can get a decent night's sleep. And Henrietta won't let me."

He was in a highly overwrought state. So I quickly told him that I might be able to help. However, I pointed out that first we must know what occurred during those nights of which he had no memory. He saw my point, and we agreed that that evening I would come secretly to his home and hide myself in the shrubbery.

Dr. Brilt usually arrived at nine. After he had entered, I would slip up to the window which Weem would leave slightly open, and watch and listen. The next day we would meet at my apartment, and I could tell him what had happened and make further plans.

That night, shortly before nine, I hid myself in the deep shadow of some lilac bushes, just outside the living-room window of Weem's modest Jersey home. A hundred yards away the great towers supporting the radio aerials loomed against the night sky, bejeweled with little red lights.

The antique dog on the front lawn was, in an uncanny manner, singing *Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, and the rain spout was echoing it at a higher pitch. I was wondering what radio salesmen did for a living in that neighborhood when a coupé stopped at the curb, and a tall man with a curiously pale, smooth face came up the walk, knocked, and was admitted. Then through the window I watched what followed.

It was much as I had suspected it would be. Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt, as he shook Weem's reluctant hand, stared fixedly into his eyes. Weem's face became blank. Brilt was a good hypnotist.

"You are going to sleep soundly tonight, Weem," he murmured, his tone unctuous. "But first, I have a picture for you to look at. Here it is. It's a picture of money — of a fresh package of ten-dollar bills. A hundred bills in all. Fix it in your mind. Now you're going to bed, aren't you? You're going to sleep. You're going to sleep soundly until morning, and every second of that time you're going to dream about this picture of ten-dollar bills."

"Yes, Doctor," Weem muttered, without inflection. "I'm going to dream about the ten-dollar bills."

He moved slowly off and disappeared into his bedroom. Ten minutes passed. Dr. Brilt and Henrietta Weem, a large woman with a pronounced jaw and a snub nose, sat tensely waiting, saying nothing.

Then from nowhere a small package appeared on the living-room table. Dr. Brilt pounced upon it, broke the manila wrapper, and extracted a handful of crisp green slips that were undoubtedly ten-dollar bills.

He riffled them through his fingers, and the look on his and Mrs. Weem's faces was avid.

"Too bad they aren't as real as they look," he remarked. "Eh, Henrietta? But they're the next best thing. I trust you have ordered nothing for tonight, as tonight is my night, and I placed an order in town for delivery here, as usual."

"There was a sable jacket that I wanted, advertised in today's paper," Henrietta said fretfully. "But I didn't forget it was your night."

"Good! We can't have too many unexplained losses occurring all at once, you know. So far, though, everything has gone just as I predicted. I told you those rascally delivery men would take care of themselves. Every one so far has claimed he was held up, when he came to turn in the money and couldn't find it."

The door bell interrupted him. I had been so engrossed I had not seen the delivery truck stop, nor the uniformed messenger come up to the door. But the messenger stepped into the room when Henrietta Weem opened the door. He held a small, securely wrapped parcel.

"Watch from Tiffany's, special order, to be delivered C.O.D. tonight to Mrs. Henrietta Weem, this address," he said briskly. "You Mrs. Weem?"

"I am," Henrietta Weem said decisively. "How much is it?"

"Nine hunnerd fifty-eight dollars, sixty cents, including sales tax."

"Platinum," Dr. Brilt murmured dreamily. "Swiss movement, thirty-nine jewels. A repeater, with special dials for the day of the month and the phases of the moon."

Mrs. Weem, evidently well rehearsed in her act, counted out the money from the pile of ten-dollar bills on the table, received change and a signed receipt, and the messenger left, seeming to sense nothing unusual.

"Well, that's that," Brilt stated then, when the truck had gone. "Your husband will continue dreaming the money into existence until tomorrow morning, and by that time its strange disappearance will in no way be associated with us. I must be going now. It occurs to me, Henrietta, that we had best make no more purchases for a while, lest too many trips to the well break the pitcher."

Mrs. Weem looked sullen. "I want that sable jacket," she said determinedly. "After that we can stop."

Brilt shrugged. "Very well, Henrietta. After tomorrow, then, we'll allow a slight interlude. For the present, good night."

He dropped the package containing the watch into his pocket and left. Henrietta Weem tossed the four remaining ten-dollar bills into the wastebasket and turned out the light. I slipped away to my parked car. As I left, the iron dog was assailing the Administration for spending so much money.

The next afternoon in my apartment, Wilfred Weem was horrified at what I told him. He flushed, then paled. "But that's *stealing*!" he cried. "They're buying expensive things with the bills I dream, that vanish when I wake up, and —"

I agreed that it was certainly dishonest, and Weem sank back into his chair.

"Morks," he groaned, "I knew Henrietta was selfish and greedy, and of course she's always spent all my money on things for herself, but I never guessed she'd do a thing like this. It — it's monstrous."

He shook his head. His face was haggard, his eyes hollow. "What can we do? It wouldn't do any good to try to reason with Henrietta, and I —"

He didn't go on, but I understood. And I told him that, having given the matter some thought, I believed I knew of a way to reform his wife and Brilt. It would take a day or so to accomplish; but I felt I could promise him results.

I suggested that he go home that night, and by the simple expedient of going to bed and being asleep from the effect of a sleeping powder, he could foil the two temporarily. Asleep, of course, he could not be hypnotized. Then, I said, if he would drop in again the next day, I would give him further details.

Taking heart, Wilfred Weem left, and I went to the phone and called up a promising young artist whom I knew. I gave him full instructions, said I wanted the work finished by noon the next day, and received his promise.

When, the following afternoon, I told Wilfred Weem what I had in mind, his face brightened. A smile touched his lips — the first in some time. He promised to follow instructions exactly, and said he would expect me that night about eight thirty.

At eight thirty exactly — I always like to be exact — I rang his bell. He admitted me, and I stepped into his little living room. Henrietta Weem gave me a look of glowering suspicion.

Weem introduced me as an art dealer who had promised to stop by with a picture which had taken his fancy, and I gave him a flat package.

"A picture?" Henrietta Weem snorted. "What kind of picture, Wilfred?"

"Oh, just a picture for my room," Weem said vaguely. "Hmmm." Hold-

ing the picture under his arm, still wrapped, he turned the key of his door back and forth, as if testing the lock. "Needs oil, I think."

"Wilfred, what are you doing?" His wife's tone was ominous.

"Er — just making sure my door will lock tightly," Wilfred told her. "I thought that tonight I might want to lock it, and —"

Henrietta Weem snatched the picture from him.

"Lock your door?" she screeched. "Wilfred, I'm going to find out just what you're up to."

She ripped the paper off the picture. Then, as she stared at the painting beneath, she turned pale. "Wilfred! You wouldn't!"

"I'm just going to hang it above the foot of my bed, where I can see it the last thing before I go to sleep." Weem took the picture from his large wife's nerveless hands. "Lifelike work, don't you think?"

"Wilfred!" There was fright in Henrietta Weem's gasp. "You — you — If you went to sleep looking at that, you'd —"

Weem did not answer. He held the picture out at arm's length, admiringly, and Henrietta Weem stared at him.

"You would!" She choked. "You — you murderer!"

"I think," Wilfred Weem said pleasantly, "that I'm going to be very fond of this work, Mr. Morks. I've always dreamed" — he lingered over the word — "of owning a genuine masterpiece."

It was at this point that Mrs. Weem's nerve broke. She screeched hysterically, and rushed for the coat closet. Not even thinking to seize up one of the ill-gotten fur wraps hanging there, she snatched at the first coat she found. Jamming on a hat, she jerked open the front door.

"I'm going to Dr. Brilt," she gasped. "He'll make you —"

"Bring him back with you," Wilfred Weem advised her cheerfully. "Be sure and tell him about the picture, though. Or better still, perhaps you should stay with him. I think you've forfeited any claims on me, Henrietta; and I assure you, I do not intend to part with this work of art.

"If Brilt doesn't want to take you in and give you shelter, and marry you after you divorce me, threaten you'll tell the police what the two of you've been up to. I think he'll listen to reason then. Now" — he yawned luxuriously — "I think I'll go to bed. *To sleep* —" he winked at me — "*perchance to dream.*"

Henrietta gave a strangled scream, and sobbing half in rage, half in fear, slammed the door and ran down the walk. Weem smiled at me.

He held the picture up to the light, and I was forced to admit it was good. I had told the young artist to go to the zoo and paint the leanest and hungriest tiger they had, the bigger the better. He had followed instructions. And

the beast that glared out at us from the canvas, over the title *Starving Tiger*, had the most famished look I have ever seen on any creature.

Weem turned the thing face down on the table.

"Ho hum," he yawned. "I really am going to bed. And I'm going to take a tablet. No dreams tonight! And tomorrow" — his words were emphatic — "tomorrow I'm going to move away from this house."

"Drop in and see me tomorrow, then," I said. "I know a lawyer who may be able to break your lease for you. I'll give you his name and address."

Weem thanked me fervently, promised he would, and I left. But — when he stopped by my apartment early the next evening, he refused to take the name of the lawyer I wanted to give him. He shook his head, firmly.

"Er — thanks, Morks," he said. "But I don't think I'll get in touch with him just yet. Henrietta didn't return; I was quite sure she wouldn't. And I slept like a top last night. Felt fine today for the first time in weeks. It's remarkable what a pleasant little place that house is, after all. I actually enjoyed hearing an installment of a radio serial from my electric razor.

"In fact, I — ah — well, to tell you the truth, the house is for sale and I rather think I'll buy it."

I must have stared at him strangely, for he colored a bit.

"Yes, I know. I did want to get away. But I've changed my mind on that point since — er, since Henrietta left me. Now that I can do as I please, I don't find the house at all distressing. But I won't bother you any more. I'm still a bit tired, so I'll just go on home and get into bed with a good book."

He had a book under his arm, in fact: a large, flat volume.

"That book?" I asked him.

"Um — yes," Weem admitted. "I saw it in a bookstore today, and it occurred to me that I ought to own a copy."

"Oh," I said. "I see. Well, in that case, Weem, good luck."

"Thanks," he replied, quite seriously, and hurried out. I haven't seen him since. I'm sorry, too. I really did want to ask him about . . .

But Morks let his narration die away into silence without finishing the final sentence. He leaned back and put his finger tips together, as if meditating on something. Nichols, finding nothing to say, stamped off, face purple. It was one of the younger members of the club who broke the silence with a question.

"What," he asked, "was the book?"

Morks looked at him.

"Why," he said, "it was a volume of color reproductions of the works of various great painters. Fine pictures, you know. The title of it was, *The Hundred Most Beautiful Women in History*."

In our last issue we were expatiating again on one of our editorial obsessions: the unlikelihood of humanoid robots. We have usually, we said, failed to see any functional reason why independent machines should be designed in the all-purpose form of Man when they could be so much more usefully constructed each for its given purpose. But we promised you a coming story which would, perhaps for the first time, fully justify the android; and here it is. You'll certainly remember Betsy Curtis' Divine Right; *and you'll be as pleased as we are to learn that in the year since we published her first story she has definitely established herself as one of the leading new science fiction writers. We're happy to welcome her back with another example of her distinctive skill at blending ingenious future-fiction ideas with warmly human treatment, seeing broad social patterns in terms of their intimate and moving small-scale impact. And we think you'll want, as we do, to hear more about her strangely human humanoids.*

A Peculiar People

by BETSY CURTIS

IN THE MOMENTARY PRIVACY of the gentlemen's room, Fedrik Spens loosened the neck cord of his heavy white toga and reached for the threadlike platinum chain of his tiny adjuster key. Pulling back the pale plastissue skin from the almost invisible slit at the center of his chest, he inserted the key in the orifice of the olfactory intensificator and gave it two full turns. Three full turns for the food receptacle grinder. These official banquets could be murder. Removing the key, he retied the cord and approached the mirror, as the ambassador had insisted in last minute instructions to the several robots on the embassy staff.

"Normal respiration, human body temperature—" Fedrik could still hear the stentorian tones of the ambassador—"as there may be dancing after dinner. Check appearance carefully with a mirror. Martian security demands Terran ignorance of your mechanical nature!" (As if all of them hadn't lived like humans all their lives. It might be true, as some of the boys said, that the ambassador was subconsciously prejudiced.)

Coming out of the gentlemen's room, Spens found the ceremonial dinner procession already forming. His searching eyes found the little knot of

attachés and he hurried to join his dinner partner, a statuesque blonde swathed in an ice-blue tissue tunic, and offered her his arm with appropriate compliments.

The great dinner was well under way when Fedrik, a little weary of small talk about Earth politics and fashions, let his gaze wander down and up the long resplendent table and saw the girl. Her head, demurely inclined to listen attentively to the man on her left, showed hair black and smooth as a Martian dove's wing, drawn softly back to a great Spanish knot. He stared at the gently rounded cheek and chin, proud neck and exquisitely modeled shoulders rising from folds of shiny deep green stuff — shoulders, neck, and face of the color and texture of the brown yornith blossom.

Trying to seem casual, he asked the blonde who she was, and received the noncommittal reply that she was probably the wife of one of the undersecretaries, who, she stated flatly before returning to the succulent *ambaut roatel*, were seldom invited to State Department functions.

Attaché Spens turned from his uninformative dinner partner to the imposing lady on his left and wondered at the towering mass of white hair piled on her head before he looked at her eyes and asked his question again.

"Who?" she replied. "The girl in bottle-green sataffa? Sitting this side of your Martian Emissary of Finance? Why she's Gordon Lowrie's daughter — the Minister of Terran Agriculture, you know. He's sitting down there between Alice Farwell and Tercsita Morgan." The white tower nodded almost imperceptibly down and across the table to Fedrik's left.

Fedrik looked covertly down the table where she gestured and noticed for the first time Gordon Lowrie's ageless face, the keen dark eyes, the smooth skin so dark a brown that the white, close-cropped hair seemed assumed for dramatic contrast. But not so dramatic as the daughter, Spens thought, as he stole a glance at the other end of the table.

He smoothed the magenta ribbon that crossed the glistening white folds on his chest, the ribbon that marked him as an attaché of the Martian Embassy, and smiled at the grande dame of the white hair-do. "The men in our department were jealous as anything when they found out I was coming to Earth. You earthwomen certainly outdo any of the rumors that reach us on Mars."

The lady inclined her white tower graciously, pleased. "We do have some pretty girls. But I'm sure," she added deprecatingly, "that half the effect is just seeing them in a different setting."

"No, I hate to say it, but our girls are mostly homely, like me. Attractive as anything, but homely." He grinned as she looked appraisingly at his straight red hair, craggy red brows, hawk nose and wide mouth. "You

women all have a delicacy of feature that is a great pleasure to see."

White-tower's nose was tiny, straight, patrician. Spens looked down at his plate. "And the cooking. Is it always this good? I'm beginning to be sorry that I'm slated for only a year here."

"Randole is the treasure of the State Department," she informed him. "Good cooks are probably just as hard to come by here as on Mars. I hope some day you'll have a chance to eat with us at the Transport Hall. My husband, as you know, is Undersecretary Breton of Transport. We think our Ashil Blake as good as Randole, although Randole's *ambaut* . . ."

Fedrik stopped listening and began scheming.

Finding his quarry in the throng milling about the great silver ballroom was much easier than he had expected. His dinner partner had been claimed by her mustachioed husband as soon as they left the banquet hall; and as Spens circled the ballroom, he caught sight of Gordon Lowrie's white hair just beyond the shoulder of Bartok Borrl, the Martian finance chief. He joined the group casually, remarking deferentially to Borrl that the Terrans certainly put on a mighty splendid party and that "we'll have to work extra hard to give them a taste of Martian hospitality soon, won't we, sir?"

Borrl's eye searched the crowd for an instant, and it seemed to Fedrik that he performed the introductions with more than his usual enthusiasm. In fact, Fedrik had hardly begun to explain to Gordon Lowrie that he had wanted to meet him than his superior was excusing himself to the smiling girl and disappearing in the melee.

"My father," Fedrik continued, "was a tweedle and bradge farmer south of Jayfield and I grew up on the farm. He took his agricultural training here on Earth while the irrigation projects in his area were under construction; and I've always had a consuming curiosity about the Earth farms. Dad used to tell me and my brothers stories about cowboys and cattle ranching and miles of tall corn and plains of wheat rippling in the wind till we dreamt of it nights. We even used to have 'roundups' with bands of hoppy little tweedles and then throw them handfuls of bradoe and tell 'em to eat their corn and get fat now."

Anna Lowrie's laugh was a gay arpeggio.

"This part of the country is going to be a disappointment to you. Dad," she turned to Gordon, "has a few acres of choice tobacco and a prize dairy, but no prairies and no cowboys. When he's on the warpath, he insists he's part Indian, but he never gets very wild."

"We have garden corn, too, but it's Dwarf Pearl and we wouldn't think of casting it before swine," added Lowrie's rich baritone.

"Well anyhow, maybe you'll give me the address of a cow so I can tell

my brothers, Donnel and Rone, that I've really seen one when I get back," Fedrik requested.

"Anna," said Gordon, "I wonder if this poor, ignorant, earnest, young man . . ."

"This seeker for wider experience, Father?"

"Exactly! Isn't it our duty to broaden his knowledge as well as to behave toward the stranger in our midst with diplomatic hospitality?"

"Mr. Spens," Anna's smile was infectious, "Daddy would like to invite you to become personally acquainted with one or several of our cows. Klover Korzybski Kreamline Garth would be charmed to know you, though you may prefer Altamont Daybird Fennerhaven, she being the petite Jersey type."

Gordon Lowrie frowned thoughtfully. "Of course, you'll have to meet them at their hours. Early morning, that is. What time do you have to be at the office?"

Fedrik was suddenly aware of his internal food chopper grinding away at speed three. "Oh, not much before eleven," he said as nonchalantly as he could.

"Then you could come right home with us now and visit with their highnesses at crack of day tomorrow and still have plenty of time to get back to stern realities by eleven." Anna was persuasive.

Fedrik could feel something, his little plans jumping up and down in his head. "Oh but . . ." he gestured toward the great shining floor where couples were turning in the slow ellipses of the xerxia, "I couldn't think of taking you away from here so early. Wouldn't you really like to dance?" He could even sacrifice the pleasure of looking at her for the pleasure of hearing more of her delicate contralto voice.

"Not tonight," she responded at once. "And everybody's used to my leaving early. I'm a government sculptress and *my* studio opens at eight, not eleven."

"You mean you do busts for halls of fame and bas-reliefs for post-offices and things like that?"

"Well . . . that's close enough. Anyhow, do come. We practically promised Mother to bring home something or someone from the party, didn't we, Dad?"

"Solemn promise, Annie. You're trapped, Mr. Spens. Trapped by two fiendishly exacting women. We'll meet you up at the copter stage as soon as we can find our robes," and Lowrie took his daughter's hand to leave the room as if there were no more to be said.

Fedrik hurried to the gentlemen's room where he had left his downy

black fur robe. Fortunately the room was again empty, and he turned off the empty grinder with considerable relief. Then out and up the ramp to the copter stage.

The thirty-minute copter trip seemed like ten to the young Martian as Anna and Gordon drew out the story of his winters at Jayfield Union School and Donnel's phoenix fair and Rone and Betha's trip to deep space.

At the house, Anna and her father left him to find her mother. Fedrik had only a few moments to look about at the deep, walnut-paneled room and notice the many stringed instruments lying about on tables and the top of the great black piano, the books, looking in the glow of many lamps like jewels, ruby, ultramarine, garnet, in their cases set into the paneling, the sedate smile of an old portrait, and the high, many-arched window. Anna entered almost at once, followed by a wheel chair pushed by Gordon Lowrie, which contained, feather-wool afghan across her knees, a lady in a rose sataffa wrap. Gordon eased the chair down the two broad steps to the lower level and Fedrik approached the chair.

"Mother," Lowrie bent over the chair, "this is Fedrik Spens from the Martian Embassy." He straightened. "Fedrik, this is my wife, Janet Lowrie."

Spens looked down into the sweet dark face. "So very glad, Mrs. Lowrie . . ."

"My name is Janet." The fine lines of a smile spread to her thin dark cheeks from the corners of clear brown eyes as she held out her hand. Fedrik took it and found the gentle pressure drawing him down to a chair beside her. "I won't ask you for your first impressions of Earth or what you think of Terran Woman." Fedrik grinned. "Gordon tells me that your father was a farmer; and presently we should like to hear about the Martian farm, but first let's have some real Brazilian coffee. Gordon?"

"At once, dear." He went back up the steps and out through the wide doorway.

Anna came to the other side of the chair and took her mother's other hand. "Mother's a sculptress, too, Fedrik, not a chronic invalid. She had a little accident at the studio a few weeks ago, but she's almost through with the wheel chair."

"A dangerous profession?" he asked, grave-faced, looking at the perfect modeling of Anna's head and shoulders.

"Oh no," she answered quickly. "A beaker of . . . of . . . solution fell and broke on her foot and an infection set in. By the way," her free hand waved about the room, "do you like music, and do you play a viol by any strange chance?"

"I could probably wring a tune out of this one." He rose and crossed to lift a viola d'aubade from the top of the piano. "I was the star," he bowed to the ladies, "of our grade-school orchestra. Though I'm afraid I haven't played a note since."

"Daddy wrote a lovely xerxia for three viols the other day," Anna was setting up stands and handed Janet a tiny violette whose pale patina shone from use. "Let's surprise him with it."

The sweet sonority of the trio greeted Gordon's return. When the piece was finished, he set the tray before Anna and said, "Bravo, Fed. I like that even if I did write it myself. Do you know any of those rousing Martian frontier songs? *Out Along the Rim*, *In Ellberg Town*, or *Her Six-Ton Boots?*"

"Sure, but it's been so long since I held a viol that I don't think I could sing them and accompany at the same time."

Janet laughed. "Well, drink your coffee now and afterwards Anna can fake the harmony on the piano while you roar out those wonderful words."

Despite the cows and Anna's studio, it was one-thirty when Gordon showed Fedrik his room. An evening to remember for its fullness.

Skillfully as usual, Fedrik maneuvered the copter he had rented by the month, for the express purpose of bringing Anna home from the studio, down to the stage on the roof of the George Willis public school to pick up Bud and Sukie, Anna's young brother and sister.

Bud waved from the crowd of children at the top of the ramp and bounded over to the copter yelling, "Hi Fed, hi Annie," at the top of his seven-year-old lungs. Sukie, six, as tall as Bud, followed more demurely and had to be boosted in, clutching a coloring book in one hand and holding a bright splashy painting on newsprint in the other.

"Hi kids. Home James, huh?" greeted Fedrik.

"Give her fifty gees and slam for the ranch!" hooted Bud from the back seat, while Sukie cuddled down on Anna's lap in the front and began a long "D'ya know what . . ." description of her school day to her older sister, who sat smiling and listening carefully.

Fed was glad he did not have to make talk as the copter carried them swiftly toward the Lowries'. This was probably the last trip, though the kids didn't know it. Neither did Anna. Nobody but himself had heard his going-over from the ambassador only an hour before.

"The Lowrie girl, Mr. Spens," the ambassador always came straight to the point with his subordinates in spite of his reputation as an interplanetary diplomat, "you're seeing a great deal of her these days."

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"That's hardly fair, Spens. Not fair to her if she's a tenth as sweet and af-

fectionate as I imagine she is; not fair to us because there's an ever present danger that anyone who knows you too well will find out that we have robots on our staff and draw the obvious conclusion that there are many of your kind on Mars. It's only human nature, you know, to be afraid of machines, and what men fear they fight."

"Yes, sir, but . . ."

"Interplanetary suspicion isn't likely to be aroused by a girl's being jilted by a young man; but I don't want it to go even that far. Lowrie's an important man to us, you know. We're still importing more than a fifth of our food, thanks to the fact that Earth farmers feel they can trust him. He's got to trust us."

"But sir, Miss Lowrie's not in love with me. It's true of course that I've been going out there to see her, but I want to be with her family, too. It's a family, sir, and they do things together — sing and talk and plan things like . . . like a garden . . . or a new cow barn . . . it's so . . . well . . . unlonely. It's more like having a new father and mother. I'm sure they don't suspect anything." He hoped wildly that the ambassador couldn't suspect how much he needed Anna's incredibly friendly self.

The ambassador's face softened for a moment, his eyes looked far out the window. "Fathers and mothers have very sharp eyes, son. You love your Mars family too well to threaten their existence by a war, don't you? If I can't convince you that nobody on earth can hold your secret safely and that you must give up the Lowries, I'll have to ship you back home on the next flight. You'll have to get your music at concerts and your talk at receptions or not at all around here. That's all."

"Yes, sir. But may I take Miss Lowrie home this afternoon? She's expecting me."

"Of course. But make it brief. You can tell them that you've got a new assignment that's going to take a lot of time. Thank them nicely. Remember, we need Lowrie's good will."

Fedrik landed the copter gently in the plot by the house. The children dashed off into the interior and he followed Anna slowly into the paneled music room as usual. Anna slipped into her favorite chair and he brought her a frosty green glass of minth from the kulpour on a side-table.

Before he could get words in order, Sukie popped into the room around the corner of the door, barefooted in a tattered old red plaid dress. "Look at me quick," she giggled and danced and bobbed about, then back to the door. "Just wait a minute now. You don't have to shut your eyes." She popped out.

In a moment she was back, resplendent in a ballet frock of spangled net, a star in her ebony curls, shining silveglas slippers on her twinkling feet.

Bud followed her in reluctantly, swathed in a long mauve cape which did not entirely hide mauve knee-breeches. Sukie laughed at him gently, trillingly. "Daddy says I'm his queen of the starlings — and Bud and I are playing Cinderella. Do you like me?"

"I couldn't help myself, your majesty," Fedrik dropped gallantly to one knee and held out his hand as the little girl twirled about him.

Anna ran to the piano and added a few bars of the *Butterfly Étude* to the fun. Bud grinned condescendingly down at the kneeling Fedrik. Sukie stopped her whirling and laughed at Bud.

"You look so silly for a prince with all those teeth out," she said.

Fedrik got awkwardly to his feet. "Why Sukie, you'll look just as silly in a year or so when yours begin to drop," he observed.

"Oh no I shan't. Mine aren't going to drop," she stated saucily.

Anna got up. Her voice seemed cold. "Susan Lowrie, you know better than to say such things. Tell Bud you're sorry you teased him and then run along and play Cinderella in the nursery."

"I'm sorry, Bud," Sukie was half penitent. She followed him to the door, then turned back to Fedrik defiantly. "Just the same, I'm never going to look silly and my teeth aren't ever going to drop," and she was gone.

"Kids," Fedrik smiled, returning to the sofa, "always so jealous of their dignity."

Anna went back to her chair, stood behind it grasping the back. "Sukie mustn't learn to enjoy teasing Bud," she said quietly. "Everybody has some dignity. Bud's a right guy, but he can get perfectly miserable when he thinks he's not living up to what that little minx expects of him. Sue's got to learn to be fair."

That word *fair* again. Fed looked about the room and seemed to feel a wrench somewhere in the vicinity of his grinder. He searched his synapses for the thing to say and heard his voice, wistful, "You love children, don't you, Anna?"

Her face went blank. Her eyes stared at him. Her voice was empty. "Yes, Fedrik, I suppose I do." She walked around the tapestried chair and continued toward the steps and the door. "Please excuse me." Her voice seemed faint, confused. When she reached the door she was moving rapidly; and Fed imagined that she was running after she turned into the hall.

He had not had a chance to rise before she was gone; and he leaned forward to put his head in his hands, an unconscious imitation of Gerel Spens, who had sat like this when he was baffled.

His fingers had barely met at his temples when Janet Lowrie came through the door and down the steps, steadying herself on her husband's arm. Fedrik pulled himself off the sofa and stood up.

Gordon Lowrie assisted Janet to a tall carved chair and sat down on the arm of it. "Sit down, please, Fedrik."

Fedrik sat down.

"What was the matter with Anna, Fed? She came running out of here as if something were after her." Janet's voice was full of deep concern.

"Really, Janet, I don't know. We were talking about Bud and Sukie and suddenly she just said 'excuse me' and went out."

"Can you remember exactly what you said before she went?" asked Lowrie. "I have a particular reason for wanting to know."

"I . . . I . . . well, I guess I said she loved children, didn't she."

"Oh." Janet's dark face was full of pain and she reached for Gordon's hand where it lay on his knee.

Gordon took hers, clasped it. He looked at Fedrik. "I don't want to sound like the stern medieval father, Fedrik Spens, but I want to know if you are in love with Anna."

Here it was. There was no escape from finding words this time. Fed wondered what the ambassador would have said in his place. He tried to sit straight and matter of fact on the sofa, but it was too soft and he seemed to be wriggling deeper into the cushions.

"I'll tell you, Gordon, but it'll have to be in a sort of round-about way."

Gordon Lowrie's white head nodded, but otherwise he sat motionless.

"My father wanted to be an artist — a painter — but Mars needed farmers and his . . . his responsibilities combined with what amounted to orders from the government made him come here for training and then move out and start a family in the thick bradge country. When I used to go around with him he was always . . . exulting over colors and shadings and forms. He even used to bring home twigs of dry bradge and put them in bowls and sketch them; and when the brown and mauve yornith blossomed in the spring we used to have expeditions to the little valleys to bring home a few for a special celebration. Well, Gordon, Anna is lovely like all the things Dad showed me, and I wanted to make a special celebration for her."

Gordon glanced proudly down at Janet, who smiled up, then both turned back to Fed.

"And when I got to know her she was such a friendly encouraging sort of person and . . . and she had you. I don't know how to put it, but there's something about this house full of things you like to use and the children who don't look at you twice except as a welcome audience and ally . . . and . . . well . . . Anna is my friend. I guess that's not exactly love but there it is." He wondered how anybody could make such a lame speech as that.

Gordon's face was still serious, but he seemed somehow relieved. "It's

hard, son, but that's how we hoped it was. Not love yet. Because we're going to have to ask you to see very little of us for a while."

("For the love of . . ." thought Fed, "they're going to do the breaking off and it's out of my hands." His relief was followed by the thought of the utter absence of Anna.) "Of course, if you say so, but I don't understand . . ."

"We want you to understand," Gordon said kindly, "and we want you to know because you're like one of the family and we don't want you to feel that we've cast you out. But the story of the reason is what all our government offices call a security risk; and once you know it, we could hardly let you go back to Mars." He looked hopefully at the young Martian.

"I'm afraid you'd better not tell me, Gordon," Fedrik replied regretfully, firmly. "The ambassador told me today that I was slated for a special mission back any day. I only came this afternoon to break the news and say goodbye."

"Would you like to stay, Fed?" Janet asked sympathetically. "Even if it meant not coming here for a while . . . that is, until Anna's married or living somewhere else?"

A soft, low voice broke in. "What about Anna, Mother? Are you planning to get rid of me?" No one had noticed her come so slowly through the door and down the two shallow carpeted steps.

Fedrik jumped and turned his head. Janet raised a beckoning hand and Anna went to sit on the other arm of her mother's chair. "What about Anna?"

"Wait a bit, dear," said Janet.

Gordon addressed Fedrik again. "I have papers in my study, Fed, that need only my signature to declare you a security risk for Earth and require that you stay here. And we really need men like you. There are a dozen excellent jobs. You can have your pick. And when you understand about us you'll probably find you want to stay and help anyway."

Fedrik sat motionless for a moment, flooded with a thought of gruesome humor . . . a security risk to both sides would be . . . well . . . too great a risk. He could imagine the interminable delicate argument between the ambassador and the President of Earth as to who was to conduct the disassembly, which side have the doubtful privilege of short-circuiting his synapses.

Gordon seemed to interpret Fedrik's silence as indecision. "There's Earth security, Fedrik, and Mars security: and then there's human security. I guess that really comes first; and that's why we need to tell you and have you understand."

Fed's memory cells flashed him a sudden picture of his father and of

Betha, his father's only human child; and a feeling of affection and pity for their weakness, their kindness and their vast lovely dreams seemed mixed with the very metal of his bones. "Human security. Yes."

"So as one human being to another, I must tell you of your duties as a man as well as your privileges."

(His father had explained duty to him and Donnel and Rone so they'd understand about Betha.)

"You see, Susan and Anna here are — are our daughters, but they're not human like Bud. They're what you Martians would think of as robots. Please don't interrupt me yet," as he saw Fed's mouth open.

"Because of the emigrations to other planets and an inexplicably declining birth rate, we came to depend more and more on intelligent machines in almost all kinds of work. And as we began to depend on them we began to be afraid — afraid of their alienness — afraid that they wouldn't always see things our way — afraid that some day we should have to choose between giving them up entirely, destroying them, or having them give us up entirely as poor, weak, selfish things who didn't deserve to clutter up their earth. We found out that we'd have to make friends of them, sons and daughters as well as bridge partners and copter mechanics . . . personalities that had to develop slowly like us, who understood and sympathized with us, no matter how much easier and more interesting and productive physical existence might be for them than for us. They had to love humanness. That's one reason why they look like humans. Both Janet and Anna," he smiled down, "are body sculptors. Janet made Anna almost as truly as if she were her real flesh-and-blood offspring.

"You're probably wondering now where the human security comes into the picture, what you and I are bound to do. Well . . . humans are a peculiar people with peculiarly human capabilities. We're bound to be fathers if we can — fathers of human children and mechanical, to grow up together under the most intelligent and loving care we can give them. Robots may be parents of robots here, but it's not the same. That's why you have a great duty that is not to Anna."

Anna added earnestly, "That's why I scolded Sukie, you see, Fed. She mustn't ever make Bud feel inferior — a feeling he might take out on his mechanical children some day. Of course Sukie's teeth won't ever drop out, although she will change her body every year for the next ten or eleven. We have our responsibilities too, in understanding you and in doing well the things we are made so well to do."

Fed traced the pattern in the wine carpet to the wall and back with his eyes as Gordon finished his revelation.

"And last of all comes interplanetary security," Gordon concluded firmly,

sadly. "Your young cultures are still expanding and you rely on men still, not machines. As you can all too easily see, Mars would fear, and, when her economy is more self-sustaining, she would fight what she would think of as the alien invasion of Earth. She might try to rescue a few Janets, a few Gordons, from what she would consider the domination of unhuman interests; but most Earth humans as well as our dear foster children would be doomed. Because we humans have learned not to be type-gregarious. There are no associations here whose membership is more than about a quarter human. Janet and I have had two earlier families: this makes four children of our bodies, fifteen children given to us by the government. You must stay with us, Fedrik Spens, because you understand from knowing Anna what we can do here and why it must not be destroyed."

Martian stood up to face Earthman. He spoke deliberately but without feeling. "Settling the interplanetary angle will be even harder than you think . . . although I'm glad you told me. I imagine with care we can keep it between a few men at the top and me."

Gordon's dark face took on a shade of gray, not brown. "You don't mean that you're going to tell your ambassador?"

"It may be the best thing to do," was the reply, as Fedrik opened the neck of his conservative dark green toga and exposed the pale skin of his chest. He fumbled for the slit and pulled the edges back to show the adjustor orifices, the silver plate bearing his name and serial number. "I represent more than one security risk."

He retied the neck cord and smiled a little at last. "If I'm not officially disassembled, I might even marry Anna. That is, if she'll have me."

Anna rose and held out her hand, which he grasped as if never to let go.

Gordon began to laugh, convulsively, until he saw that Janet was weeping. He tightened his arm around her shoulders.

"I wouldn't worry about disassembly," he said. "I think your ambassador and I can make plans to write you into the charter at last without having anything to hide. And do you really want to get married?"

Two human-type mechanical faces looked only at each other.

"Then Annie, you bring me home a parentage application form from the studio tomorrow. I'll qualify you as parents first class."

"Anna," Fedrik asked, "will you make all our kids look just like you?"

"Personally, I rather fancy craggy red-haired people."

" 'People' . . ." Gordon Lowrie murmured to his wife. There were tenderness and wonder and amusement in the quotation marks with which he enclosed the word.

Janet smiled up at him. "Well?" she asked.

The Invisible Playmate of childhood is understandably one of the great themes of fantasy fiction: it presents an impossibility that still seems in retrospect disturbingly real to many of us, and it gives the author a natural opportunity to go beyond simple entertainment into serious psychological implications. After such masterpieces as John Collier's Thus I Refute Beelzy *and Ray Bradbury's* Zero Hour, *it might seem that the Playmate theme was exhausted; but Garrett Oppenheim has come up with a fine fresh variant in this story from "Liberty," May 1950 — a surprisingly bitter and tragic story to have appeared in a mass-circulation slick, and a beautiful example of eerie skill in treading the precise borderline between everyday reality and the unknown terror of the impossible.*

The Punishing of Eddie Jungle-Spit

by GARRETT OPPENHEIM

EDDIE THE ARROW MAN was four years old when Eddie Jungle-Spit came to live with him. The rain was loud outside; and inside, spilt water on the tablecloth was creeping softly toward the edges when the second Eddie arrived. He sprang full-blown from the fragments of a Bohemian glass fruit bowl.

Their mother had filled the bowl with white chrysanthemums from the yard. It was her last act before dressing and the first act in a long, rainy afternoon she had really enjoyed. Level lamplight pierced the red glass, diffusing color over the white cloth. Silver and crystal flashed with ruby pin points. Color — that was what Lynn Gabriel wanted so much.

The dress she chose was wine-colored. You are so beautiful, she whispered into the mirror; so beautiful it's a shame. Her gray eyes drank in the lovely reflection, the pale gold hair, the fragile mouth, then peered into their own depths, filling with sympathy. No one would ever value her so truly as the one lover from whom she was forever separated by the thickness of a mirror. She touched the cold glass and thought of her husband.

Leonard, looking at her tonight through the eyes of his guests, would be proud, awed, and afraid to touch. As if he could preserve this loveliness by keeping it under a glass bell, bringing it out only for display. Too

scared to care for her as a person. There was little he did care for these days beyond the quantities of sore feet on which he was trudging to a dreary success in chiropody. And soon it would be too late.

It would have been too late long ago if it hadn't been for Eddie. She smiled, listening to the rhythmic babble downstairs, where he was playing with his archery set. The child had eyes, beautiful flecked eyes, that saw her almost as she saw herself. But not quite. Every now and then his father looked at her out of those eyes with an expression of — was it fear? Whatever it was, she must drive that look away, drive away everything but the happiness she wanted to give him.

Downstairs the play grew more boisterous. "I'm Eddie the Arrow Man," he bragged. "I'm bigger than a tiger and I'm gonna shoot you full of holes."

There was a ringing crash, a moment of stunned silence.

The Bohemian glass bowl lay in four pieces. An arrow tipped with blunt brass rested among the chrysanthemums.

"Oh, damnation!" she said softly. She did not even notice the small boy at her side until his frightened whisper stabbed through her irritation:

"Don't spank me, Mommy. Please don't spank me."

She glanced at him and her lips curled slightly. He had a hangdog look that made him seem for a moment his father's child. Then his wide flecked eyes met hers, and it was unbearable that he should be afraid of her.

Lynn disliked being reminded of the one time she had spanked her child. Ordinarily she didn't believe in spankings, but — well, the music box was a special case. They had bought it in Zurich on their honeymoon, and it played *Ich Liebe Dich* with a sad tinkle that brought back the dark, unhappy man she had wed and was losing.

"Spank you?" she laughed, crowding him into her arms. "Of course not! It wasn't *my* little boy who broke the glass. It was *another* little boy — another Eddie."

"Yes," he agreed quickly. "Another Eddie broke the glass — on purpose."

Lynn wagged her head. "Wasn't that wicked of him! I think we'll have to give *him* a spanking."

She set her own child down, reached for the imaginary one and thrashed him so convincingly she almost expected to hear his screams. The absolved boy joined in, scolding:

"Bad Eddie, bad Eddie! You broke the glass on purpose."

Bad Eddie made a good anecdote. The guests were amused, and Leonard's pleased smile had said she was making the right impression. That was im-

portant, of course, because it might bring in more sore feet to Leonard.

Leonard was such a hovering host, particularly with doctors. He called them "Doc," and the word had a glossy, toadying sound. "You can forgive a child anything," he announced, "if only it makes good telling. Isn't that so, Doc?"

At that point Lynn excused herself.

It was time for a story, but tonight the request was: "Mommy, tell me about bad Eddie."

Lynn sat on the edge of the bed. "Him? Oh, he's just a disgusting little boy who's always doing hateful things."

"Where does he come from?"

"Why, the jungle, I suppose."

"Like a tiger," the child decided. "But he looks like me," he added.

A face, illuminated from within, took shape in the darkness. First the blurred gold tousle of hair, then one by one the features — the bright flecked eyes, the laughing mouth, the eager uptilted head.

"Very much like you," she mused aloud. "Almost the spittin' image of you." There was a difference, though. The eyes were narrowed and hostile. The mouth, too. There was just the hint of a sneer in its laughter.

"Yes," the boy said. "And his name is Eddie Jungle-Spit, 'cause he spits like a tiger."

The face in the dark bared its teeth and spat at her. With a mental push she thrust it back.

"But *my* name is Eddie the Arrow Man," the child rambled on, "'cause I'm good and I'm bigger than a tiger."

"Are you now? Well, in that case you better give Mommy a great big kiss good night."

He hugged her close.

"I love you, Eddie the Arrow Man," she whispered fiercely.

The rain stopped before morning, leaving a limpid fall sky. Lynn was up early, feeling curiously taut and alert. Something was different this morning — teasingly but pleasantly different. As she passed the door of the nursery it became a tingling certainty: Somebody else was in the house.

"His name's Eddie Jungle-Spit," she told Leonard at breakfast, "and he spits like a tiger."

Leonard's narrow flecked eyes quizzed her through tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses. He seemed about to say something. Instead, he smiled, folded his napkin, and rose to go. She went with him as far as the front door, but when he stooped to kiss her, she drew back from the eye-level close-up of his nose. It was too heavy for the small, still boyish head.

"Pretty please," she demanded.

"Pretty please," he said docilely, and she offered a cool cheek.

As she mounted the stairs she heard Eddie's voice in the nursery.

"When you wind it here it goes by itself and the bell rings like this." The toy fire engine clanged as it rolled over the linoleum. "No, you can't play with it, 'cause you're bad and you might break it."

Lynn paused at the open door. "Who's your friend?"

"He's not my friend," the child answered promptly. "Mommy, look. He broke my shovel."

Lynn examined the two pieces. The handle had been worked loose and the red metal was doubled up. It was a small enough shovel. But Lynn seriously doubted that Eddie the Arrow Man had the strength to bend it. Not unless he had first wedged it in the closed doorway, which seemed a little beyond his ingenuity. But of course he must have done exactly that. Otherwise — She laughed it off brightly.

"Just for that," she said, "we won't take him out shopping with us, darling."

The boy turned sharply on his invisible playmate. "You can't come along, see? You broke my shovel. You stay right here!"

Eddie Jungle-Spit stayed. And after days and weeks Lynn got used to his being there. She got used to — even enjoyed — the illusion of four feet romping in the nursery, or the sound of two voices (always merging into one as soon as she came close).

Eddie Jungle-Spit broke things and was spanked. He repeated nasty words he heard on the street and went supperless to bed.

It was Eddie Jungle-Spit who found Leonard's office scissors and stripped the piano of nearly a square foot of veneer before Eddie the Arrow Man was caught with the scissors in his hand. But Lynn knew whom to blame, and it was Eddie Jungle-Spit who went to the basement and stood with his face to the wall for three hours.

It was he who knocked Jane Carroll off her tricycle, cutting her eye so severely it required stitches. This time Lynn took a real cane to Eddie Jungle-Spit, beat him violently, and locked him in the basement for a whole day with nothing to eat or drink. She wanted to make sure that Eddie the Arrow Man was impressed.

Later the Gabriels paid an uncomfortable call on the Carrolls, and Leonard, making amends, looked particularly stoop-shouldered.

"Still," she argued when they were home, "the two Eddies put together aren't any worse than one normal child." She hadn't discussed the new Eddie with Leonard lately. It had become a kind of secret between her

and Eddie the Arrow Man. But Leonard was attacking, talking of punishment, and Lynn for once found herself on the defensive.

"Aren't you afraid it'll kick back?" he asked. She looked at him in astonishment.

"Kick back?"

"This fairy tale you've rigged up. All this make-believe. Aren't you afraid —"

"Afraid of what, Leonard?"

He shot a quick look at her, but reflected lamplight made his glasses into bright opacities. Her own gaze, calmly demanding, never wavered. As he looked down again he seemed to shrink in his chair.

"Don't you think I'm a fit mother?"

"Of course you are, Lynn." He frowned miserably. "Only — oh well, I guess you know what you're doing."

She moved through those days with a sure step, conscious that imaginary feet rushed through the house at her bidding and a voice from another world spoke at her command. She gave more and more rein to Eddie Jungle-Spit.

It was only when she actually saw him that she felt shaken. But these glimpses were at first so rare, so fleeting that she had only to will the apparition out of existence. As she mastered the trick of it, she began to enjoy this too.

She always knew when she was going to see him. Walking on the driveway from the garage she would have a sudden clutching certainty that he was watching her from the nursery window. Then she would look up to meet for an instant those familiar flecked eyes, bright with hate, set in the beautiful face of her son. But something was happening to that face since the rainy night she had conjured it out of the darkness. The mouth was twisted into a fixed sneer now. The features were somehow malignant beyond their years.

But she never saw it long enough to analyze it. Her will lashed at it and it vanished.

The drawn-taut feeling in her body told her it was there that winter afternoon. The tension had increased by such imperceptible degrees she could not say how long she had known it was behind her. She was reading in Leonard's big chair, stopping now and then to watch the steady snow pile up in the twilight and wondering if he was going to be late.

Each time she herded her thoughts back to the book it cost her a greater effort. It was no use. Her whole body was listening for something in back of her, and a thrill of anger told her what it was. Don't look at him, she

warned herself. Don't even give him the satisfaction of turning around.

She read a paragraph again, and then again. The words spun round in a senseless abracadabra.

She had played this game too long. Eddie Jungle-Spit must go. Tonight. Before he became too real. She nailed her attention to the book. To look around, to make any move now, would be a surrender to — yes, madness.

But the muscles at the back of her neck ached with the strain. She could not wait much longer.

It came at last, as she had known it would, in complete silence. It sped past her cheek (if she had turned, it would have struck her), making a slight current of air and jarring the book in her hand. She felt the blood drain from her head, and for a long moment she sat there, white and still, gazing at the arrow that rested on her lap. It was a very real arrow, even if it was a toy, and there could be no doubt what it meant.

The silence was broken by the sound of the bow clattering to the rugless floor of the foyer. She rose from the chair and turned to face him. Eddie the Arrow Man was staring at her from the doorway, his eyes wide with fright.

"I didn't do it, Mommy," he said.

"I know, Eddie, I know." Lynn knelt down and held the boy firmly by both arms. "Now I want you to tell Mommy exactly what happened."

"*He* did it. Bad Eddie did it."

"Don't you know you're not to bring your bow and arrow downstairs?"

"I didn't. Eddie Jungle-Spit brought it down. He said you can't spank me, 'cause *he* did it. And he doesn't care if you spank *him*."

"Why did he bring it down?"

"We were playing Indians. He said to come down the stairs on tiptoe, like real Indians."

That, then, was the sound that had alerted her while she was reading — the sound of Eddie the Arrow Man tiptoeing down the stairs while the invisible Eddie led the way, silently and purposefully.

"And then?"

Eddie's troubled eyes were fixed on a point of air behind her. Lynn repeated her question.

"He just shot you," Eddie said without shifting his gaze. "Are you gonna spank him?"

"No, Eddie, I'm not going to spank him. It doesn't do any good. I'm going to send him away." She rose to her feet and called out, "Did you hear that, Eddie Jungle-Spit?"

"He's laughing at you, Mommy, 'cause you're talking to him over here and he's really behind you."

"It doesn't matter," Lynn snapped. "He hears me and he knows what I mean. He'd better not let me catch him in this house again."

"He says he doesn't care." There was a note of defiance in the child's voice as he fell into his habitual role of translator. "He says he can take care of himself and he hates this house anyway."

Lynn opened the front door. Beyond the porch the white flakes drifted quietly in the gathering darkness. The street lamps were haloed in blue. The icy air swept in, and she drew herself erect.

"Out you go, Eddie Jungle-Spit!" With all her might she willed him away. "And don't you ever come back here as long as you live."

Something did indeed go out of the house. She could almost trace its progress across the trackless snow down the walk to the street.

A car rolled up through the snow, its skid chains clanking softly, and turned into the driveway. Eddie the Arrow Man began to jump up and down. "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!"

It was as if a blight had passed. Lynn saw her child with new eyes — or was it he who was changing? The scared look was gone. He seemed all bounce and sparkle, and the weeks went by without breakage or a naughty word. It was as if she had separated the boy into his good and bad components and then cast out the bad.

The two of them threw themselves joyfully into the pre-Christmas whirl of shopping and planning. Lynn was determined to make the most wonderful Christmas he had ever known. Eddie caught the spirit and dictated four letters to Santa Claus, revising to the last excited hour.

Christmas morning Eddie rushed downstairs to shout at a giant tree that towered gaudily over a pyramid of gifts. Lynn helped him unwrap the packages, drinking up the contagion of his delight. There was everything he had asked for, and a mountain more. For Lynn there was a brooch of gold shaped like a butterfly, its wings and eye sockets set with emeralds.

"Oh!" she gasped (as if it weren't in abominable taste). "Oh, Leonard, you shouldn't have!"

Fortunately a college president broke his toenail, and Leonard was summoned away. Lynn said it was a shame, but reveled in the thought of spending the afternoon alone with Eddie. He was such fun any time that his father wasn't around.

All day the phones were ringing, the old one and the new one. It seemed as if the whole world wanted to wish the Gabriels a Merry Christmas. One of the callers was Eddie Jungle-Spit.

He didn't use the big phone, of course. He called on the new one, which belonged exclusively to Eddie the Arrow Man. It was a copy of the larger

one, with a dial and a realistic bell that worked by turning a crank.

The toy phone rang more persistently than the real one, and Lynn saw herself burlesqued in the child.

"Hello? Oh, hello, hello, how are you?" he inquired chattily. "I'm fine. Yes. Merry Christmas. Happy New Year. The same to you. We have a great big Christmas tree. And lots and lots of presents. Yes. No, I can't come Wednesday. I have to go to a wedding announcement. No, you can't come here. Mommy won't let you. Because you're bad and you break things. G'by."

This conversation was different from Eddie's other calls. Mostly he babbled without interruption. But this time his pauses and replies gave an uncanny illusion that someone was actually talking at the other end of the line — which was absurd, of course, because there was no line, just a short piece of colored cord connecting the receiver with the base.

A fragment of memory was teasing her. Something had happened — somewhere, yesterday.

"If that's Eddie Jungle-Spit," she said, "we don't want him to call here any more."

Eddie the Arrow Man looked up at her with clear eyes in which there was a trace of pain. "He wants to see the Christmas tree. I told him he can't come in 'cause he's bad and he has to stay in the tool shed."

Lynn pressed her palms against her eyes. It was piecing itself together now. Yes, it was yesterday afternoon. She had come home in the car, laden with the makings of Christmas dinner and last minute gifts. As she lifted her bundles from the trunk she was aware of a disagreeable oppression in the air, and her body tensed with a familiar sensation. It seemed to emanate from behind her, in the storage room of the garage which the Gabriels called the tool shed.

She gathered up her packages and hurried into the house, resolutely thrusting the feeling away. What she had willed into being she could will back into oblivion.

She tried to sound matter-of-fact. "How long has he been in the tool shed?"

"Oh, he came there yesterday."

"Did you see him there?"

"Yes."

"You talked to him?"

"Yes."

"Who gave him permission to live in the tool shed?"

Eddie the Arrow Man shrugged. "I don't know," he said. And the one

admission of ignorance lent a weird veracity to the rest of his story.

She tried to force her thoughts into some kind of order. Her memory was playing tricks on her. That recollection of yesterday was a fraud — it had to be. Very likely the thought of Eddie Jungle-Spit had come into her mind without her realizing it and had subtly depressed her. To believe more was to lean over the edge of reason.

One thing was clear. There must be no Eddie Jungle-Spit. Eddie the Arrow Man must face it.

"Eddie, I want to tell you something."

The boy put down his telephone, came to her and leaned against her knees while his hands examined the butterfly brooch she was wearing. She drew him closer, smiled into his eyes for a long moment.

"There isn't any Eddie Jungle-Spit," she said slowly, and caressed his beautiful perplexed face. "It was all make-believe, you see. Just a little game we were playing."

The wide flecked eyes stared at her with earnest disbelief. "But, Mommy, I *saw* him."

Lynn groped for words. "Do you know what imagination is?"

He shook his head vaguely.

"Imagination makes us think things which aren't real. Imagination made you think you saw Eddie Jungle-Spit in the tool shed. But he wasn't really there. Because there really isn't any Eddie Jungle-Spit. Now do you see?"

Eddie the Arrow Man did not see. He looked distressed, angry. "There is, too!" he blurted. "I don't want you to talk to me like that."

"You only *think* there is," Lynn fought on, almost pleadingly. "If he were real, you could touch him and he could touch you and pick up things and do things, just like you and me."

"But he *does!* I did touch him. And he did pick up things. And he broke things too. And he tried to shoot you with my bow and arrow."

"He didn't, he didn't!" Lynn cried. "We only made believe he did. It was really just you all the time. There is no other Eddie."

She knew that a note of hysteria was creeping into her voice. Her hands gripped his fragile shoulders as if her strength would force him to believe. He burst into tears.

"Mommy, don't talk to me like that! I don't like you when you t-talk like that!" He tried to wrench himself free, but she held on to him.

"Don't cry, Eddie darling! Mommy's only telling you this because she loves you."

"No, you don't!" he shouted. "You hate me. You said I t-tried to shoot you!"

A great white light snapped on inside her, and suddenly she saw what she was saying to the child. She was telling him that he, Eddie the Arrow Man, had done all the terrible things they had blamed on Eddie Jungle-Spit, that this monstrous creature was none other than himself.

The white light snapped off, leaving only darkness and failure. She let go of the child and sank back in the chair. Daylight ebbed from the windows too, but she did not get up to switch on the lamps, or even the tree lights. Eddie the Arrow Man stood by the tree among his toys, quiet as on the day she had spanked him.

She heard his phone ring, but the sound came to her from worlds away. She was only dimly aware of the muffled conversation that went on in the dark. But presently he slammed the receiver back into its cradle and spoke to her:

"He says he hates you and he's gonna come over and kill you."

Lynn started. Was this her son's voice? He spoke not as if he were translating for the other one, but as if the fury were his own. For a frozen moment the words hung in the air, a menace without sense.

Then, slowly, their meaning unfolded. It stretched through her until every part of her was trembling with a strange new emotion.

It was mortal fear.

So Eddie Jungle-Spit was going to kill her. She knew it was no childish threat. This monster, this caricature of the child she loved, was quite capable of making good his word. That is, if she let him.

He must die. It was that simple. And Eddie the Arrow Man must know, once and for all, that this nightmare was dead. He must see it with his own eyes. It must be real — real.

She knew what she had to do now. The sound of Leonard's car on the driveway was a signal. She sprang from the chair, grasped her son by the wrist and half dragged him to the front door, flicking on lights as she went.

"What are you doing, Mommy?" he asked in a terrified whisper.

"You'll see." She threw the door open for her husband and spoke rapidly, before he set foot in the house. "Leonard, you've got to help me."

"What goes on here? Trying to catch a cold, you two?"

"Listen, will you?" Lynn said. "Eddie Jungle-Spit's out in the tool shed."

She could have struck him for the way he laughed. "Well, well! That's fine on Christmas Day. I didn't know he was still —"

"Don't be a fool!" she interrupted. "Do as I tell you. I'll explain later."

Leonard searched her face, and what he saw there sobered him a little. "What are we going to do?"

"Drown him," Lynn said. "Drown him in the bathtub."

Eddie the Arrow Man started to cry. "Don't drown me in the bathtub, Mommy. Please don't drown me in the bathtub."

She turned on him in exasperation. "Don't be stupid! You're a good boy and we love you. But we hate Eddie Jungle-Spit. And we're going to drown him. You can watch him die."

"Lynn," Leonard laid a cold hand on her arm. "Hadn't we better talk this over?"

"Oh, shut up, you imbecile!" She flung his hand down. "Can't you see this is a matter of life and death?"

He seemed to shrink before her eyes.

Without pausing for coats or boots, she led the way across the snow to the garage. Eddie Jungle-Spit was there all right. Lynn could feel the evilness of him seeping through the door of the tool shed. She braced herself as Leonard opened the padlock.

The door had hardly creaked on its hinges when the invisible thing inside tried to rush past her, but she blocked its way and held it firmly. She knew, exultantly, that she was still the stronger one.

They marched it back to the house and upstairs to the bathroom. Lynn locked the door from the inside and gave the key to Leonard. Eddie the Arrow Man watched in frightened fascination while the tub filled from an angry spout of water. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes wild.

"Will it hurt?" he asked softly.

"Yes," Lynn said; "but only until he's dead." She turned to the invisible Eddie and addressed him solemnly:

"Eddie Jungle-Spit, you have been a bad, hateful boy ever since you first came into this house. You broke things. You harmed people. You had a wicked tongue. You even threatened to kill me. So now we're going to drown you. Then you'll be dead and nobody will ever see you again."

That, she felt, was clear enough for even a four-year-old to understand. She reached for her prey with both hands and lifted him off the floor. She could feel the weight of him and the hot struggle in her arms. But she was strong now.

"Mommy," her own child whimpered, "I'm afraid."

"You'll never be afraid any more," Lynn said. She hoisted the thing over the tub, plunged it under.

"Don't stand there, Leonard. We'll hold him down and count to a hundred. And that'll be the last of Eddie Jungle-Spit."

Leonard leaned over the tub, acting out the execution with an odd realism, the way Lynn wanted it. She counted steadily, deliberately, slowing down for effect as she neared the end.

"Ninety-eight — ninety-nine — one hundred!"

There was a sharp outcry behind her and Eddie was pounding on the locked door with his fists. Leonard opened it, and the boy raced for the stairs.

"Get him back," Lynn ordered. "Don't let him get out."

Leonard bounded down the steps and caught hold of the child at the front door. Eddie squirmed loose and darted back up. He ducked past his mother, dashed into the nursery, and slammed the door. Next instant Leonard and Lynn were in after him.

In the dim light from the hall they could make out the huddled shape on the bed. Leonard went to it. "There," he said gently. He laid a hand on the small heaving shoulder and turned the boy around. There was a sharp hiss.

The man took a quick step backward.

"He spat at me," Leonard said.

Lynn reached for the toggle switch. The room leaped into being under the naked white light. In that light she saw what was on the bed. Every nerve of her body shrieked out for help, but not a sound came from her throat.

She clutched blindly at her husband.

The face was not a human one. In the bright deadly eyes, in the twisted mouth and contorted features she could read every beating, every starving, every brutally thought-out punishment and death sentence she had inflicted on it. Yet somehow, somewhere in that criminal malformity she could still recognize the face of her son. It glared at her from under a gold tousle of hair with a malignance in which she could fathom only one sure, clear meaning.

"What is it, Lynn? What's the matter?" The alarmed eyes of her husband were peering at her. "For pity's sake, what's happened — what's wrong?"

"Happened!" she breathed. "Can't you see it?" Her voice broke. "It's *him* — the *other* one. It was the wrong one we drowned!"

The Mad Scientist we have always had with us; even that greatest of science fiction protagonists, Professor George Edward Challenger, was mad at least north-north-west. But H. Nearing, Jr. has created, in Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, something far more dangerous: the Sane Scientist. Ransom is a logical man, unaffected by the poetry and philosophy that can influence his colleague MacTate; when ideas impinge upon him, he follows them through, as a resolute logical mathematician who has a decent smattering of other sciences. And the results are far more devastating than anything that could be achieved by madness. You've read in earlier issues of Ransom's construction of a poetry machine, and of his attempts (unswervingly logical) to teach mathematics by means of a voodoo doll. This time Ransom speculates on the nature of the fifth dimension and tries to produce the crystalline opposite of scopalomine — seemingly harmless occupations, both of them; but no Mad Scientist ever produced such maddening and delightful results.

The Embarrassing Dimension

by H. NEARING, JR.

"I HAVE just — what do you call it — excogitated it," said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom of the Mathematics Faculty. "The fifth dimension, I mean."

Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy, fumbled in his coat pockets. "Do you have a cigarette?"

Ransom opened his desk drawer, handed a crumpled pack to his colleague, and struck a match. "Nothing to it once you get away from physics," he said, holding out the match. "The fourth dimension relates time and space. You know, Einstein. So I figure the fifth dimension does the same with mind and matter."

MacTate drew on his cigarette, blew a delicate stream of smoke over Ransom's head, and regarded him with calm expectancy.

Ransom held up his left hand and touched the pudgy thumb with his right forefinger. "You know the analogy. You say you'll meet somebody at Forty-Second and Broadway. Two dimensions." His right hand grasped the left thumb and forefinger. "But your friend might be upstairs in the Times building, so you have to think of three dimensions. When you say you'll meet him, I mean." He pinched the middle finger of his left hand. "But if

he comes at two o'clock and you come at three —" He curled his right forefinger around the left ring finger. "Fourth dimension. Time." His eyes gleamed, and he pointed his forefinger at MacTate. "Now." He bent back the little finger of his left hand with the right forefinger. "Suppose you meet this person on the right floor at the right time. Suppose all four dimensions click, I mean, *but you don't recognize him.*"

The ash of MacTate's cigarette fell on the desk top. He started, bent over to blow it off, and looked up at Ransom again.

"Recognition, the fifth dimension." Ransom thrust out his little round belly and began to swing in his swivel chair.

"But my dear Ransom —" MacTate waved his cigarette deprecatingly.

"Wait." Ransom stopped swinging and leaned over the desk. "You've been lost sometime. In the woods, I mean. And you didn't know what time it was. All the space-time dimensions were there, weren't they? You were somewhere east, somewhere north, somewhere in altitude, at some time of the day. But you weren't — related to them. You didn't recognize them."

"But —"

"What I mean is that pragmatically speaking you didn't exist. You were lost, which is like being instantaneous or infinitesimal. You miss one dimension and you miss them all. See?"

"But obviously I found my way out of the woods." MacTate held up his hands to call attention to his existence.

"Sure. You got back into the dimensional continuum again. Like speeding up a slow electron to give it the same mass as a faster one. It's all relative."

"But look at it the other way." MacTate ground out his cigarette in an icosahedral ashtray on Ransom's desk and tapped the desk with his finger. "I have gone to places that I felt I had visited before, and yet I knew I hadn't. How do you account for that?"

"Easy. A fifth-dimensional equivalent of thinking it's Wednesday when it's Tuesday. Or taking the wrong train. You think you're going to New York when you're really headed for Miami or someplace." Ransom warmed to the explanation. He flung out both arms, pointing in the two relevant directions. "You ride along all right for a while. No worry at all. Then you begin noticing the scenery out the window. Looks funny. Different, I mean. You begin to think. Then you hit Baltimore. See the station sign. My God. It comes to you like that. Your mind has been traveling in one dimensional continuum while your matter was off in another. You've been crazy. Temporarily crazy."

"But why didn't I cease pragmatically to exist, as I did in the woods?"

"Ah." Ransom leaned back in his chair. "Because on the train you were occupying two continua at once. Before, you weren't occupying any. In

the woods, I mean. As a matter of fact" — he reached into his inside coat pocket — "I've been fooling with an idea for combining two continua any time. Over in the chemistry laboratory." He took out a little jewelry box, opened it, and set it on the desk. In it was a crystal, something like a diamond, though there was no sparkle. Instead, it seemed to emit waves of force that almost imperceptibly distorted the parts of the room caught in the corner of the eye.

MacTate leaned forward to examine it. "Odd-looking, isn't it? You say you can merge two continua with it?"

"No. Not yet, I mean." Ransom picked the crystal up and squinted through it at the window. "This one didn't work out right. You see, I figured that if this stuff they give you to make you forget an experience — scopalomine, *you* know — I figured that if scopalomine would make you forget an experience, then the opposite of scopalomine would make you recognize experiences you never had. I'm oversimplifying, I know, but you see what I mean. Anyway, all you have to do is discover the opposite of scopalomine, right?"

MacTate stared at him.

"Well, it happens that scopalomine can be crystallized from ether, and the crystals make polarized light turn counterclockwise. What do you call it? Levorotatory. Well" — Ransom put the crystal on the desk and pointed his finger at MacTate — "suppose you could make an isomer of scopalomine that turned polarized light *clockwise*."

"My dear Ransom —"

"Wait. Do you remember what happened when those Frenchmen shot a beam of electrons through a crystal? Diffracted. The electrons, I mean. Just like light waves. I tell you, MacTate, the inside of a crystal is a weird thing. So why not clockwise?"

"But what connection is there between the physical structure and its chemical effect on the body — or the mind?"

"Look, MacTate. What's the connection between hydrocarbons and life? *I* don't know. All I know is that you can't have one without the other. I've got the right to fool with an hypothesis, haven't I?"

MacTate pointed at the thing on the desk. "But what's this? You say it didn't —"

"That's right. I got the research boys in the laboratory to synthesize a hydrocarbon chain, one I worked out. But instead of dextrorotatory scopalomine, we got this. It isn't much like scopalomine at all. Has a melting point something under 59 C. and doesn't seem to do anything to polarized light." Ransom looked queerly at the abortive crystal and poked it with his finger. "I don't know —"

There was a banging on the door. Ransom and MacTate looked up. The knob rattled and the door, which seemed somehow a little larger than usual, flew open.

"Professor Ransom. I am gratified to find you in your office. It is a privilege to see you, sir."

The newcomer was a portly personage of florid complexion. He swept off a black fedora to reveal white hair, almost yellow in spots. Ransom gaped at him. MacTate waved numbly toward a chair.

"I thank you, sir." He stowed his amplitude in the chair and held out a handful of cigars. "If I may take the liberty, Professor, of engaging a few moments of your time, I have a proposition which I am confident will compel your interest." He pocketed the cigars, which Ransom and MacTate ignored, and rubbed his hands together. "As I was saying to the other senators in the cloak-room last night, what our country needs in this time of peril — and I refer, Professor, to those insidious perils which threaten our interior economy as well as those from foreign shores, get me? — what our country needs in these perilous times is a realistic, rational attitude toward the facts of political, economic, and atomic life. What does this country of ours need most desperately in this crucial age?" He stabbed a finger toward the ceiling.

"Televised Congresses?" said MacTate.

The senator brushed an imaginary speck from his shoulder and turned back to Ransom.

"What, I repeat, is the crucial need of our country in this desperate age, Professor?" He pounded the desk to emphasize the answer. "Logic. Get me? Just plain, ordinary old logic. But the rarest commodity this country produces, Professor. Rarer than uranium, rarer than plutonium, rarer than — neptunium. Logic."

He paused impressively, thrust a cigar into his mouth, and crossed his legs.

"And how, Professor, can we step up our production of this rare commodity? That is the question I asked my colleagues in the cloak-room. From what mine is it dug? From what operators can it be purchased?" He beamed at Ransom. "You know the answer to that, Professor. You and those other chosen few who, in obscure and often thankless toil, keep alive the flickering spark of logic in the gloom of these perilous times. The mathematicians, Professor, the mathematicians."

Ransom glanced vaguely at the desk top as if looking for a goblet to raise.

"What this country needs," said the senator, suddenly stern, "is a Bureau of Mathematics." He shot out a finger at Ransom. "And you, Professor, are the man to head it."

MacTate looked at Ransom. "Congratulations, old boy."

"Wait." Ransom's eyes narrowed. He fingered the crystal on his desk.

"Don't say a word, Professor." The senator smiled understandingly. "Not right now. I realize only too thoroughly that you must have time to consider a momentous step of this kind. The terrible responsibility, the sacred trust. I know." He nodded sympathetically as if to a fellow martyr. "But in a few days — get me? — the Chief Justice and I, and maybe the President, we'll be here for your answer. And I am confident, Professor —"

At that moment the door flew open and a tall black figure leaped into the room. Beating thunderously on a hand drum attached to its waist, it hopped ecstatically about, first on one foot, then on the other, the gold rings around its wrists and ankles jangling rhythmically to the drum.

The dancer hopped to the front of Ransom's desk, flung out his arms, bowed, and stood erect again. Nearly seven feet tall, his glistening body was nude except for a leopard-skin breech clout. Two circles of yellow and blue paint were smeared on his chest, four lines of red paint on his cheeks. In his swollen underlip was imbedded a diamond chip, and stuck through his woolly topknot was an immense bone. He exuded an odor of the deep jungle.

"Bwana," he boomed, and bowed again. "Bwana, Mbongo hear you sick in head. Come make ju ju. No be sick." From his leopard skin he drew a long needle. "Bad god, he inside bwana. This make bad god go way. Big ju ju." He stepped around the desk.

In Ransom's face astonishment gave way to terror. "MacTate —!"

MacTate started from his chair and seized the witch doctor's arm. "Mbongo, wait." He pondered how to speak to the giant. There was little time to spare. "Mbongo, no make ju ju. White ju ju man just here. You see him. He say no make ju ju today."

The witch doctor looked at MacTate with suspicion. He thrust out his lips. "Make ju ju," he said stubbornly.

Ransom had crawled to the other side of the desk. "MacTate, listen. You can't —"

"Mbongo," said MacTate. "You good boy, come make ju ju. But not today. White ju ju man say bad god sleep today. You wait till god wake up. Next week, maybe. Then you make ju ju." He nodded vigorously to emphasize his point.

Mbongo began to look more hurt than suspicious. His great lips pouted with disappointment.

Suddenly he brightened. "Mbongo wake god up," he said. He jabbed his needle into the air demonstratively.

MacTate shook his head gravely. "No good. God sound asleep." He imitated a snore. "White ju ju man try."

Mbongo looked disconsolately at the needle and put it sadly back into the

leopard skin. He sighed. "Mbongo come next week. God wake up. Make ju ju."

"That's the idea." MacTate led him to the door. "Mbongo good boy. We see Mbongo next week." He shut the door behind the witch doctor and snapped the lock. "Whew!"

Ransom plopped weakly into his chair and wiped his face with a handkerchief. "MacTate, what is this? Are we both crazy?" He twisted the crystal on his desk nervously. "What do you —?"

"I say, Ransom, what happened to the senator?"

Ransom looked vaguely about the room. "The senator? I don't know. I didn't see him —"

There was a series of thumps on the door.

"Oh, no." MacTate turned wearily.

"MacTate, don't let that ju ju thing come in again." Ransom was nearly hysterical.

"All right. Just keep calm." MacTate unlocked the door and opened it a crack to peer out. He was thrown violently back as a clanging blow knocked the door open.

A short, massive figure in rusted armor stalked into the room, carrying a visored helmet under one arm. His head was bullet-shaped, the hair cropped short. His face, smooth-shaven, bore an unpleasant expression.

"God den, varlet." The tone was grim. He was followed in by a lanky, dull-eyed youth dressed in green jerkin and hose.

The knight squinted disdainfully at MacTate and addressed himself to Ransom. "Thy lackeys want courtesy, my lord almagester. But enough. I desire thy skill, to speak plain. An thou readest me well the stars for to vanquish the Douglas, thou hast made thy fortune."

Ransom looked at MacTate helplessly.

"He wants you to cast a horoscope," said MacTate. "Apparently it's about a propitious moment for a battle he has in mind."

"Aye," said the knight, flapping a gauntlet toward MacTate. "He speaks less fool than acts. I would have this devil of a Douglas aroast on my spit." He tapped the blade in his belt. "See what he hath done. Up hand, lad."

The tall youth raised his right hand. The second and third fingers were missing.

"Hath catched Jenkin here and snatched off his bowstring fingers. Fiend of hell. Read me the stars, for I will see his entrails smoking on the ground."

Ransom's eyes were frightened and wild. MacTate thought quickly. He stepped forward.

"My lord keeps vows of silence this day, sir knight," he said. "Give me the figures and we'll work it out for you." He took a notebook and pencil

from his pocket and looked interested. "Now, let's see. Where were you born?"

"Pomfret Castle," said the knight.

MacTate made a note. "And when was it?"

The knight rubbed his chin. "Michaelmas Eve, it was," he said. "Methinks it was in the twelfth year of the king's father, the old king that was."

MacTate scribbled briskly, then looked up. "And what is the birth date of the Douglas?"

The knight smiled sardonically. "Sayst thou? Am I his sib to know when the fiend gave him life?"

MacTate put on a worried expression. "That's so. I shouldn't think you would. But can you find out? It's really necessary for the almagest."

The knight frowned evilly. "Almagest me no almagest, scriveyn," he roared. "Read me the stars for to kill any man, and at the hour I will slay the Douglas."

MacTate looked at the ceiling judiciously and then shook his head. "I'm afraid it's not that simple," he said. "You see, we have to find a time when you're strong and the Douglas is weak. We couldn't tell when you'd be stronger than everyone else unless we read the stars for all the people in the world. You want it to be a sure thing, don't you?"

The knight looked frustrated. He glowered at the maimed youth as if trying to think of a way to blame him for the impasse.

"'Twill mean a pining of prisoners that else were ransomed," he said. "Warlocks and the Douglas. Of a kind." He sighed. "Come, lad."

He looked at MacTate darkly and turned toward the door. MacTate started to follow.

"Stand off!" The knight raised his gauntlet. MacTate fell back.

As soon as they had gone, Ransom pushed back his chair. "Let's get out of here."

"I suppose we'd better," said MacTate. "Who do you suppose that was? He said Pomfret Castle —"

Ransom looked at him and shook his head weakly. "That, right now, is the thing I care about least in the whole world." He pushed the crystal aside to put his elbows on the desk and hold his head in his hands. "I just want —"

There was a sound at the open door. In it stood a majestic woman clad only in a garment which was about to slide from her hips.

"Χαιρετου Κυριω," she said.

"MacTate!" Ransom leaped to the door, knocking the crystal off the desk. He slammed the door in the woman's face and locked it. "Go away, please just go away," he breathed.

"Ransom, did you see her arms?" MacTate was staring at the closed door.

"I didn't see anything. I just want to keep it shut. The door, I mean. Let's just not open it any more. For anything."

"Listen, Ransom. I didn't see her arms either. *Because she didn't have any.*"

Ransom stared at him. "No arms? You mean like the Venus de —?"

MacTate nodded. "That's right. There's a lifesize plaster cast of her in the hall just across from your office. Does that mean anything to you?"

Ransom's mouth was open. His eyes were glassy. "Wait." He jumped up, unlocked the door, and looked out. Venus stood calmly on her pedestal, her garment clinging safely to her hips. Cold plaster.

MacTate, who was looking over his shoulder, sighed and went back to the desk. Ransom closed the door and locked it.

"MacTate, what —?"

"I say, Ransom." MacTate was staring at the desk. "What's happened to the crystal?"

"I don't know. I think I knocked it off when —" Ransom bent over to reach into the wastebasket that stood beside his desk. "Here it is." He held it up.

A megatherial bellow thundered in the hall outside. Ransom dropped the crystal and stood paralyzed.

When the last reverberation had died away, MacTate tiptoed to the door, unlocked it noiselessly, and opened it a crack to peer out. He opened it a little wider, then all the way. "Nothing there." He looked at Ransom. "Give me another cigarette." He opened the desk drawer, took out the cigarettes and lit one. "You know, this is as bad as the train to Baltimore, really. You notice — what was it you said? Strange scenery. Strange characters."

"Like the senator," Ransom said.

MacTate nodded. "And Mbongo, and Jenkin's friend."

"And the Venus de — No. *She's* plaster. I just saw her out there."

"But what was it you said about the fifth dimension relating mind and matter? Presumably a continuum could exist in which a mental afflatus informing plaster with —"

"Wait." Ransom looked at the door. "How about that noise? Can a continuum exist that's inhabited by disembodied bellowings?"

"For all we know, it was a dinosaur." MacTate shrugged.

"But why wasn't it there when you looked?" Ransom's voice was agitated. "And how did it get there in the first place? That's what I want to know. How did they all get there? What's making this happen, MacTate?"

MacTate looked at him thoughtfully. "Let's see, now. Let's reconstruct it. Starting from this end. What did you do when you heard the noise?"

Ransom looked puzzled. "I don't know. I just stood there." He turned

toward the desk. "I'd just fished the crystal out of the wastebasket, and when I heard the noise, I — The crystal. I dropped the crystal, and —"

"What were you doing when the Venus came to the door?"

"Why, I was sitting at the desk" — Ransom sat down at it — "with my elbows on it like this."

"And you moved the crystal to make room for your elbows?"

"Yes. Say." Ransom got up. "Where is the crystal? When I heard the noise, I dropped it. Here." He bent over to pick it up.

"Ransom! Just a minute. *Don't touch that thing.*" MacTate took the jewelry box from the desk and placed it carefully, upside down, over the crystal on the floor. "Now." He scooped up the crystal with the box and snapped the lid shut. "I should advise you to keep this insulated, if that's the word for it. The box apparently serves. It's safe only when in contact with continua in which nothing happens."

"What do you mean?" Ransom took the box and cupped it in his hands. "It's just a good-for-nothing alkaloid crystal that won't even warp polarized light. What harm —?"

MacTate looked at him patiently. "Don't you see, old man? Every time you moved that crystal, we had a visitor. Fortunately, you dropped it before the last one became anything more than a noise." He shook his head. "Of course it doesn't warp light. It warps space-time continua."

"That's very neat, MacTate. Very neat. There's just one little thing wrong. How did those people know who I am?"

"Well, I suppose there must be someone corresponding to you in those respective continua. Avatars, so to speak."

"Then why don't I remember any of them?" Ransom thrust out his belly challengingly.

"Oh, have you forgotten the second floor of the Times building? Temporary insanity and all that? Anyway, I think avatars aren't supposed to recall one another's experiences. But —" MacTate's eyes twinkled. He took the jewelry box from Ransom's hands. "It's perfectly easy to find out how they recognized you. We'll get them back and ask them."

"MacTate!" Ransom turned pale. He grabbed the box from MacTate and clasped it to his bosom, almost snarling. "You wouldn't. You wouldn't. But I'll make sure." He took a sheet of paper from his desk drawer, crumpled it around the box, and set it on the icosahedral ashtray. Then he struck a match and lit the paper. The flames shot up brightly. The box appeared through the charred paper, blackened, and lost shape. Ransom sank into his chair once more and wiped his face with his handkerchief. "That's the end of *that*," he said. "Thank God that stuff has a low melting point."

We have a high respect for, and just a little dread of, our friend, Mr. Philip MacDonald. We respect him for taking time out from a very lucrative career of screen-writing to write such stories as these, purely for the fun of it. And we're not a little scared by what develops from his idea of fun. Not that Philip MacDonald writes about headless shades that clank in the night or tentacled monsters that titter; he shuns anything so obvious. He prefers the more subtle, and more frightful, terror of situation. (*Do you remember* Private, Keep Out! *in our first issue?*) *Situations so reasonable, so subtly plausible, that we're too easily convinced that we might find ourselves in the same plight . . . and one day probably will.*

Solitary Confinement

by PHILIP MACDONALD

THE light is grey, not so much light indeed as alleviation of darkness. It oppresses you, and as you walk mechanically on, you begin to wonder what time it is.

It must be much later than you've thought. Or have you thought? Perhaps it is earlier; it must be earlier, because the greyness can't mean anything except the approach of dawn. Can it?

You walk a little faster, trying to sort out the foggy swirling in your head. You think — on top, as it were, of all the other jumbled thoughts — that it is a good thing you know your way, because you certainly haven't been paying any attention to where you are going. . . .

You stop. *Where you are going.*

The four words — the feeling of the four words rather than their shape — vibrate all through you. The awful hollowness of fear tugs at the essence of you. You know now, but to cushion the shock of the knowledge thrust it from you and for the first time study your surroundings: the surroundings which are so familiar that you haven't needed to look at them as you go along.

You are in a street. That you have known all the time. But now you study it, to analyze its familiarity.

And find it is no street at all but a depthless, almost formless simulacrum. While you were moving, wrapped in the fog-like uncertainty of your

thoughts, it loomed on each side of you correct and possible. But now that you try to embrace it in your consciousness, its grey misty outlines waver and melt and come together again in new shapes defying space and time — so that what you have thought was the half-timbered and ivy-colored frontage of the school becomes the shadow of a stone-and-iron façaded barracks; the white railings of your friend's house the ruby-tinted steps of some brothel; the stucco of that well-remembered cottage the glass-and-brick unfriendliness of an office building. . . .

The knowledge will not be kept at bay. Your gaze goes inward — and you know it is useless to fight against it any more. This is not life. For you there is no more life as you have known life. This is death and the unknown existence.

The existence you have constantly doubted in secret and completely denied in public. The existence which, you know now, does indeed bear relation to what you have called life — and must therefore contain some sort of reckoning for deportment in that life.

Just as the religions taught. As your mother believed. As was held by a few of even your more intelligent friends.

Fear possesses you. It is no longer an aching hollowness trying to pull you into its void; it has become the core of you.

You know there is no possibility, yet you contemplate flight. And as you do so, the shifting simulacra which surround you begin to fade. They came from greyness, and now the greyness swallows them and moves in on you, impalpable, invisible, but there.

It makes walls. A wall behind you, which you can sense without turning. A wall upon either side of you, reaching forward into more greyness.

A corridor along which you must go, inevitably.

You find yourself moving along it, the fear pervading you like overpowering fever. Through your mind course memories of deeds and thoughts and omissions which must count against you on the reckoning. They come in no rational or time-chart sequence, but fast and hard and real, so that it is as if you were reliving each incident rather than remembering it. But it is worse than mere reliving, because you yourself are divided. You are objective and subjective at the same time; the actor and the observer too, not only performing the actions and thinking the thoughts and failing to do what you should have done, but watching yourself while you think and act and deliberately refrain from acting; seeing from outside exactly in what proportion of wrong, of evil, stands each deed and thought and omission. . . .

The grey walls seem to narrow as you go on between them. As if they are fining down to the point at which you must stop. The point is not near,

but it is somewhere. It will inevitably be reached. You can neither slacken nor increase your pace; you cannot stop — although, the memories over, you are now all fear again.

You fight against the fear as you always fought against fear when you were alive. But this fear is infinite and unconquerable; it seems to have no counteractive possibilities on which you can force thought to dwell. It is so great that it seems insupportable. It seems that it must destroy you utterly — and yet you know paradoxically that here there can be no such end as destruction; that in fact there can be no end.

You find yourself, as a new step in this catharsis of terror, face to face with the dread and hitherto unthinkable fact of personal infinity. And the very contemplation of this awesomeness applies such a spur to the emotion that it shifts to a plane where the now impossible word *unbearable* takes on a sharper shape. . . .

Until a vision comes to your mind, and by its implication eases the agony. Now you see your impalpable grey-walled corridor as a hollow spoke in a vast, illimitable wheel along whose countless other spokes countless other men are moving down the lines of formless perspective toward the infinite inescapable hub.

Fear doesn't leave you. Perhaps it doesn't even lessen — but, rather, concentrates to make room for the new and therefore analgesic thought that you aren't alone.

Of course you aren't! How could you be? What wild incredible egotism can have made you think that you are? You are one of hundreds of thousands, one of millions upon millions.

And your balance sheet, among the myriad other balance sheets, will total far from the worst. Surely it must be less — less wrong than many, many others, less *evil?* Why, even among the men and women you yourself have known in life, you can think of several who were worse than you; crueler, more selfish, less truthful by any standard, more ruthless in their pursuit of self-advantage.

You try to strike a balance for yourself, forcing your thought to dwell upon the other side, upon those in your memory who were as much above you as the others below. You find you can remember more of these — but not so many more. . . .

Ahead, the grey walls narrow yet more sharply. Even beside you they seem to press closer.

The hub is nearer; so near that once more terror surges in you, trying to swamp all other thought and feeling.

But not succeeding, because nothing now can rob you of the solace of the mere thought of companionship. Your spoke may be narrowed nearly

to the hub, but so are all the other spokes — tens upon tens, hundreds upon hundreds, thousands upon thousands, millions upon millions.

The fear contracts again. Now the alleviation is as deep-rooted, as permanent as the terror. This is mercy. However awful the unknown, however severe the reckoning, it will be shared by countless others, who will regard with compassion the myriads whose plight is worse, with envy the host which has no plight.

You have been striving uselessly for slowness, for postponement, for any degree of delay, however minute — but now you begin to hope that the hub will soon be reached —

And it is. The grey walls aren't pressing close any more. Perhaps they aren't there at all. There is a — a *roundness*. . . .

And ahead, somehow expected and inevitable and completely congruous despite all your formless expectation, is a man seated at a desk.

From somewhere, light shines on his bent head, and on the papers over which he is working. He does not look up.

You go forward. You stand at the desk. You wait — until you can bear waiting no longer.

You force out words. "Please," you say. "Please — where are all the others?"

He looks up at you, inquiringly.

"What others?" he says.

Title Contest Announcement . .

The $100 prize for a title to Idris Seabright's story in the April issue of *F&SF* has been awarded by our judges to Marian C. H. Schloeder of Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. Honorable mentions, each with a year's subscription, go to Mrs. Gladys Christensen of Phoenix, Arizona; Mrs. Barbara B. Constant of El Paso, Texas; and Valeria Kondrat of Watertown, Massachusetts. (And perhaps it's only appropriate that on a story by one of our most distinguished woman authors, all of the prize-winners should, by pure chance, be women!)

Even the specialists who read everything published in every fantasy magazine have only a partial idea of the extent and variety of American fantasy fiction. Odd and imaginative stories keep turning up from the least suspected sources; and perhaps as unexpected a source as any we've yet met up with is Mast Magazine, *a publication of the United States Maritime Service, which in October 1947 published* The Man Who Could Smell Land. *John Langdon has written many stories of many types, including the often anthologized* The Girls of Tongatabu — *and we don't need to tell anyone who reads the story which follows that he has served in the merchant marine. We're glad to welcome Mr. Langdon to the domain of fantasy — though we're a little uncertain as to whether this story should be so classified: he calmly tells us it's based on fact!*

The Man Who Could Smell Land

by JOHN LANGDON

QUEEREST thing I ever did see —

Jorgensen, the Chief Mate, hoisted himself up on the tarpaulin-covered hatch and fingered his thin blond fringe. Nobody said anything.

It was just after the war started, he began. I was Chief on the Christabel. And when I see this Pickering — Augustus A. Pickering — I figure I'm a man short on deck. Funny-lookin' little guy, skinny and shrivelled up like a dried cocoa bean — and no teeth. His eyes are watery and the lower lids 're pulled down till you can see the red. What forehead he's got is all wrinkled and worried-lookin'. If it wasn't for his long, sharp-pointed nose, you'd a' taken him for an oversized monkey.

I'm wrong; Pickering's a first-class seaman. But not much of a mixer. Likes to get away by himself. Mornings, he goes up to the fo'c's'le-head and stays till breakfast. And after supper, too, till it's dark.

He don't smoke, so they ain't no lighting matches after blackout. Nothing wrong in it, but naturally I'm curious.

One evening I'm comin' along the catwalk when I see him leanin' over the bow. I slip behind the pillar of a gun mount. The door is swung open and I can see him through the crack at the hinges, his face a quarter turned to me.

All of a sudden he starts sniffing. He raises his head, strokin' the air with his nose. He does this in a half-circle, takin' about a point a' the compass to a sniff, raising and dropping his head at each stroke, his eyes closed.

At the end, he moves his head a bit more and takes another sniff. Then he stiffens. His eyes pop open and he jerks around.

"Evenin', Mr. Jorgensen —"

The hair on the back of my neck clean rose up. All I can figure is he can see through a solid steel door! No use pretendin' I'm not there. I step out, but it's like I ain't hardly touchin' the deck — with them cold chills lifting and dropping me.

"Evening, Pickering," I say, coming up. "How'd you know I was there? *And how'd you know it was me?*"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I want to know how you knew I was there. Not that I was spyin'. Just an accident I happen a' see you."

"Of course, sir. I was sure of it."

"Sure a' what?"

"That it was an accident —"

"You hear or see me?"

"No sir, not that I know of."

"Not that you know of! Are you one a' them psy — psychos or Yogis?"

"If I am," he says, "I ain't never knowed about it."

"Well, I'll — ! There's somethin' mighty queer here. Was you prayin', Pickering?"

"Oh no, sir."

"Then what *was* you doin'?"

"Well, I . . . ah —"

"And how could you know it was me — with your eyes closed and your back turned?"

Pickering shuffles his feet and wipes his face and blows his nose. He twitches and he fidgets. Then he heaves a long sigh.

"Well . . . when you come up I was practising —" He coughs and clears his throat.

"Practising what?"

"Smelling."

"Smelling!"

"The wind was kind a' off from your quarter or I'd a' knowed you was there before. I didn't get a whiff of you till —"

"Wait a minute! Are you saying you *smelled* me?"

"Yessir —"

"Don't tell me I smell that bad! Of course, this shipboard soap —"

"Oh no, sir! As a matter a' fact, you don't smell bad — not near as bad as the Second and the Junior Third Mate —"

"Well! *That's* a relief — !"

"— but I'd a' smelled anybody at that distance. I was sorta set. That is —"

"Set? Set for what?"

He twitches some more and gives me an anxious look. "To — to smell land."

"*Smell land!* What're you talking about? They ain't any land within a hundred and fifty miles —"

"I know," he says, backing like I was goin' to hit him. "A low island with a lot a' sandy beach. Only —" He looks up, pleading, worried-like. "Only it's around a hundred miles. Hundred to hundred and ten — over that way —"

That stops me! We're in a war and ain't letting nobody but the Master, the mates, the radio operator and the gunnery officer know the ship's exact position. So when I said a hundred and fifty, I'm shadin' it about fifty miles. And here he hits it — the kind of island, the direction and the distance!

"Now, Pickering," I say, careful and easy. "That's remarkable. But just between us — you tell me who's been showin' you the charts — and I'll forget the whole thing right here."

He stares at me. His face works and he looks so thin and slumped. Then he sighs and turns away, starin' out to sea.

"I just knew you wasn't goin' to believe me."

"Believe you can *smell land*?"

"But I can — I *can*!"

Well, I kept it up and he kept it up, and it wasn't no use. He didn't know a thing about charts. So at last I give up. Didn't tell no one about him but from then on I keep my weather eye on him. About a week later we're passin' another island.

"Evening, Pickering — how's the nose? Smell any land?"

He gives me a tired, sorrowful eye. "Yessir — right over there." His skinny arm shoots out a few points aft of starboard.

He's hit it again! But this time I play him easy. "And what kind of land is it?"

"Big island. Got some mountains. Natives and whites. Lot a' farms. Even a factory. . . ."

Better'n I expect! If I can keep him goin' he'll tell me who's givin' him this dope.

"Fine. Fine. And how far would you say it is?"

He puts his nose up in the air. He keeps sniffin' and smackin' his lips. I have to keep a straight face.

"Between eighty and ninety miles. Not more 'n ninety — not less 'n eighty."

Wrong, and I was ready to bet he knew it. I figure he's been wised up. Matter of fact, I took the reading myself at sundown — two shots just as the sun sets on the horizon.

"Come, come, Pickering. Wouldn't you say it was a hundred miles?"

"Eighty to ninety, Mr. Jorgensen."

"Damn it, Pickering! You know as well as I do it's a hundred and twenty!"

"Eighty to ninety."

"All right. Like to bet twenty-five bucks?"

His face lights up, then he looks worried. "Wouldn't want to take your money, Mr. Jorgensen."

"Never mind about that!"

It's dark now and I go to the bridge. I shoot Scorpio. Then I hurry down to the chart-room. Our speed and my new figure would make Pickering's guess just about right. It was my sunset shots that were off.

I hand Pickering the money. It don't make sense but it can't be a trick. All I can say is:

"Land ain't got no smell. Away out here it ain't."

"Everything's got a smell. And land's got a smell — even way out here."

"How come I ain't smelled it? I been sailin' forty years."

"Takes time, Mr. Jorgensen. I been practisin' twenty-odd years. Took me eighteen years to smell up to a hundred miles —"

"All right, if you can smell land — what does it smell like?"

Pickering works this one over. "Well," he says, "if I was to ask you how a dog smelled — what'd you say?"

"Doggy."

"That's it. And land smells like land."

Well, the long and short is I put Pickering through every test I could think of. I'm not sayin' I believed him — and I'm not sayin' I didn't. But we had a lot a' time shuttling, and believe me, he never missed! He had a reach a' smell up to near two hundred miles!

Humans is funny, Pickering told me. They think a' smells as big stinks — just good or bad stinks — not little hard-to-find smells you can make use of. Why can animals pick out different smells? Because they have to. And ain't *humans* better 'n animals?

First time he noticed this different smell near land, a funny kind a' damp green smell a little like wood or charcoal burning with a whiff a' meat fryin' in it — and come to think of it, there is that smell near port — he started tryin' it out. Every morning 'n' evening up on the fo'c's'le-head. Couple a'

times he thought he had it but he wasn't sure. Then one morning he got it — sharp and clear. Wasn't no land to see but he asks the Mate on watch. Sure enough, they was passin' a small island about sixty miles away.

It got so he could tell about the land, what kind and if they had mostly farms, or was there big cities and factories. Got so he could even tell different countries by their smell!

For a couple a' months I'm like a man with a miracle. Can't leave it alone. But Pickering won't never let me tell nobody about it and after a while we get started back, our old rust-pot wallowin' along.

One evening about sundown we get it — tin fish in number three hold. We're down in the belly, listin' bad, but goin' slow ahead — when she gets it again, square in her engine room. Blowed the guts out a' her. She starts to sink fast. Guys hit the water but we manage to put over a couple a' boats. In the morning we take stock. Lose only three men who were down in the engine room. Two sailors are hurt, the skipper's got a crack on the head from a swinging block and the Junior Third Engineer's sick from oil and water.

They decide to head for a big island — one a' ours — about four hundred and fifty miles northwest. Some small islands are closer but they figure chances a' hittin' one is slim.

Course, I could a' told 'em about Pickering, but I could imagine tryin' to convince 'em. I sometimes didn't know if I was convinced myself. Anyway, with good luck, we ought to make it in a couple weeks. Even without luck three weeks. Longer'n that I wouldn't bet a penny on our chances.

Luck ain't with us. The fourth day a squall rips our sail and carries away the other boat's, mast 'n' all. We can't leave 'em, so we break out oars. Ten days — two weeks — still goin'. Skipper's in a bad way with that crack on the head. All a' us are feelin' low and some are pretty sick. One injured sailor dies. An oiler in the other boat goes over the side at night. All a' the men got salt-water and sun sores. Everybody's light in the head and flighty.

Nineteen days . . .

Pickering's in our boat. All the time he's been actin' strange, sniffing and givin' me the eye. The others don't pay no attention and the Old Man seems in a sort of a daze. Finally Pickering crawls up beside me.

"Gettin' close," he says. "About seventy miles."

"Figures show a hundred and ten," I say.

"Nearer seventy or eighty, Mr. Jorgensen. Been gettin' closer. But now it kinda seems —" He shakes his head and won't finish. "Tell better in the morning."

In the morning, he still ain't sure. Next morning, he looks more worried than I ever seen him. Keeps sniffin' like a huntin' dog on a cold trail. His eyes are sort a' desperate-lookin'.

"Just can't get it," he whispers. "We're goin' too slow. And the wind keeps shiftin'. Mixes me up. But I'll get it."

"Better be soon. It's three weeks today. One more week's our limit."

Next morning, soon's I see his face, sharp and sure a' himself, I feel better. But his news ain't good.

"We're passin' it! That's what had me fooled — that 'n' the wind. We're due west and a little north a' the main part. About ninety-five or a hundred miles."

"You're sure?" Somehow it just don't seem right. Still, figurin' like we got to, nobody can be sure.

"I tell you I'm sure, Mr. Jorgensen."

"Pickering, this is one time you can't be wrong!"

"Mr. Jorgensen, I'd stake my life —"

"That's what you'd be doin', Pickering. Yours 'n' mine 'n' about eighty other guys' lives."

"I know, I know! That's why I waited till I was dead sure. I tell you, there's nothing within smellin' distance the way we're headed now. Nothing!"

Pickering's so worked up he forgets to whisper. The others are watchin' us, their faces tight and drawn and their eyes glitterin'. The skipper raises his head.

"Mr. Jorgensen!" His voice is hoarse and cracked. "What are you and that seaman up to?"

This is it! Me 'n' Pickering's nose — against hard, careful figurin' on wind and current-drift. If I talk — at best I'm goin' to look silly; at the worst, they'll tie me and Pickering up. But if I don't talk, I can't change course. And if we don't change course —

It was enough to take the heart out a' any man. But I *got* to do it.

"Captain," I say, starting easy. "When I tell you, you're goin' to think I'm out a' my head. But — I know we're passin' east a' the island. It's almost due west right now — about a hundred miles."

He blinks a couple a' times. When he speaks, his voice is quiet. "And *how* do you know that, Mr. Jorgensen?"

"Captain," I say, talkin' right up to him but makin' my words count, "this is the hard part. For forty years I've sailed the world over. I've seen some strange things — things you nor I nor any man could explain. Yet if anybody'd told me, just four months ago, what I'm goin' to tell you now — I would of called 'em crazy and had 'em locked up. But things is desperate, and I'm goin' to stick my own neck out, no matter how crazy it sounds. I only want you should hear me out."

The skipper's eyes been gettin' narrower and his face more grim. "That's reasonable, Mr. Jorgensen."

"Very well, sir. When I say land's over there, I'm depending on Pickering here. And Pickering knows land's over there and we're passin' it, because —"

"Because, Mr. Jorgensen?"

"— he's able to smell it."

For a full minute there's a dead silence. Then the skipper sits bolt upright for the first time.

"Smell it! Smell land — at a hundred miles?"

Well, sir, that gets a laugh — the first laugh anybody's had in twenty-two days. They pretty near pass out from laughin'.

When it quiets down, the skipper's smilin' a little. "Pickering," he says, "what kind of horsing is this?"

"No horsing, sir! I really *can* smell land. Been able to for twenty years. Didn't tell no one. Even Mr. Jorgensen wouldn't a' knowed except he caught me at it."

"That's right," I said, and told them the whole story. When I come to the part about the thirty-five mile error, the Captain remembers. It kind a' sets him back for a while.

I told 'em about the tests, and how Pickering never missed. When I finally wind up I hear enough wisecracking and name-callin' to do me the rest of my life. A couple a' guys are all for tyin' me and Pickering up, right then. The men get to arguin'. Some is for it, some against, some doubtful. . . .

The guys in the other boat, two hundred yards astern, must've thought we'd all gone crazy at once.

Then the skipper, whose face's been gettin' grayer, raises up.

"Mr. Jorgensen! I think we've had enough of this nonsense of steering by a nose. I'd rather die at sea than take a chance on any such silly thing!"

That does it! Even though I can see some a' the guys still believe in me and others are mad at the skipper for actin' that way with their lives, I just can't go on. Better save my fight for later, I figure.

While I'm sitting there, bluer 'n battle-smoke, Pickering whispers something in my ear. At first it don't mean nothing. Then, all of a sudden, it goes off in my head like a gun — light, noise, everything!

"Men!" Everybody jerks up. "Listen! Pickering just told me something. He says, back in the other boat, less'n a minute ago — a man just died! That man is the Junior Engineer who's been sick from oil and water!"

They stare at me, mouths open.

"See what that means, men? If he can smell the minute a man dies, and that man a couple hundred yards away — he's got a nose that can out-smell any dog alive! If he can smell that, he can sure smell a big piece a' land — even if it is a hundred miles!"

Just then the other boat pulls up. They holler over that the Junior Engineer has just kicked off. Then they drop behind like before.

"Men, this is it!" I don't lose no time. "The Captain has no authority over your lives in an open boat." I knew better, but I had to put it over. "It's up to you. With me and Pickering's nose, you'll be ashore in a week." Five days, Pickering thinks, but I ask a week. "It's your lives. What say?"

To my surprise, they're with me — all except the two guys who wanted to tie us up, the Junior Third Mate . . . and, of course, the Captain.

"Remember — you're givin' me a week. Seven days —"

"Mr. Jorgensen!" The skipper can hardly talk and he can't raise his head. His eyes are burnin' like live coals. "This is mutiny! I'll break you for this! I'll put you in prison —"

"Captain — right now I'm so anxious to see land — I don't care if I have to see it from a jail window!"

The skipper's all in. He sort a' lays back, groanin'. I turn the boat west. The other boat hauls up and calls out, wantin' to know what's up. I tell 'em we've got an error in our figures . . . the skipper's passed out and I'm in command.

I don't mind tellin' you it was a terrible week I went through. The guys kidded a lot at first, but after a while they just settled down, their faces tight and hard, watchin' every move me 'n Pickering made. It was bad enough to see doubt and suspicion creepin' into them — 'twas a lot worse when I knew the same was creepin' into me, too. For all the tests, there were times when I couldn't stay convinced. You know how that is? Yes, sir, take my word for it — a terrible week!

But Pickering? He's in his glory, sittin' up there like a pointin' dog, his nose in the air all the time, sniffin', correctin' our heading. Even at night you could hear his voice, "Little north" . . . "Steady on course" . . . "A bit more south . . ." Seems like he never slept a wink.

When the fifth day broke, I thought I could see murder in some of the eyes. Maybe it was me — I hadn't been sleepin' too good. Anyways, they started whisperin', their eyes like burnt holes in their heads. Once one a' them laughed — and I'm tellin' you, it made my hair curl.

Then, late in the day, we spotted some coconuts floatin'. We scooped them up with a shout. We know we're near now. Sure enough — next morning we see land — dead ahead of us!

Well sir, you'd a' thought the cheerin' and yellin' for Pickering would a' never stopped. Dried up as we was, we was all cryin'! Yessir, cryin' and laughin'. Damn fools near upset the boat tryin' to get to Pickering, fightin' to hug him, to shake his hand and slap him on the back.

And Pickering! His face, blistered and squeezed up like a dried-out old

tomato, was shinin' and glowin'. Long nose, wrinkled monkey-face and droopin' hang-dog eyes and all — he sure looked beautiful — just beautiful!

Well, long about noon one a' them destroyer-escorts came steamin' out and got us all aboard. Finally, we all got ships back to the States. The last day before I'm to leave, I hear the skipper's up, so I go to see 'im to find out the charges he's goin' to press.

"Charges, Mr. Jorgensen?" He stares at me as if I don't make good sense. "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about. You see, I can't recall a single thing since we was lowerin' the boats and something hit me, here —"

He touches his bandaged head, then looks up at the ceiling.

"That so, Captain?" I say. "Too bad. Well, see you in the States."

"Umm — yes. Thanks. By the way — that fellow — Pickering. Remarkable man!"

And Pickering — he's a hero, a seven-day wonder and a scientific curiosity all in one. Government don't let newspapers get the story, but scientists, I hear, swarm all over him, tryin' to prove he's a fake, I guess. The Navy and Coast Guard are interested till they find out it takes twenty years hard practice to become really proficient. Uncle Sam takes him to Washington and shunts him from one agency to another, tryin' to find the best use for his smeller.

Finally he can't stand the life no more. Now he's back to sea on some rust-pot or other. I like to figure him, come evenin', leanin' over the bulwarks of the bow, sniffin' like a huntin' dog at some two-by-four island about a hundred miles away. . . .

Jorgensen broke off. If he was aware of the dead silence evoked by his story, he gave no sign. He stared out over our heads at some point just above the horizon.

"Yessir," he went on. "He could smell land like a burro smells water on the desert. Seems to me these last few years that there ought to be a way to make use of all those little, hard-to-find smells —"

He stopped again. He slid off the hatch and turned around.

"Evenin', Cap'n. . . ."

There was no one in sight — absolutely no one. Then the skipper, a slight smile on his lips, came from behind number three masthouse aft of where we were. This was the first time any of us had seen him down on the main deck where the crew gathered in the evenings.

"Good evening, Mr. Jorgensen. Would you mind coming up to my office for a few minutes?"

We stared after them. Someone said, "That Chief and his yarns —" and shut up. Nobody said anything.

Miriam Allen deFord, as we pointed out last year when we published her The Last Generation?, *is the most versatile professional writer we have ever encountered. There's hardly a field of fiction or non-fiction in which she has not distinguished herself — and yet she manages occasionally to amaze us by displaying still another facet of her creative talent, as in this tender and tragic story based on Indian folklore of the American Northwest. The atmosphere of pioneer Washington comes from the boyhood of the author's husband, the late astronomer Maynard Shipley; and legend and fact fuse in a human story at once touching and a little terrifying — a tale that may save you from ever again speaking too loudly where a tree may hear.*

The Daughter of the Tree

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

WHAT WORRIED LEE CHIEFLY was the silence. Back home, in Boston, he had been taught his Longfellow — "the murmuring pines and the hemlocks." There were pines and hemlocks here, though the forest was mostly spruce and, above all, Douglas fir; but none of them murmured. There were no songbirds, and only once in a while did he hear the rallying call of a quail. He missed even the roar of the Snoqualmie River that had annoyed him so much the first night. Perhaps — he set the tin oven and the pans and canisters on the ground, to rest his shoulders, and took a long drink from his water flask — perhaps he had been a fool not to try to cross that half-made bridge after all.

But he could never have done it. All Watt's gibes and sneers about husky eighteen-year-old boys who couldn't keep their balance could only bring the blood to his face; they could not make him set foot on that swaying contraption with the big gaps between. He had never been able to endure heights: that time when he was a tiny tad and his father had taken him up to Vermont in the summer, he had learned that he grew sick and dizzy when there was no solid ground under him. He would be all right alone. He had a hatchet to cut away the undergrowth if the salmonberry bushes and rhododendrons grew too thick, and if he met a cougar or even a bear, the chances were that it would back away hastily at sight of him. He was not afraid. Only, it was so dreadfully quiet.

To cheer himself up, he began to whistle: "Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea" — a tune from two years ago, 1890, in Boston, before his father had died and he had been set adrift. It had seemed like a romantic, adventurous dream then, to leave school and use up all that was left of the insurance money to go with Watt Gibson to Seattle. Washington had been a state for only a year; Watt, from his seniority of five years and an uncle who had been West for a decade and had sent for him, had been full of rosy stories of prospects in which money and excitement were inextricably mingled. But the boys had arrived on the heels of a great fire which had left the little city prostrate, with only two business buildings standing: people were living in tents, and there was little work except for skilled carpenters and builders. Then Watt's uncle had joined a party which was going to open up the country east of the Snoqualmie; and Lee, who had seldom been out of a city in his life, was overwhelmed with gratitude at the chance to go with them as cook.

Tramping miles around a gorge, all by himself, until it had narrowed to where he could cross it, and then tramping back again to join the squatters' camp, had been something he had not figured on.

Well, if the others could live that long without bacon and flapjacks, he could live till he got back to them. He stooped and shouldered the heavy kitchen-pack again. There was no least crackling of twigs or swish of air; but as he stepped around the huge trunk of a fir-tree he came face to face with a man, standing silently to await him.

Lee jumped and the tins rattled, but the man simply stood and waited. He was an Indian — one of the Flathead Indians from the big hop-ranch, probably, since in slack seasons they sometimes came into the wilderness for salmonberries and grouse and deer.

"*Klahowya sikhs,*" Lee said tentatively. All these Indian tribes of various descent and language spoke Chinook, the trade jargon; so did all the white men who had dealings with them; and Lee had amused himself for nearly two years by learning fluently the weird mixture of English, French, Spanish, and disparate Indian dialects.

"*Klahowya,*" responded the stranger briefly.

Lee was not so glib as he had imagined. The impassive dark face before him almost smiled as he explained laboriously where he was going — not why. Those fellows could cross the Grand Canyon on a plank — they were like cats in their delicate sense of balance.

He learned that it was nearly five miles to the end of the gorge. He had already come at least three, so there would be eight miles back on the other side. It was still early in the day; with luck, he could rejoin his party by dark. If they were hungry, they could make a fire and heat coffee and eat some of

the cold biscuit from breakfast, but though he had the stove and all the kitchenware, he carried nothing edible except salt and baking powder and a stray small tin of flour. He was considerably relieved when the Indian remarked: "*Mesika olo?*"

Yes, he was very hungry, as only a healthy eighteen-year-old can be. The Indian had a pouch full of salmonberries and two quail. They would have a feast.

Gravely, without much conversation, they set up the stove and gathered kindling. Lee made flapjacks while the Indian gutted and spitted the quail. They set to with hearty appetites.

Suddenly, with scarcely a sound, the rhododendron bushes at the right parted, and a girl appeared. The Indian nodded curtly, and the girl smiled shyly, but said not a word. Lee sat with his mouth half-open, staring at her, a forgotten drumstick between his fingers. The girl sank in a graceful heap beside him on the ground, and still without a word prepared to share the food.

In his amazement the boy forgot to eat. He glanced inquiringly at his companion, but the Indian only shook his head very slightly and impassively went on with his meal. Not a sound came from the girl, and she did not seem to notice Lee's covert glances.

She was dressed like an Indian, but she was plainly of full white blood. Her hair, worn in two long plaits, was a soft chestnut brown, and as she stretched out her arm for a flapjack he could see the white above the sunburn. Once she looked full at him, with curiosity equal to his own, and he saw that her eyes were a dark blue.

Then, as silently as she had come, she stood up, raised her hands for a minute above her head, in salutation and apparently in thanks, and quietly slipped away. There was no sound of her going in her buckskin moccasins, and though Lee jumped to his feet and ran a few steps after her, she was nowhere to be seen.

When he came back, the Indian was cleaning up and burying the remains of their meal. He looked amused, but he waited for Lee to speak.

"Who is she?" the boy asked in Chinook.

The Indian was busy lighting his pipe. When it was drawing properly he answered at leisure, in the same language, though not to the point.

"She no can hear," he said, "but if we talk about her when she is here she know, and it make her sad."

"But who *is* she?"

"*Okustie stick*," said the Indian, and puffed away in silence.

"The daughter of the tree." Lee flushed: was the man making game of him? But the Indian gazed at him with sleepy amiability.

A little offended, the boy finished his packing, and prepared to continue his journey. He felt the man's eyes on him, but he did not look in the Indian's direction. When his task was done, he said stiffly: "Thank you for the food. Goodbye, friend," and turned to leave.

The Indian chuckled.

"Wait. I tell you," he proffered dryly.

That was just what Lee wanted. He dropped the pack immediately,and squatted beside the man, with his back against the big fir.

There was a comfortable silence. Then the Indian said, smoking peacefully between the guttural words of the strange language:

"Long time ago I come here, I little boy. Long time ago my father come here sometimes to hunt. Sometimes he give big potlatch, he want much dinner to give his friends. We live then on seashore, we fish. Sometimes we want bear-meat, deer-meat, my father come many miles, hunt here in woods. I little boy, he bring me, teach me how to hunt. So long time before she born, I know that girl's mother."

"She's a white girl, isn't she?" burst from Lee.

The Indian frowned; the order of his narrative had been interrupted.

"Her mother white woman."

"But she looks all white. Is her father an Indian?"

"Her father not Indian, not white man. You listen, no talk. I tell."

Lee settled back. Let the men wait; they would be comfortable enough and glad of the enforced rest after days of blazing trails and chopping underbrush. The Indian, raising an admonitory hand against further interference, continued:

"That girl younger than you. This I tell you happen since I grown man. But begin long time ago, when my father bring me here little boy, teach me how to hunt. When I big, I come by myself. Then white man and white woman come here from far off, live here in woods.

"Pretty soon maybe white man live all around here, chop down trees, build houses. You come today, tomorrow plenty more. Some day no more woods, all houses, all white men. But that time he first white man ever come here, and he bring woman with him.

"Why he come I not know, my father not know. Maybe he do bad things, run away. Maybe he sick, want get well in woods. You come here sick, trees cure you. But no, he strong man, do much work, he not sick. Maybe he crazy, I not know. But he come, and he bring woman.

"He camp first, then he chop trees and build house. House all gone now — trees grow over it. But he build, and he hunt to eat, and woman pick berries. She clear ground and try grow corn — no good. She not woman to do hard work. When I see her I see from her hands she not woman to do work.

"Man very busy, all day, chop trees, build fence, hunt. When day over, he very tired; eat, lie down, sleep. Morning he get up, go to work. Never talk much; very quiet always for woman."

Lee thought of the silence of the woods which had so oppressed him. He imagined a gently bred white woman condemned to this forest forever, and he shuddered.

"Every year, white man go away, back to his own country. So maybe he not do bad things, maybe he come here just because crazy. But he not too crazy, he take care everything all right. He gone maybe two moons.

"Those days, our people keep slaves. He come to us, borrow use of slave to help him carry load. He come back, bring back slave, leave us presents. Sometimes we want things, we tell him, he buy them, bring them to us. Always come back with big load, all he need till next year. While he gone, he leave woman alone in house.

"One day he come our place like that, he talk my father. He say: 'My woman run away.'

"My father say: 'You no find?'

"He say: 'Oh, yes, I find. She run away two time, three time, I think maybe she go crazy.'

"My father say: 'What she do, you think she go crazy?'

"White man say: 'I find her, she make love to fir-tree. She put arms around fir-tree, say to it like to man, "You understand me, you love me." '

"White man laugh, but my father shake head. He know trees good medicine sick people, bad medicine crazy people. You see big tree here?"

Lee nodded. The Indian touched lightly the huge fir-tree against which they were leaning.

"Trees like people, some trees once people, long time ago. This tree, he hear everything we talk. He no can answer, but he hear."

It sounded silly, but in spite of himself a little cold shiver trickled down Lee's spine. The Indian went on gravely:

"You treat woman bad, leave her alone, maybe whip her, maybe speak bad to her, some tree it hear. That tree, it call that woman, it take her away from man, maybe it be her husband."

That was a bit too thick. The boy laughed. The Indian frowned.

"You no laugh. White man, he laugh when my father tell him. He say: 'You crazy too, like my woman.' He go away.

"By and by, I grown man, I go alone hunt in woods. My father old man now, no go with me. We get poor people, leave our home, no more slaves, go work for white man on hop-ranch. Sometimes I remember, like now, when I boy. I come to woods again, live here two, three days. I remember good times I know, forget bad times.

"Every time I come, when I young man, I see white woman here.

"Sometimes her husband work in woods, sometimes he far away in his own country. But always the same — she walk around woods, not afraid of anything. Cougars, bears, deer, she talk to those animals, they never hurt her. Sometimes she sing. Once I see her, long time ago. Somebody kill doe, maybe her man, maybe Indian. Little fawn left, baby, maybe one moon old. She hold little fawn in arms like baby, sing to it. I see that.

"Always too she talk to trees, just like they people. That is bad, talk to trees. They listen, they no can talk, but they hear. One big fir-tree — big like this — I see her put arms around, kiss bark, talk to tree. I see, I run fast. I no want tree punish me, I see it with woman.

"You no believe me, but I tell you.

"Then come long winter, very bad. Plenty snow, very deep. I no can work, I say to boss man I come here to woods, maybe catch something to eat, maybe not. This seventeen year ago, maybe."

Seventeen years. The girl, Lee thought, judging as well as he could, must be about sixteen.

"All day I hunt, no grouse, no quail, no deer, nothing. Snow come down hard, very cold. I come near white man's house — house all gone now, trees grow over it. But house there then. Inside I hear talk. I no want go in, maybe people quarrel, not want stranger hear. I wait outside, I listen.

"White woman she very angry, she cry, she say: 'Put down that axe!' I look through window — just paper over window, and wind tear corner, so I see. White man have axe, she hold his arm, hold on tight.

"He say: 'I stop this nonsense! I put end to that!' I think maybe he going hurt her, I must stop him, but she let go arm, run to door, and he no touch her. He say: 'What you do? Where you go?'

"Then I hear her talk in other woman's voice, not her voice; if I not see, I think other woman in room. Wait. I remember what she say, the words: not Chinook, I say them in *King Chautch le lang*."

The Indian paused a second, as if to recollect with accuracy, then slowly, in his guttural voice, he said in English:

"I'm through with you. I'm going where I'm wanted."

The sound of those slow, badly pronounced words, in the Indian's harsh monotone, sent a tremor of horror through Lee's veins. He was an imaginative boy — an unimaginative one, like Watt Gibson, would have crossed that swaying bridge without a thought — and suddenly he heard that lost, desolate creature, worn to insanity, uttering her dreary challenge. In the silence that followed, he fancied for a second he could hear the girl's light footfall. But when he turned sharply no one was visible.

"So," the Indian went on deliberately, "I know because she speak in other

woman's voice, she truly crazy. I rather stay out in snow than be with crazy woman. I not listen any more, I go."

"And didn't you find out what happened?" Lee cried. "He must have been fixing to chop down that big tree she was so fond of, wasn't he, and she was trying to stop him. Did he cut it down?"

To his embarrassment, he suddenly discovered he had been speaking English, of which the Indian probably knew only a few words. But the man paid no attention to his outburst. He went on placidly.

"I go away, but I not find anything to hunt. Night come, still snow. I very cold, no can make fire in snow. Nothing else to do but pass night next crazy woman. I go back to white man's house.

"No light there. I go to door, to knock, no noise in house. At door I stumble, stoop down. I pick up branch of tree, lie across doorstep. I shake snow off branch, I feel. It is branch of fir-tree. Then I know."

"Know what?"

"I know fir-tree has come for woman. I know it hear her, come for her. I know another thing. I open door. White man is lying on floor. I light lamp, but I know before I look. He is dead."

"Dead?"

"He has been dead four, five hour. I look to see sign how he die, but I know before I look. The back of his head is broken."

"By the axe?"

"Axe is in corner, it is clean. The tree has heard; it has come to get its woman, it has killed him."

"But, good Lord!" Lee burst out. He recollected himself and went on haltingly in Chinook: "Tree no can come in house, kill man."

"Spirit of tree come anywhere, kill anybody. You listen.

"I go back to ranch, but I come here again. I see white woman maybe two, three time before summer. I no tell anybody, not my father, not anybody. I no want tree come, punish me. First time I come back here, next moon, house all clean, dead body buried. Woman, she can do that, work slow in frozen ground. Very cold all time, he keep till she ready. One time I come again, just before summer. I see her, she say: 'You come here again when first snow fall.' I say: 'I come.'

"First snow fall, I tell boss man I no can work. I come here, go to white woman's house. Her house now, man dead. But most time, she live out in woods, with tree. I go in house, she very sick. I see she going die. She have little baby. That girl you see.

"She say: 'I going die, you take baby, take to your wife.' I say: 'I stay. I wait.' I stay maybe two, three day, give her food. Then she die. I dig grave, I bury her. Then I take baby to my wife.

"She daughter of the tree. Tree hear too much, so she no can hear, no can speak. But very good baby, very quiet. She live with us, like our daughter. Very pretty, very good, but no can talk. When she grown girl, she run away. I know where she go. I come here, I get her, I bring her back. By and by she run away again.

"Now all winter, she stay our camp. She help my wife, she work hop-ranch, she very good girl. But come spring, she run away, stay till first snow. I no follow her now, I know where she go. I come here, sometimes I see her, sometimes no. She live here, live on berries, wash in river, sleep on ground. She stay with her father."

Instinctively Lee edged away from the giant fir-tree against which he had been leaning. The Indian almost smiled.

"Not this tree. I no lean on that tree. That tree far off in woods. White man ever cut that tree, maybe he be sorry. Maybe tree kill him when it fall."

"The whole thing's impossible!" exclaimed Lee, a little too loudly. Then he switched again to Chinook: "She grown girl. She safe in woods?"

"She safe," said the Indian grimly. "My wife see she safe in camp, her father see she safe in woods. I think maybe she never love man. She only half like you and me."

Lee glanced at him dubiously. The girl was very pretty.

The Indian stood up. Doubtless he was due at the hop-ranch at Snoqualmie by morning.

"You get back your friends, maybe tonight. Full moon tonight, very easy." He raised a hand in farewell. "*Klahowya sikhs.*"

"*Klahowya*," responded Lee. Then, already a few steps off, already wondering with a quickened pulse if the girl might not emerge from the bushes again when the man was out of sight, he called back:

"I no believe. White woman kill man. Girl his baby."

Or yours, he thought to himself.

The Indian turned too, and smiled condescendingly. He had lived with white men: he knew how their minds worked.

"Girl not his baby," he said dispassionately. "Girl not my baby, too. I no touch woman belong to tree. You young man, you no child, you not talk like child. That girl not baby any man.

"She born ten full moons after man die, when snow begin to fall. She daughter of the tree."

Lee smiled too, and shook his head stubbornly. The Indian shrugged his shoulders and turned to go. The boy watched him disappear among the trees; then he adjusted his heavy pack and started to trudge on down the trail. It was true, as Watt had told him; these Indians had the minds of children,

once you got them off the beaten track of everyday practicalities. Of all the fantastic yarns!

There was a slight rustle to his left, in the underbrush. Looking up sharply, Lee caught a glimpse of long chestnut hair.

Aha, he thought, so she did notice me! He had plenty of time; the day was young yet. Deliberately he laid down the pack, tied his handkerchief to a branch to mark the spot, and plunged off the trail.

She was fleeter-footed than he, and the woods were her familiar territory. But she kept sufficiently in sight and sound to lure him on. Suddenly she paused, not fifty feet away; and there was invitation in her eyes.

"Wait!" he called, forgetting that she could not hear him. There was no other sound; the trees stood about him like solemn guardians. He began to run.

He found himself sprawled ridiculously on the hard ground, his knees scraped, his left hand bleeding.

Stiffly he got to his feet again. There lay the fallen branch that had tripped him.

He stooped and picked it up. For a long minute he stared at it. The trees around him, he saw at a glance, were spruce, with a few pines.

The branch he held in his hand was fir.

The girl had disappeared. Around him was only silence.

Shivering in the warm sunshine, Lee limped back to the trail. As quickly as he could, he shouldered his pack and faced toward the camp. All he wanted in the world was to be with Watt and the others just as soon as his hurrying legs could make it.

Our friend Herman Mudgett is a collector and composer of that noble and neglected form of verse, the science fiction limerick. If you like this sample, we'll use others occasionally.

There was a young man of Cape Horn
Who held his grandparents in scorn;
Time-travel adventury,
He killed them last century —
And found he had never been born!

Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

ALL OF US enthusiasts have for so long hailed science fiction as a typically American form that it's somewhat embarrassing to admit that the two best science fiction novels of 1951 to date (this column is being written in late March) are both imports from England.

John Wyndham's THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (Doubleday) may remind you of many other novels describing the collapse of contemporary civilization; but rarely have the details of that collapse been treated with such detailed plausibility and human immediacy, and never has the collapse been attributed to such an unusual and terrifying source. You'll find a high quality of novel-writing here; and those tripodal walking plants known as *triffids* will, we guarantee, haunt your nightmares for years to come.

There's no new and startling concept in Arthur C. Clarke's PRELUDE TO SPACE (Galaxy); the book is merely the description of the day-by-day preparation for the launching of the first moon rocket. But Mr. Clarke knows his scientific details so well, projects them so clearly, and manages miraculously to infuse them with so sensitive a poetic understanding that this simple factual narrative is more absorbing than the most elaborately plotted intergalactic epic. And it's further distinguished by the moving theme: "We will take no frontiers into space" — a refreshing change from the narrow "practical" chauvinism of so many of our writers.

Such books as these make one remember the history of the detective story, another distinctively American form to which the British contributed a new polish and literacy — which tended in turn to raise the level of the American product. And we're certainly not going to deny that the level of book-form American science fiction could stand some raising.

A few recent items, however, are well worth reading. John W. Campbell Jr.'s THE MOON IS HELL! (Fantasy Press) is an extraordinary short novel: the diary of a stranded lunar expedition which creates its own living conditions out of that barren satellite — a narrative with much of the fascination of a SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON or a ROBINSON CRUSOE, and with Defoe's own dry convincing factuality. Edmond Hamilton's CITY AT WORLD'S END (Fell) is a surprising departure for the creator of Captain Future: the warm and

intimate story of a small mid-western town blasted into the remote future and adjusting itself to an uninhabited earth and a vastly inhabited galaxy.

If you like space opera — and very possibly even if you don't — you'll revel in Jack Williamson's THE COMETEERS (Fantasy Press): two full-length novels (1936 and 1939) of broad swashbuckling romantic adventure by the Legion of Space, which make more recent imitators look pallid indeed. And there's more romantic adventure, if on a smaller scale, in Vaughan Williams' THE CITY OF FROZEN FIRE (Macmillan), which combines Stevensonian piracy with a Lost Race of Welshmen in South America to make a plot as highly enjoyable as it is faintly absurd.

There's been only one recent volume of science fiction short stories; but that one is a *must:* Ray Bradbury's THE ILLUSTRATED MAN (Doubleday). The attempt at a unifying frame-structure is, in contrast to THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, markedly unsuccessful; and a few of the eighteen stories seem less than wisely chosen to enhance the Bradbury reputation. But enough excellent ones remain to provide a feast for every devotee of the finest traditions in imaginative fiction.

Several non-fiction books should interest you strongly. THE STANDARD DICTIONARY OF FOLKLORE, MYTHOLOGY AND LEGEND, edited by Maria Leach (Funk & Wagnalls, 2 volumes), is a wondrous compendium of peculiar lore, with at least three plot ideas on each of its 1196 pages; we commend it to our readers almost as urgently as to our writers.

Gerald Heard's IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING? (Harper) is an item calculated, like so many of Mr. Heard's works, to defy critical analysis. It starts off with a clear, well documented survey of the flying saucer situation to date, a badly needed corrective to the distorted and even flatly untrue "explanations" in recent magazines and newspapers. Then gradually, by certain steps of decidedly eluctable logic, Mr. Heard reaches the conclusion (and expatiates on it as established fact) that the "saucers" are piloted by intelligent bees from Mars. Frankly, we aren't at all sure of the position of Mr. Heard's tongue relative to his cheek at this point; at any rate we urge the book upon you as the best written and, up to a point, factually most complete book to date on what may quite possibly prove to be the most serious subject of twentieth century non-fiction.

Two recent reprint volumes demand inclusion in your permanent basic library: A new revised edition, in modernized spelling, of Ralph Robinson's 1551 translation of Sir Thomas More's UTOPIA (Everyman); and a fine new volume of the SELECTED PROSE AND POETRY of Edgar Allan Poe (Rinehart), admirably designed and printed, tastefully selected (with a most perceptive introduction) by W. H. Auden, and including the complete text of the book-length NARRATIVE OF A. GORDON PYM . . . all at a surprising bargain price.

Once in a long while there appears a story which people remember vividly without recalling any details of title, author or source; they recollect only that the story had an odd plot idea which enabled it to say something fresh that had never been said in quite that way before. Shirley Jackson's The Lottery *is such a story; so are Robert Ayre's* Mr. Sycamore *and, on a possibly lower level of subtlety, Cleveland Moffett's* The Mysterious Card. *And another story that readers keep thinking of and asking about is "that one . . .* you *know . . . about the little boy and the cube." Your editors were among those who warmly remembered this charming short story in which an impossible event makes it possible for the author to display an acute insight into the nature of the thinking of Man (and Child); but we had, we confess, no idea of who had written it, or where it had been published until one of your favorite fantasy writers, R. Bretnor, pointed out to us that it was by John Leimert and had appeared in "The Atlantic Monthly" for August 1945. So here, thanks to Mr. Bretnor, is* John Thomas's Cube. *If you've read it before, you'll be delighted to read it again; if you haven't, we envy you your first reading.*

John Thomas's Cube

by JOHN LEIMERT

JOHN THOMAS THOMPSON, aged eight years and nine months, lived in a house with an old, warped, but extremely large and fruitful apple tree in the back yard. Beneath this tree, leaning with his back against the trunk, or in it, wedged between forking limbs, John Thomas often took refuge. Here he came to escape the turmoil of his expanding world and to dream the dreams and think the thoughts important to a boy aged eight years and nine months.

John Thomas went out to visit this tree at seven-thirty o'clock of the morning of September 30. He didn't even wait for his breakfast. He just tumbled out of bed, threw his clothes on, and dashed out. He wasn't much more than past the door when he set up a clamor for his mother to come and see what he had found. His mother, however, was busy making toast, and frying bacon, and pouring John's father's coffee. She called to him to hurry

back into the house and eat his breakfast, and to be sure his hands and face were clean, or else he would be late for school.

John Thomas ordinarily was an obedient boy, but on this morning he ignored his mother's summons. "But, Mother," he said, "it's the queerest thing I've found. A little block of metal so heavy I can't lift it. Come and see. Please, Mother."

"You might just as well," John Thomas's father said.

When his mother came to where John Thomas was standing under the apple tree, she at first could see nothing. But the boy pointed to a bare spot and there on the ground was a perfect cube about one inch each way.

"It appears to be made of highly polished steel," Mrs. Thompson said, and stooped to pick it up. To her surprise, she could not lift it. "That's the strangest thing I ever saw," she said as her fingers slipped on the gleaming surfaces.

By this time Mr. Thompson had come out to see what was going on, and he, too, tried to lift the cube, without success. "John Thomas," he said, "did you bury a steel rod in the ground just to see what would happen?"

"No, Father," the boy said, "I didn't. Honest. I found it that way."

"Why don't you get a shovel and see whether it's buried?" Mrs. Thompson asked reasonably.

"I believe I will," Mr. Thompson said. He got a garden spade from the garage and shoved it into the ground at an angle under the metal cube. The spade cut easily into the soft earth without striking an obstruction.

"You see," Mrs. Thompson said, "it isn't buried."

Mr. Thompson grasped the spade firmly and tried to lift the dirt with the cube resting on top. He couldn't do it. He then shifted both hands to the end of the spade handle and tried to pry with it. The handle bent slightly with his effort, but the metal cube remained immovable.

Mr. Thompson now pulled the spade out of the ground, bringing a quantity of loose dirt from beneath the cube as he did so. John Thomas squatted to inspect the cube more narrowly. "Look, Father," he said. "The block isn't even touching the ground."

"That," Mr. Thompson said, "is impossible." Nevertheless, he stooped to look, and after looking returned to his spade. He began to dig a hole around the cube, and before long he was able to take a spadeful from directly beneath it. The weight of the small cube had been astonishing enough, but what now occurred dumfounded them.

When the supporting column of earth was removed, the cube, contrary to all the laws with which the Thompsons were familiar, remained suspended a good two inches in the air. As they stared at the perverse, shiny object, a few grains of dirt fell free from its under surface, as though to demonstrate

that for dirt, at least, the law of gravitational attraction still held firm.

"Perhaps the hole isn't deep enough to make it fall," Mrs. Thompson said, and her husband, anxious for an explanation, excavated another six inches of dirt from beneath the cube. Nothing happened.

Mr. Thompson now thought of another force. "Stand back," he said to his wife and son. "I'll fix this thing's clock for it." He raised the spade above his head, took careful aim, and then swung down at the cube with all his strength. He was rewarded with a terrific clang. The spade bounced into the air again, almost wrenching itself out of his hands, but the cube continued serenely to occupy the precise sections of time and space as before.

Five minutes later, when the city editor of the largest daily heard an excited account of these events from Mr. Thompson, he was understandably skeptical. Nevertheless, he sent a reporter out to have a look. The reporter, who was a cynical and degraded person, cynical without conviction and degraded without villainy, because his station in life required it of him, also was skeptical. He stopped along the way for two or three quick ones and when he finally arrived, looking bored and smelling of strong liquor, he found not only the Thompsons but most of their near neighbors impatiently awaiting him.

The hole had been enlarged by succeeding workers, who had the same idea as John Thomas's father, to a diameter of four feet and a depth of two. The reporter surveyed the hole, the block of metal suspended above it, and a branch of the apple tree directly above the cube. Then he said knowingly, "Which is the kid who found it?"

"I am," John Thomas said.

"Quite a magician, ain't you?" the reporter said, and taking off his hat, he swung it vigorously above the cube. The hat met nothing more resistant than air, and therewith the reporter became the first of a series of professional gentlemen who came to scoff and stayed to wonder.

The news spread rapidly and the mayor was among the earliest of the dignitaries to arrive. He was followed by a committee of inquiry from the university, consisting of its president, the head of the physics department, the head of the chemistry department, an associate professor who was an expert metallurgist, the professor of astronomy, and their respective assistants bearing scientific instruments of all kinds.

"Here, gentlemen," the mayor greeted them, "is an incredible situation. This block of metal arrived in the Thompsons' yard, no one knows precisely when nor from where. There it remains, suspended in mid-air. Where did it come from? Why doesn't it fall? Will there be more like it? When will it go?"

"One question at a time, if you please, Mr. Mayor," the president of the

university said. "Let us first have the facts so far known, and then proceed with an orderly inquiry. Mr. Thompson, would you mind telling us whatever you know about this cube?"

John Thomas's father obliged with a recital of the events of the morning, suppressing, however, the episode of hitting the cube with the spade. He did not want these people to know that he could lose his temper at an inanimate object.

When Mr. Thompson had finished, the president of the university went on. "I have formed a hypothesis that I am confident will explain all the puzzling questions that here confront us. There was a shower of meteors last night, a fact that my astronomical colleague will confirm, and this object arrived in the place it now is, in the form it now has, from the limitless distances of outer space.

"Why does it neither fall nor fly away again? We all know that there are two opposite but unequal forces that act upon every body at the earth's surface. One of these is the centrifugal force that results from the spinning of the earth upon its axis, a force that tends to hurl objects away. The other and stronger force is that of gravity, tending to pull objects towards the earth's center.

"This particular object, moving freely at tremendous velocity through space, entered into the gravitational field of the earth and was pulled from its course. As it hurtled through the atmosphere that envelops us, it became increasingly hot from friction, with the result that its molecular activity was distorted in such a way as to set up within the structure of the cube itself a force that neutralizes the force of gravity.

"The result we all see. The cube is at rest in a perfect state of equilibrium. Centrifugal force plus the gravity-resistant force within the material itself exactly equals the force of gravity. In a moment I shall prove my contention by lifting upward against the cube, thus giving it an impetus that will destroy its present perfect balance and send it flying back into the void from whence it came. Before I do so, does anyone question the accuracy of my hypothesis?"

The various scientists present remained silent, but John Thomas said, "I don't think it will fly away."

"Well, well," the president of the university said. "And why not, my little man?"

"Because my father hit it with a spade and it didn't budge."

The president reversed his field with a mental agility that no doubt had contributed to his reputation as an administrator. "Exactly," he said. "What this boy has said exactly proves the point I was trying to make. When confronted with the unknown, it is idle to speculate, however ra-

tionally, without having first erected a sound foundation of fact. I shall now retire in favor of my colleagues of the physics and chemistry departments. When they have examined this object from every scientific aspect, we shall consult together and, in the light of known mathematical formulae, arrive at the correct description."

The chemists and physicists now came forward with acids and bases, with agents and reagents, with spectroscopes and microscopes, with cyclotrons and atom smashers, with electric furnaces and vacuum machines — in fact with every known instrument by means of which man projects his senses into the infinite. The results were disappointing.

Viewed under the most powerful microscope, the surface of the cube looked no different than when viewed with the naked eye. No slightest fissure was revealed, no clue obtained as to the structure of the block. After finishing this part of the examination, the metallurgist said, "All I can say is that the surface is absolutely smooth, so that no part of it reflects more or less light than any other part. It is amazing."

The use of various chemicals proved equally ineffective. The block was impervious to every test and shed the most vitriolic concoctions like water off a duck's back. When it was exposed to intense heat, it not only remained cool, but it refused to expand or contract. No matter what they did to it, its dimensions remained constant.

It proved to be a nonconductor of electricity and had neither a positive nor a negative pole; yet when someone touched the base of an electric light bulb to it, the bulb lit. When this phenomenon occurred, the scientists retired to a corner of the yard for consultation.

Their places were taken by a delegation from the principal churches of the town headed by the president of the local theological seminary. "Mr. Mayor," this gentleman said, "we believe that further scientific inquiry into the nature of this object will prove fruitless. It belongs not to man but to God. What we witness is a veritable and unquestioned miracle.

"No material description of this block is possible, since it is not material, but spiritual. Science, in its search for a purely mechanistic explanation of reality, sooner or later comes up against an irreducible minimum which remains as unfathomable and mysterious as the larger conglomerate it was intended to explain.

"What we now have before us is a corporeal representation of this irreducible minimum. God in His wisdom has chosen to send us a reminder made manifest that, though men can tinker with the building blocks of nature, they cannot explain them."

At this stage of the proceedings a Mr. Heartly, chief engineer for a firm of tool and die makers in the town, stepped forward and asked to be heard.

"I am neither a pure scientist," he said, "nor am I trained in theology and metaphysics, and therefore I am unqualified to make any statements concerning the nature of this block. But I am a toolmaker, and if I cannot account for the unusual behavior of this cube of metal, at least I can name it.

"In our business we use similar cubes machined with nearly perfect precision so that each face forms exactly a 90-degree angle with every adjacent face, and so smooth that when two blocks are placed together, the pressure of the surrounding atmosphere holds them firmly in place. Gentlemen, this mysterious object is a Johanssen Block, and with your permission I will now prove it."

With these words Mr. Heartly took a second block of metal from his pocket exactly like the suspended cube in every respect except that it was larger, and placed two faces of the cubes together. He then stepped back for all to see that they firmly adhered — so firmly that he was forced to strike his own cube a sharp blow to release it. "Only Johanssen Blocks," he said, "are machined perfectly enough to hold together in this fashion."

It would be pleasant to report that Mr. Heartly's solution proved satisfactory to all concerned. The scientists, however, while they thanked Mr. Heartly for identifying the object and demonstrating some of its properties, felt that to name a thing is not necessarily to have it. They advanced the proposition that no Johanssen Block could be expected to remain suspended in mid-air, equally resisting all forces exerted upon it, and to this Mr. Heartly agreed.

They stated that since the metal cube had been shown in certain respects to possess perfectly natural qualities and quantities, it must be assumed that its apparently unnatural qualities were capable of a natural and materialistic explanation. All that was needed was a patient application of the scientific method until the truth was made known.

To this the churchmen dissented. They did not deny that the block was a Johanssen Block if Mr. Heartly said it was, nor that it possessed some of the attributes of a Johanssen Block. But it did not possess all of those attributes, and the Divine purpose was to make the basic contradiction more clear. The shiny cube was sent to demonstrate that the fundamental mystery can never be discovered with man-made measuring sticks, not even that incorporeal measuring stick, the higher mathematics.

By now it was past noon and John Thomas suddenly realized that he was hungry. Not only that, but most of the discussions he had been hearing were totally without meaning for him. He recognized a word here and there, but that was all. It is true that the general feeling of excitement and wonder had communicated itself to him and he had enjoyed being the center, directly

and indirectly, of so much attention. But at last he was bored and wanted his lunch.

His mother took him into the house and made him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and gave him a glass of milk. While he was eating, he said to her, "Mother, do you like having that funny block in our back yard and all those queer people?"

"No," she said, "I don't. I'll never get any work done, and all that talk makes my head swim. I don't know who's right and who's wrong, but I do know that your father will want to stay around to superintend things, and the people he works for won't like that. I wish that block would take itself off to whatever place it came from."

"So do I," John Thomas said. "I'm tired of it."

At that precise moment there was a shout from the yard. "It's gone. The block has gone."

So it had. The mayor noted this fact with relief, since he believed that once the object that had caused so much discord and disquiet no longer existed, the problems it had raised were no longer of any importance. He stated this point of view and found that the majority of those present agreed with him, which, of course, is why he had been elected mayor.

The crowd dispersed at his direction, peaceably, except for the scientists and the churchmen, who could be seen contending for their respective positions as they walked off down the street.

As for John Thomas, he heard no more of the affair until that night at supper, but what he didn't know was that his father and mother had been holding a conference about him. His father approached the problem obliquely, as is the custom with parents.

"John Thomas," he said, "your mother tells me that the moment you said you were tired of the block, it disappeared. Is that right?"

"What block, Father?" John Thomas said.

"You know very well what block. The block in our back yard that caused all the trouble and excitement this morning."

Actually, being only eight years old, John Thomas had forgotten about the block. "Oh," he said, "that block."

"Yes, that block," his father said. "I know you had something to do with its being there. You were the first to see it, and when you said you were tired of it, it was gone. Did you have some reason why you didn't want to go to school today? Did you play during study hour yesterday and fail to prepare your lessons?"

When confronted with this partly right guess, John Thomas supposed that everything was known and that the best thing was to confess his crime in detail.

"It wasn't my fault," he said. "Billy Dixon kept whispering to me and writing notes and I couldn't get my work done. When I woke up this morning, I thought wouldn't it be swell if I didn't have to go to school. And then I thought that if there was a shiny little cube in the back yard that nobody could lift or move, maybe everyone would get so interested that I wouldn't have to go. Then I got to thinking there was such a cube, and when I went out to see, it was there."

The next morning John Thomas's father and mother took him to Dr. Emanuel Klein, the famous psychiatrist with offices in the Rookery Building. Like nearly everyone else in town, Dr. Klein was familiar with the facts in the case, and indeed had spent the previous evening discussing it with members of the committee of inquiry from the university. However, he was devoted to his profession and conscientious in the practice of it, and therefore first listened to a detailed account of the events as described by the Thompsons, and then proceeded with a careful examination of the boy.

John Thomas spent nearly an hour having his reflexes tested, starting at sudden noises, arranging blocks, sorting colors, identifying qualities of tone, and finding his way through labyrinths with pencil on paper. He then answered questions as politely and accurately as he could about the food he ate, how he liked his school, what his favorite games were, and the content of any dreams he could remember. When the examination at last was finished, Dr. Klein with great solemnity pronounced the opinion he had formed the night before.

In every respect save one, he said, John Thomas was perfectly normal for a boy of his age. He was above average in intelligence, had an excellent emotional balance, and was on the whole happy and content with his life. For this his parents were to be congratulated.

Nevertheless, he did have an unusually vivid imagination and was subject to hallucinations, auditory, visual, tactual. Further, through the operation of a kind of mass hypnosis, he had the rare faculty of making the creation of his imagination as real to others as to himself. Hallucinations, however, are likely to become antisocial, as witness the perverse characteristics of John Thomas's cube, and dangerous, therefore, to the subject and his family. For this reason, Dr. Klein recommended a series of treatments designed to teach John Thomas to distinguish between the fabrications of his subconscious mind and the hearty, solid world outside of him.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, relieved that it was no worse, agreed to this program. They took the boy home confident that he soon would be able to tell the false from the true, the imagined from the real, as easily as the next one. As for John Thomas, he determined never again to admit adults to his own special world. The fuss they stirred up, he decided, wasn't worth it.

"H. F. Heard," one of your editors once wrote in "The New York Times Book Review," "is a writer as unclassifiable as he is entrancing. He writes detective stories that are not quite detective stories and science fiction that is not quite science fiction, just as he employs a pseudonym that is not quite a pseudonym. For Henry Fitzgerald Heard is, as Gerald Heard, a serious student and advocate of eclectic mysticism, spiritual kin to Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood; as H. F. Heard, he is the only man who ever won a $3000 detective-story prize with a pure science fiction story." The recent publication of the curious and provocative IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING? (*see this issue's* Recommended Reading) *has somewhat blended the two personalities, with Gerald plainly poaching on H. F.'s preserves; but the literary character remains as paradoxical as ever. For instance, he has published two collected volumes of excellent science fiction and fantasy short stories and novelettes; but he has hitherto never appeared in a fantasy or science fiction magazine. That's one paradox which we hereby abolish, by bringing you the first of (we hope) many uniquely Heardian concepts and treatments: this extraordinary study in psychobiology. The convincing characterization of a completely alien mind is one of the most difficult and stimulating problems that the science fiction writer can face; and we know of few more successful solutions than this.*

The Collector

by H. F. HEARD

(*Vol. XLVII*, Journal of Oceanograph Institute, *Cookstown, Van Diemansland. Report of 15th Expedition. Appendix B.:* — *"In the Report of the 14th Expedition (Vol. XLV) there was noted the loss, while Atoll 345 S.W. Marshall Group was being catalogued, of Dr. Charles Mackay. An obituary notice reviewing his services to ichthyological studies appeared as an Appendix to Vol. XLVI. As Dr. Mackay's fatal accident has not been satisfactorily accounted for (the body not being recovered) the Institute feels that it is obliged to publish as this Appendix B the only record that throws any light, however baffling, on this mystery. What follows is the final entry from Dr. Mackay's diary giving his account of what befell him from the time that he left his party till, under the stress of some*

hallucinatory drive, probably due to sunstroke, and under the illusion that he had been marooned or abandoned, he took the dinghy to sea. Though, then, there would appear to be an obligation to publish this account, the Institute wishes to emphasize most strongly that it declines to suggest in any way where in the following account Dr. Mackay ceases to be objective. Of that point every reader must be his own judge. As a further explanatory note there is given in conclusion an excerpt from the log of the Thetis *which covers the final incident in this tragic episode.*")

I had reached the south end of the Atoll. It is somewhat an uncommon shape trailing away into a series of small islets. The outer reef is irregular and broken. All the rest of the expedition had stayed up on the north side where the yacht had anchorage. There was only the poorest here — little more than shoals. And certainly not much to study either. The island's geology seems coraline formation on an igneous base and perhaps again later intruded on by igneous disturbance. I went for a walk. We'd heard that there was nothing to see but some tumbled-down sheds at the extreme south point. The place — I forget who had reported that — had once been a pearling base and then for a while, when the pearling was abandoned, served as some sort of quarantine station. But it was all closed up and abandoned now, for a long spell. No one had been left on the island. Our expedition was doing a routine ichthyological inspection. We'd found what we'd expected — standard ecological conditions and littoral fauna-flora balance. As it was our last day here and we might now have a good few trawling and sounding in the open, I thought I might feel I had missed something if I didn't take the opportunity for the exercise.

In a way I was right.

I had come to where there was only one more small cove ahead. Then the coast line swept back north. I'd enjoyed the quiet monotonous tramp along the hard sand, from crescent to crescent of the small uniform beaches. At the end of the miniature bay I was now skirting stood the huts we had heard of. They were huddled near the little promontory that separated this shore from the final bay. They were dreary enough in all conscience. But, with that odd curiosity that is aroused by any abandoned buildings, especially ruins on an abandoned island, I went up to them peering about. I didn't enter any of the dismal half-dozen doors. After all, no one seems certain how long some contagious virus may remain latent and the place we knew had been used for quarantine. Somehow, when you're peering about, you tend to move cautiously — as though dozing bacteria might be aroused by a careless step and spring. An irrational pre-human 'linkage characteristic.' Still I was glad of it. It certainly seemed to have served. Indeed, I wish I'd

been far more cautious. For as I trod softly between the last couple of huts (they were close together) I got a chink-view.

No, there was nothing to alarm me in the abandoned settlement. But the narrow passage I was in sighted, as it were, my eye. I was in shadow, the sun was already sloping. The shadow kept sun out of my eyes. The beach beyond I saw as clear lit by the strong cross-light as though I'd been sitting in a darkened stall looking on at a flood-lit stage. That beach was bare, too — a sickle of smooth, almost white coral sand, the perfect sweep of its sea-edge only notched in one place by a small reef of low rock, that, emerging out of the sand, also kept just above the sea-level, so making a tiny circle-reef of its own. Perfect observation, perfect lighting, perfect unrelieved background. So I couldn't be mistaken. There was no chance I might be imagining. A man was standing there, not a hundred feet from me, standing on that rib of rock as it rose from the sand. He was looking down into the rock-circled miniature lagoon. We were so close that he must have seen me even in my narrow shadowed passage, had he not been engrossed watching something in the water.

Of course, it is always a little startling suddenly to come upon another person when you've been assured that nobody can be there. But I think I'd have hailed — if the light hadn't been so good and I hadn't known the spot's past. I'm an ichthyologist. Specialised before I left school. After fifteen, fishes were increasingly my world. So perhaps I tend to see everything, indeed everyone, somewhat in fish terms. What kept me staring was not so much the man himself. He was naked but tall and straight. It was his colour. He wasn't white, tan, bronze, yellow or black. He was greenish lead colour — one big livid bruise all over. 'He might be a merman,' I tried as a joke on myself. For it wasn't a pretty tint or texture — like greasy metal. And I guess I knew what would next swim into my mind — wasn't there such a name as Livid Leprosy?

Very carefully, much more carefully than I had come, I turned to go back. I emerged from between the two houses. A few more steps and I was back on the sand of the small bay by which I had come. Then, feeling I was safe, curiosity awoke. How could a leper have hung on here by himself? Living alone marooned on an abandoned island — that sort of thing figures largely in boys' books, little in real records. And a leper is a sick man . . .

I clambered up again by some rocks that ran out from where the huts stood and divided the two bays. I peeped into the one beyond. There was nobody there. Curiosity drew me further. The cove — as I'd seen before — was as open as your hand's palm. I looked carefully, scanningly. There wasn't a boulder or a scrub of bush where a cat could have hidden. I went down over the rock-barrier onto the sand shore toward its little lagoon where I had

seen my 'vision.' There wasn't a sign. Not a hint of the footprint. The whole thing must have been some sort of after-image, owing to my looking out from the deep shadow onto the highly lit open.

I had reached now the spot where I had been sure the image had stood. I looked down into the rock-edged pool, the model lagoon into which I had thought I had seen him looking. The water looked surprisingly deep, but still and clear as a block of green glass. I couldn't, however, judge how far down the bottom lay, for there rose from the floor a forest of tall-standing seaweed. My eye then ran round the ribbing of rock that enclosed this small lake. The tide was out — the full ebb of a spring-tide. Evidently when in, the sea flooded this pool. On the outer, sea-side, the ring of rock breakwater broadened like a bezel of a ring. This cape which had a minute beach of its own stood out into the main lagoon. Out on that little promontory, I thought, there'd be a good view of the whole southern point of the island. I was still in two minds whether the man I'd seen was imagination, or might — as unlikely — have sprinted off over the hard printless sand and be hiding in the still further off cove. The promontory did give me, when I had scrambled out to it, the survey I hoped. And not a sign of anything living — not even a perambulating gull.

'Visual illusion established,' I was saying to myself, as I got ready to return over the small rough causeway back to the main shore of the island — when, on looking where to put my foot, I saw a small siltage of sand that had filled a rock cleft. A little pad of sand just enough to put your foot on. I didn't though. For — well, I didn't want to spoil it. I wanted to look at it, study it, not tread on it and wipe out what had already been printed on it. It bore the mark of a naked foot. And it certainly gave the true Robinson Crusoe feeling — with the added shudder, it might be highly contagious. I carefully avoided the mark and hopped back clumsily along the rock ridge, back to land. The round trip and survey had taken me about ten minutes. As I glanced at my watch my mind spun round. So it wasn't illusion I had suffered from. Somewhere here someone — a very odd and perhaps a very unhealthy person — was lurking, was probably watching me. The dislike this thought roused was, I discovered, far stronger than had been the fear that my eyes might have gone wrong. Better see things that aren't really there than be seen by things that are watching you but you can't see. I dropped my plan of rounding the island, turned in my tracks and hurried back the way I'd come.

But the second time I found myself on what I felt was the right side of the quarantine huts I felt once more and even more strongly curiosity's counter-attack. How unscientific to give way to something like panic simply because I'd sighted an odd creature — certainly not as dangerous as a shark and prob-

ably considerably more interesting. I determined to have one last look at that last empty bay. And I was rewarded — by my third shock. The figure was there again.

I watched it carefully. I was standing between two rocks of the natural breakwater. It was, as before, with its back almost turned to me, gazing down into the pool. I could study the creature, and the light, as I've said, couldn't have been better. Surely leprosy, being a skin disease, swells, lesions and tubercules the flesh? This creature's skin was an utterly unnatural, yes a revolting hue, for any human. But I'd swear one thing — it wasn't diseased. Nor was the creature sick in any way. It stood as before tall and straight and with the grace of undeniable health. It had a greasy glitter over it. Certainly it was, I now could see, still dripping. But the texture, quite apart from the tint, did it resemble in any way even the most livid and chilled and sopped human skin? However that odd little question of dermatology was sunk by the odder problem of habitat. Where'd he been all the time I'd been out there? In the sea, of course. Yes, but that, of course, must mean some twenty minutes' submersion. It was really harder to think that he'd been down hiding at the bottom of that seaweed-curtained pool than that he'd managed to make himself by some chameleon change of that repulsive skin so that he was invisible on that bare-as-your-hand beach.

Suddenly he turned, caught sight of me and waved. I waved back. After all it was against all the odds that he was a leper. He was certainly unable to conceal any arms on a body without a stitch. He seemed friendly and I was certainly now curious enough to feel *that* more than any other feeling.

I beckoned him to come toward me. He beckoned to me. I laughed at the pseudo-flirtation. He grinned. I felt that the naked can safely be patronised by the clothed. After all if he was a submarine creature then he was in my province as an ichthyologist. If he wouldn't leave the water line I could at least get within conversation span and see if he could speak. As I got closer I felt, as part of the official exploration team, I had a right to examine all fauna and question any casuals.

"Who are you?"

His reply, "A diver," was given in that flat tone of so many English speaking Mongolians. Perhaps the eyes were a trifle slanted. The colour of course was no help. I was close enough now to see that the cornea was almost as green as the lids.

"A diver?"

He curled himself on the rock. I stood looking down on him. We were a dozen feet apart now. He dangled one foot in the water. "I work on my own. I knew your lot had been here. You're going tomorrow, aren't you?"

He had evidently spied on us while we loaded the yacht. I didn't confirm

but counter-questioned, "I thought the pearling had stopped here?" I wanted him to go on about himself. Perhaps he'd show why he was lying. I kept my remaining distance, too. Though now within three or four yards the skin did look healthy enough (if greasy green is possible as a health tint), still, the man must have some general complaint — of the liver I guessed.

"Yes it did stop," he allowed, apparently honestly.

"And then there were quarantine quarters over there?" I pointed at the huts.

"That didn't last long."

"Why?"

"Oh, I was told there were only a few, and they all disappeared."

"How?"

"Drowned's the story. A skipper that used to land supplies said the last man told him the others all went that way, and then, on the skipper's last call, the last man was gone — no trace of him."

"So you came along to see if you couldn't drown too or if not salvage those who had sunk!"

His tone had provoked me to counter what I took to be some sort of sullen attempt at satire. He didn't seem, though, to notice my sarcasm. "I guess they'd heard, as I did, about the pearls."

"Didn't the old pearlers clean the place out?"

"They thought they did . . ." he paused, "but they missed the real beds."

"And how did you find them — especially as all your predecessors managed to get sunk?"

"You'd like my story?"

"Of course!"

"I'm a half-caste — mother Chinese, father, she said, a Scotch skipper. She never felt he was bad to her. Left money for me — I don't remember him — she saved it all. She said he wanted me to be a doctor. So I went to the medical school at Singapore. Say, I loved medicine. The Chinese profs were fine fellows. I took a course on respiration under one of them. He combined East and West as Sing' does. For his Parkinson cases he used silver needle acupuncture — ephedrine for Addison's. And for his t.b. cases he'd go right back to Mencius, the Great Mang."

"What's that?" I asked as the fellow seemed rambling, and added, "I'll be having to get back to the yacht. Anyhow what's all this got to do with your being a diver?"

"Everything! Without that I wouldn't even have got down the first couple of fathoms. In t.b.," he went on complacently, "the problem's to rest the lung, isn't it — and yet not have your patient suffocate?"

I'd heard doctors enough to be able to nod honestly. The queer creature had, maybe, swept up some medical jargon from some drunken ship-doctor free-associating in his cups.

"Well, if you can practically suspend breathing without suffocation you'd get cures. He did."

"How?"

"Oh," he replied airily, "it's all in the later commentaries on Mang. It's called all sorts of nearly nonsense names — 'vanishing breath,' 'heaping up breath,' 'breathing through the navel,' or gill or fish breathing. He taught me. Said anyhow one should know. Never be ill if you breathed right."

"You're a specimen of the regime?"

"Yes, I learnt it. But couldn't go on. My mother died and I couldn't find where she'd hid the rest of the money — maybe it came by remittance and stopped at her death. I had to go into business. Pharmacists and jewellers link up in any China town. I was taken by a jeweller. But he paid too little for me to hope to save enough to go on with my medical courses. I'd *got* to make more cash. And he did show me how. A peach-tint coloured pearl was coming now and then on the market. 'If you could find those beds — for that tint surely comes from one place — you'd never need to practice medicine,' he told me. 'Any idea where they could lie?' 'Just that the place was worked twenty years ago,' he answered, 'and is somewhere southwest of the Marshalls.'

"It certainly wasn't much to go on; but I had luck — at least I thought so then. As I've told you, I met the skipper who used to victual these quarantine quarters. He swore that these men marooned out here had some of these pearls. 'Wouldn't wonder,' he added, 'if the actual beds may lie somewhere close.' 'Then why not go for them?' I naturally asked. 'Laddie, don't you know that there's only one sort of salt-water man more superstitious than a skipper, and that's a diver? The place's got a bad name, whether the pearls gave it or not. There's no end of stories of haunted bays where your lungs cave in and currents pin you down, cramp you or freeze you. Mermaids weren't thought up for fun, no more than witches were.' . . . But he gave me my bearings and you see I got here."

"And got the pearls and settled down too healthy to need to practice medicine and no doubt too wealthy also!"

Again the green beach-comber didn't seem to notice my incredulous sarcasm. "I dived. You see I was, as it happened, peculiarly equipped to dive. If you learn breath-control you can hold on under, go further and get more when all the others have to come up. My Prof had showed me Gorer's account of the Moll fishermen on the West African coast. Also Behanin's study of his work done at Yale after Kavalianda had trained him."

I switched from this pseudo-physiology. "And you found, of course, your predecessors' bones all 'coral made'?"

"I did find out why they sunk."

I felt I had found out enough to be sure that the man was some sort of tale-spinning lunatic, a balmy beach-comber. Of course, it's not impossible to strike on such a case of a marooned madman. I think I have heard of a couple of such cases. What the man had told me was obvious fantasy. I began to be glad I hadn't been more bluntly incredulous. It was certainly time to be getting back to the yacht. I'd had my walk and a fantastic tale to boot and certainly the teller was as weird as his story. The man wasn't really sick, even if he did look diseased. Anyhow I wasn't responsible for him. We couldn't take him with us. No port health authority would let such a complexion pass: even the police might have views about him — and of course (final dismissal) quite likely he didn't want to come with us. Certainly he didn't seem unhappy nor as far as I could judge undernourished. I had turned to go when he called after me. What he said did stop me.

"You don't believe a word I've said, of course. But I can show you what gives some point to my story — the pearls."

"Where?" I threw over my shoulder.

"Just over there," he pointed across the little breakwater to the miniature island. "I keep them in a rock-crevice just under water. They keep their lustre best that way."

I naturally knew enough of oysters and their calcine callousnesses to know that was true. I hesitated. Obviously he feared I was going.

"Here," he said. I don't know where he had had it hidden — probably in the sand by his foot. But what he was holding out to me was plump and large as a fine hazel nut. In his greasy green palm it shone like a quiet flame in a dirty bronze cup-lamp. It showed up so vividly on that dingy setting for it was luminous as sun-lit peach-blossom. "The others are better." He got up and started across the little reef break-water. I followed.

By the time I arrived out on the little peninsula — for I crawled while he trotted over the jagged coral and slag — he was already lying flat down, his face almost touching the still water of this pool, his right arm thrust down under, to the shoulder. "There." He was pointing under the water. I crouched beside him. The surface rippling made by his movement cleared. I could just see his 'protective coloured' fingers combing back some sea-weed fronds, lying near a small nest of sea-moss — a nest filled with objects about the size of finches' eggs. He picked out a couple and flexing his arm raised them within an inch of the surface. I could see, through the water, they were richer in glow than the one he had already shown me. He turned his head to me, inviting me to take them. I stretched forward and down to touch them

— perhaps the water was magnifying them — felt myself slip, had just time to gasp a full breath and then was plunged head over heels.

It was a straight dive. But when I struck out to bring myself up, I couldn't. I'd caught in the sea-weed. A coil I could feel was round one leg, and, as I threshed, the other leg was caught. My arms became snarled, too. It is hard to keep methodical when you have only some fifteen seconds left to loose your knots and get back to air. My struggle became blind. I felt as though the tendrils that had me held were pulling at me, not I at them. My head whirled. The smeared daylight vanished. I was wrapped in total dark.

But suddenly my main exhausting agony was relieved. I was breathing. I didn't know if it was air. I thought it was so thick and dank that it might have been a kind of breathable water. I couldn't hear a thing save the gasping and heart-pounding of my body. Perhaps it meant that the water was already in my lungs, the struggle really over. I had heard that once the lung is filled the agony ends though you may be still faintly conscious for a few very long seconds. I was dead, though still in my body.

Then I noticed that I could feel. I had a sense of touch. I was shut in some narrow cleft. I felt the sides pressing on me, clammy, sticky. Repugnance leaves you, of course, when you are in great peril. But this contact was so repulsive that I soon felt rising in me an intense nausea. I found I could smell, too. The black fume my lungs laboured in was revoltingly fishy. I could not raise my arms. My whole body seemed to have become plugged into some submarine crack lined with putrefying sea-anemones or jelly fish. But my head must somehow have emerged into some small chamber that contained an air which, however foul, fended off for the time being total suffocation.

I began to recall my last above-surface moments. I had slipped into the pool, of course. But how had I managed to get caught like this? And, where, in the name of salvage, was the green diver? If he was the amphibian that he claimed, no moment could be more apt, more welcome for a demonstration. Then I did feel a movement, a kind of shudder. Caught under some dense tangle of weed, a tangle that somehow captured air of a sort, I was now being pulled at — the green diver's struggles to get me free were the cause of the shudders? I was helpless to respond, but thank heaven they continued, became stronger. I felt my body being bent as the clammy coat that held me was twisted. Then suddenly I felt I was turned over, I was standing on my head for the blood rushed to it. A second after some kind of blast struck me. I was driven upwards with great force. I shot free and on for a short distance. Then felt myself flop, tumbled over onto sand. Of that I was sure, by the touch. But I was still as blind as I'd been in the cleft. The air, however, was far less foul though far from fresh. I took a deep breath and called out. I

heard my voice ring. I must be in some chamber fairly spacious. The slight suggestion of echo was however my only answer.

Then, as I crouched listening, I could hear a faint lapping. I gathered my sprawled self as far as 'all fours,' crept thus over what felt like a floor of sand-covered rock and found the end of this area was marked by an abrupt edge. Some depth under this ledge I could hear the water lapping. As I listened, however, even that died down. All I could do was to continue to explore by touch. Then the damp of sopping clothes began to make me shudder. I took them off. The place, though vault-like, wasn't cold. As soon as I was naked I ceased to feel chill. I continued my touch finding. Retreating from the brink, I patted and pawed my way backward till I found a rockwall. Stretching up as far as I could, I found the rock going on but tending, I judged, to cove over. When I went right or left, in a dozen paces I found I was back at the brink. I was in a submarine cave, half of which — at least at present tidal level — was filled with air. That was all that touch could tell me. I was blind, and now that the lapping had died down my ears were as uninformative. There wasn't a gurgle or a drip anywhere. That gave me my first hope. For semi-aquatic rock-rooted creatures, when the tide is out, generally ooze and give out small sucking noises. I must be above high-tide level. I shouldn't drown. I should die slowly of thirst instead — of course, a worse alternative but because the death-sentence was dated not today but next week I found myself a little less despairing.

I had naturally given up hope that my queer companion could have followed me. Some bubble-explosion of 'marsh gas' perhaps released by my struggles had thrown me up into this rock-pocket. I crawled and patted my way to the brink again. I began to reach down to see whether I could touch the water surface. I was stretching my finger tips as far down as I could and yet touching nothing when my retina gave a sort of 'after-image' recording — the kind of thing you see when you accidentally press on the optic nerve by the eye socket. But when I blinked I saw it wasn't subjective.

It wasn't any sort of light I knew. But it was nearer phosphorescence than any daylight. It grew stronger. It was being emitted by some object down below, in that well up through which I must have been driven. The trouble was that though the illumination grew, it didn't show up anything. It was more like a spread of blue fog. Though it wasn't blue it was the kind of colour you might imagine might lie behind blue. It grew now rapidly till the whole space down into which I was peering seemed flooded. It came pouring up toward me. I tried to see my arm that was stretched out down into this atmosphere but the mist engulfed it. Suddenly I was aware that the unseen water below me was splashing. I drew back instinctively. Something was clambering up toward me. I crouched until I was bundled up against the

back wall. The luminous fog poured up. Then it seemed to condense, take shape, and, lit as though a statue made of fluorescent tubing, before me was standing the green man.

I was so relieved that I put out my hand. My relief switched to fresh panic when my fingers passed through his skin as though it were shadow. I heard a laugh, though, and a moment after, "It's some sort of refraction effect." I saw the figure move. He was still a couple of feet from me but I felt my own arm being touched. It was an additional uncanniness that sight and touch wouldn't coordinate here. But there was no doubt that was the present state of things.*

"You fell in," he began, "and I plunged after you. You were caught . . ." he paused.

"I was caught, yes," I took him up. "Yes, by what? How did I get carried here?"

I could see his face now. But it's amazing how difficult it is to judge expression on features lit from inside. The puckers that shadow-sign to us human emotional play are somehow reversed. I felt he must naturally be expressing concern, as muscle-ripplings I could see went on round the mouth and eyes. But it might just as well have been humour. It's hard to judge expression even in a photograph negative. His voice, though, did register concern, even perhaps alarm. He certainly seemed to hush it. "They can't hear, can they?" he questioned.

"What?"

"Well . . . fishes!"

I thought I had better humour him — he was clearly mad, but if he could get here he could get me out, and he must have been fairly truthful about his swimming powers. "Most of them are certainly deaf," I assured him.

"But what about . . . squid?"

"Pretty certainly deaf, too. But go on. How did I get here? Is this a sort of periodic tidal whirlpool? We've got to get out, you know; with your swimming powers we can. It's just a dive down and up, isn't it? If we get through

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* (*Note: This part of Dr. Mackay's record, though it cannot have happened to him, is nevertheless in accord with some research — of which no doubt he had read — done in the middle thirties at London University, wherein it was shown that after considerable time in total darkness the human eye can perceive objects illuminated by nothing but ultra-violet light, and further, the objects though seen with comparative clearness, are perceived with a displacement of some 2 feet and at an angle of 45 degrees above their actual station. It is, of course, just possible that the spectrum of the luciferin of some aquatic animals may contain, together with radiation of visible light, some U.V. radiation as well.*)

at a time when that pulse isn't driving, we can do it together, can't we?"

"Rather too far for anyone who hasn't had special respiration training. You got here . . ." again he paused, "because you were brought, carried — the way the others were."

"The others? And by whom?"

He crouched beside me. "Nobody knew . . . why these dawn-pearls, as they were called, weren't fished. All that was said was that the beds had given out. All that was whispered was that if you got down there you wouldn't come back. And certainly *I*'d have followed the rest if I hadn't had the super-diving training I've told you. You escaped," he went on more slowly, "because . . . he's learnt."

"Who's learnt, what's learnt!" I was shuddering now, not from the dank place but from fear. The light, which I thought came from his unhealthy skin, I now noticed came also and now increasingly from the well-shaft. He beckoned me. We crawled to the brink. The shaft now was not only full of light but it had cleared. It was limpid. I could see the water level — I judged some dozen feet down. And then, through that, I could see maybe another twenty feet. It was clear to the bottom. And indeed the light as it came up from there showed things most brightly down on that floor. For on that floor lay two cables — cables with knots and bosses on them and each cable about six inches in diameter I judged. The light came from these hawsers. They were of the same sort of colour as my companion's body but of stronger radiation. The luminosity of the cables pulsed, fluctuated as the cables themselves twisted and writhed.

"They're tentacles!"

It wasn't a question. It was my involuntary disgust spurting words. I knew well enough what must be behind such tubing. They began to curl and spiral. Two more came in sight. But these latter ended in huge mittens, almost handshaped flippers, studded over with thorn-edged vacuum-pads. I knew what was being unrolled toward us: the tentacles of the giant of all the Cephalopods — the ten-armed monster, the Decapod.

These cables paid themselves out and came swarming up like Hydra itself, a forest of leprous boa-constrictors each with a hundred fanged mouths. I shrank against the back wall at the moment that the two mitten flippers came over the edge. They flowed over the floor and were soon accompanied by their eight satellite snakes. By some kind of tactile sensitiveness they seemed — perhaps they could sense my warmth — to have no difficulty in cornering me. They paid no attention to my companion, who, crouched also against the wall on the other side of the cavern, looked on. When they had me cornered they waited a moment. For what? There was a threshing and plunging like the sucker of a giant pump, a rush of water that swept our

little ledge, a huge heave, and over the edge, lit by its own uncanny luminescence, like a moonrise in Hell, the vast bulbous bulk of the giant decapodic trunk-head, hoisted itself onto the rock.

The cavern was awrithe with its arms: the well blocked by its mass. Otherwise I'd have made a plunge for it and died trying to get away. I gave the squeal of a mouse when the cat grips it, as the tentacles lapped and lifted me. Through the slither of its coils and the continual grunting wheeze of the great bag-pipe of its body, I could just hear the green diver calling, "Don't struggle, don't struggle. He'll kill you straight if you do. Give way. It's your one chance. Go limp!"

I tried to. I had read that squids will often let fall something that ceases struggling. This didn't. But the cables though they held tightly didn't strangle. I was lifted up and swept to the edge. I saw the great, expressionless soup-plate of an eye, the size of one of the yacht's portholes, regarding me. 'I suppose he'll drown and then eat me.' It was the last dismal flicker of hope — to be suffocated before being dismembered — and it was drowned when the fringe of eight secondary tentacles was suddenly thrown back and I saw into the cavern made by the 'apron' or cowling from which the ring of limbs sprout. I saw the great parrot beak of the mouth. Then with a flop the monster clammy cape-extinguisher had come down on me.

I was in total dark. My vehicle heaved and then plunged. I gasped and could just breathe. I struggled but was held as though bound up in rubber sheeting. Yes, I was back into the condition in which I had been caught after falling into the pool. Disgust and panic paralyzed me. I almost hoped for the sharp pain that would tell me an artery had been bitten through and I would die quickly. But it didn't come. My lungs continued to keep me gaspingly alive. I think I was coffined like this longer than the first plunge, before I felt myself heaved and manipulated. Then once more the head-over-heels whirl, followed immediately by the violent expulsive moment. Again I was thrown out and lay winded.

I was in the dark, this time lying on smooth rock. I was so beat I must have lost consciousness. When I sat up, everything was still. I was alone. But this place had light of a sort and not that ghastly blue. This glow did come up through the water, but it was daylight, true daylight, though made tremulous dusk because it was coming through I judged some fathoms of sea. But I'd swear it was sunlight, however filtered. The sun should have set, I remembered, in a feeble attempt to orient myself, at least in time. But even as I peered down into the shifting green light I could see that it was growing stronger. I couldn't doubt it: I was watching the reflection or refraction of dawn in this marine world.

Somehow that started up my hope again — or what I've called hope's

physiological counterpart, which at its lowest level of all is hunger — the will to live. Yes, I felt hungry. After all, the sea shore has one advantage over nearly every other site. You can generally find free food of a sort. I began to hunt about the ledge. I found no mussels though and couldn't dislodge any of the rock-clingers. I could here reach my hands into the water, but though small minnows were darting about they were wisely wary of my fingers. Then, just as I was going to give up and fall into a deeper dudgeon, I came on a couple of large scallops and, what is more, open. I pounced on them to thrust a pebble between their shells before they could close. But they made no reaction. I bobbed my head down to smell if they were dead. Then I saw they had been wrenched off their rock and their hinges broken. I gulped them down: they were perfectly fresh.

Not till then did it enter my mind that this was an odd little accident. Indeed, not till then did I find my mind trying to set out in proper order the nightmare journey that had brought me, naked and ravenous, to this blind-alley pot-hole. It seemed I must be a double Jonah. Twice I'd been swallowed by a sea-monster and twice regurgitated. The incident was horribly, grotesquely disgusting. Yet not only had I not suffered any damage, I wasn't even — as storekeepers say — 'soiled,' at least no more than a wash would remove. Before however I could consider whether that might not be my next step I spun round, for I'd been touched. The green diver was standing above me.

"Did you get me these scallops?" — I pointed to the shells, which I had found in a corner of the cavern; and so, evidently, had missed his follow up of me to this my new place of deposit. It was a silly question of course but of course it's the way the mind works when it's really lost its bearings. The big issue stuns so one fiddles over trifles. Men going to the scaffold notice that their shoelace has come loose and stop to retie it. Of course, the creature must have prepared this cold breakfast. So when he said "No" I was as stubborn as a mental patient. And I guess I was, for all intents, just that. "Then who?" I asked with the triumph a child questions a grown-up caught lying. And he seemed to fall in and play his part — looked vague, uneasy and then said, "I expect there're more."

We hunted and found a couple of oysters open, six prawns with their heads whipped off and a brace of large crab claws with the shell-casings split so that I could draw out the meat. I ate them all with childish pleasure. Then turned again on my companion, "Of course you got these ready." Again he shook his head. Then seeing I naturally didn't believe him, he beckoned me to the back of the cave. It was dark there of course but I could just see that the rock wall didn't quite come down to the floor. He crouched and then was gone. But I heard his voice. So dipping down I crawled after.

Suddenly hope had shot up. He had a secret way out. This was the land entrance to this sea grotto. You had to lie flat and worm along. But after a while the roof lifted. We'd entered a large place. I got to my feet. Then stopped dead still. Oh it was pretty enough, this cave, lit as the other had been by the weaving green-golden light that came up through the water. And it was fantastic enough to hold anyone's attention. For it was decorated, yes, richly decorated.

I couldn't remember for a moment where, before, long ago I had once seen decoration like this. Of course I had difficulty in recalling the place, because the two spots were so differently located. But at last it flashed into my mind. It was during the time that I'd been taking one of my marine biology courses at the great oceanographic institute and aquarium at Naples. I'd run up for a short visit just to glance at Rome and someone had taken me to that strange Campo Santo of the Capuchin Monks. There the earth preserves the bodies of the Fratri, so when they are sufficiently 'cured', they are mounted round the walls as mural decoration and their canopies and niches are fashioned with considerable ingenuity and no little taste out of the ribs, limb-bones, skulls and pelves of the less honoured lay-brothers.

Of course, this place I now found myself in couldn't really compete with that. For one thing the raw material was less abundant here. But an effort, yes quite a good one, had been made. There were not more than a dozen niches. But the canopy work was made happily enough with coral branches, dolphin ribs, and fish vertebrae; and shark jaws made capacious cupolae. Half the niches were already filled, completed — in the same way as the Capuchin Campo Santo. Of course the skin was gone. But the skeletons were complete to the last phalange. And as a final finish a pair of large rosy pearls shone as artificial eyes in the eye-sockets of each skull.

I was just going to scuttle back into the rock-cleft in blind flight from my ghastly companion and this treasury of his, when he suddenly seized me. I had no idea how strong he was, and, conversely, how slippery, how impossible to break from or to hold. He had me down in a few panting moments. But then, to my surprise, he dragged me back into the cleft out which we had crawled into this — this aquatic funeral parlour. I thought, or rather felt, I might spend my last breath in a yell. But he stifled that, too. He didn't, however, get his fingers over my eyes. Perhaps he didn't want to. So out of our wainscot cranny-slit I was squinting along the floor from which I had just been so unceremoniously swept. And what I squinted made me lie still. For up over the brink of the well and out over the floor were flowing those grey greasy thorny cables.

They rippled on, till with a gulp and a surge that sent a small wave almost into our cranny the monster bulb with its soup-plate eyes heaved into

view. I shortened focus, though, for at that moment a tentacle came writhing past our hide. It didn't, however, investigate, but my eye didn't leave it. For, neatly coiled in the curled tip, was quite the largest pearl I have ever seen — and need I say of a perfect rose-pink.

The tentacle went on. And now I saw that every one of the eight subsidiary arms held in it some object — a shell, a sprig of coral, the skull of a fish. The whole thing, form and movement, reminded me of some worse than Black Art idol come to worse than human life.

This huge snake-complex swept forward with a sinuosity that had about it a nauseating flavour of affectation. You felt that the monstrous horror was showing off, registering charm, displaying feminine elegance. It was impossible to avoid this grotesque suspicion of aestheticism, as, one by one, the eight subsidiary arms offered each its object, placing pearl, bone or coral on some point, trefoil, coign or cusp of the great reredos. And as the tentacles played about, fussing like a woman dolling-up her toilet table, the two great main flipper-ended arms with their thorn-edged pockings postured and waved as though miming exclamations of delight. In comparison with the incessant flow and flourish of these boneless rubber coilings, the 'willowiest' of ephebes was an upstanding, straight-forward, angular bit of engineering. And yet this great greasy boss of intestine-fringed succulence was, of course, far more formidable than a charging mammoth. It could pull the toughest human athlete limb from limb with the idle nonchalance of a maiden depetalling a flower to the tune 'he loves me, he loves me not.'

At last, however, these affectations and hesitations came to an end. The monster was apparently satisfied with its composition. So this was where the other pearl-divers had ended, 'full fathom five,' with the pearls they coveted and longed to see, set in their heads, as their eyes refused to obey the Shakespearian formula. The ten coordinated snakes were at rest. The giant squid would now go and we'd have another chance to escape.

Perhaps I stirred prematurely. All I know is that the tentacle nearest me suddenly coiled. There was no lazy aestheticism about it now. It struck like an anaconda, struck and wound round me and whipped me out of my chink as a hooked pin whips a perrywinkle out of its shell. I found myself held for a moment in the air. Then I was being carried backwards. A moment more, with two other tentacles to help, I was being packed neatly into a vacant niche in the reredos. Through the weaving of the tentacles I could glimpse first one huge soup-plate eye and then the other judging the pictorial effect. The tentacles held me as gently as though I were a piece of an egg-shell porcelain tea-service being put away in its curiocabinet. But I could see within six inches of my nose the claw-thorn fringes of their suction pads. No doubt when the general proportions of figure to niche had been settled —

well then, as we strip unnecessary leaves off a spray of flowers we have selected for a particular narrow-necked vase, my flesh would be stripped deftly off my skeleton, my eyes plucked out and instead of their watery gleam two of the most lustrous pearls put in the gaping sockets.

My flesh was as cold as the monster's. Indeed, I'd have slumped like a melted candle had not these horrible living ropes with incessant fondling held me in shape. I therefore not unnaturally thought it was blessed unconsciousness when I felt my head spin and my body whirl. It was hardly possible to realise, until it was over and the slither of the last tentacle had ended with a gurgle, that I must have been stuffed back into the crack out of which I had been so unceremoniously fetched for such a disconcerting 'fitting.' I lay with my eyes closed for a little. Then peeped under my lids 'shamming dead.' I could see along the floor into the funeral throne-room. Yes, the vast creature had retracted the jungle of snake-limbs, had swept them in, round and under it, as a cat folds in its forepaws to serve as a cushion to sit on — so the mouse may the better imagine it had gone to sleep. Though of course this horrible up-side-down creature was poised on its tubing as an up-turned bottle might be balanced on a heap of dead eels. Naturally a cephalopod, a 'befooted skull,' can have no true face. Facial expression is then out of the question, so upside down makes no difference. Gradually, however, as I watched my gaoler perched on the edge of the water dive that could lead me to liberty, the whole vast bag that blocked my path began to flush from its blue mould colour to a rich yellow.

"It's pleased," I heard a whisper near me. I swivelled my eyes to the back of the cleft in which I was lying packed. The green diver was crouched behind my shoulder. The sound of a wave however made me re-swivel my eyes. With amazing speed the giant decapod had resunk himself in his well. My human friend — for such at that moment he seemed in comparison with our only other associate — evidently sensed my utterly baffled questioning.

"Yes, that's his way of showing emotion. He can show a whole range of feelings by a gamut of coloured flushings. He has quite an amazing number of such tints." I did remember learning that some of the cephalopods do show fear by changing chameleon-like their colouration. But I certainly was in no mood for natural history. And my companion, seeing wisely where my main immediate interest was rooted, turned to our own species.

"Yes, those up there," he pointed to the half filled reredos, "those were the last of the pink-pearlers. Yes, they got in on something big, I allow . . ."

"It caught and killed them. . . ."

"I, I don't think so . . . I mean not intentionally. It, it is decorative. I mean it is — how do you say it? aesthetically-minded, beauty-interested. Do you know anything about giant squids?"

"Well, they are far the cleverest of all the under-water creatures. They might have gone far in evolution if they could have got out of the water." I ran off my aquarium information. It was faintly reassuring to remember I was or had been a naturalist. I used, I remembered, to smirk superiorly at the unscientific disgust most lay-folk showed when viewing squid. I often pointed out how elegant their motions were to a true nature lover. "Trouble with them," I heard my voice reciting, "is their structure's so limited."

"Then there might be a genius squid . . . ?"

"Yes. . . ."

"And it might develop beauty-sense?"

"Well, you said that already!" I felt as irritable as a badly wounded man. "Everyone knows the bower-bird does and it's got a brain about as small."

"Then that's what it's done. It tumbled to the fact that we like pearls and it took to the fashion, caught the taste."

"And then went one better in aesthetic detachment and killed the pearlers just to help out the decorative design," I snarled at his detachment.

"No, no, I don't think quite that. . . ."

"Well, did they all conveniently drown themselves as soon as the aesthetic possibilities of their skeletal structure occurred to this boneless monster?"

Then suddenly my fumbling jokes, a sort of feeble vomiting reaction of the mind under the stress of too much fear, all died away. I had brought up in my mind a real solid question and one he could and he must answer. "And what about *you*!"

"That's why I'm not sure about the others — that they were drowned."

"You mean to say that they, one by one, died in their beds of old age and this submarine monster dung-beetle crept out and, to save the survivors trouble, and in the name of world-wide hygiene, carried off the cadavers, taking, as his fee, only their bones! You know you killed them!" I flung myself at this half sea-creature, half living-corpse that kept this ghastly pet. No doubt he'd feed me to it when he'd enjoyed a little further its pretty play and teach it some further pretty beach themes with my brachia. But I'd get him first. . . .

Of course it was no use tackling a thing as greasy as an eel and as lithe-strong as a python. Indeed it took him so little effort to down me as we writhed upon each other in the crack that his voice went on without pant or gasp till with me neatly trussed, he continued our conversation. But what he said, and said so quietly, was still arresting enough to quieten me, to deflate my effort to throw him off, to make my last gust of courage end in a gasp of deeper horror.

"No," he remarked slowly, like a chess-player checked and suspecting check-mate, "no, it's not my pet. I'm its. And *they* were. At least I'm sure

that's what it intended. You remember, I called out to you, 'Don't struggle'? Well they did. Oh, of course quite naturally, and fatally. If you'd struggled enough you know you'd have suffocated in that cape. Besides, then he didn't know his business."

"What do you mean!"

"I mean he hadn't perfected his technique."

"What the devil . . ."

"Well, I told you *I'd* got, by chance training, a very uncommon, very useful technique for diving. That certainly saved my life. When it caught me, I didn't suffocate because — well you know, and I didn't struggle. And then that super-squid brain evidently tumbled on the fact that we have to breathe air, just about the same time (just in time, in fact) that I tumbled on the complementary fact that he wanted not to drown me but on the contrary to keep me alive. Some air (as you know, not at all pleasant but distinctly more so than suffocating) naturally clings under the apron from which the tentacles spread. Well, it learnt, as does the water-spider, to capture a large bubble of this. Not for its own use, of course — as does the spider. But for its freight, its possible passengers."

"For us?" He nodded. "My, we can't stay here" seemed obvious reaction in favour of action. So his "One gets adapted" struck me as insane defeatism. "We *must* get out!"

"But I've told you, there's no danger. Indeed quite the reverse. He's wishing to keep his pets. He kept you. He got that meal ready for you. I'm quite free here — just act as a companion for an hour or two every day: help him with his designing. He loves learning new patterns. He's out most of the time. Goes off the deep end — don't they call it? He's a deep fellow of a fish, but really quite a good fellow at heart. As long as I turn up when he wants to be amused, I'm free to do what I like. Where else'd I be so free!"

I looked at the green, greasy flesh. He'd said he'd had some hospital training. Of course, he was right — as far as he went. He'd be locked up under half an hour in an isolation ward if any port doctor set eyes on that hide of his. But I, I was quite another kettle of fish. I needn't skulk here and it happened to be the very last thing in the world that I wished to do, or intended. "Well, you can certainly stay. I'm going. . . ."

"But I like you. I want some company. I'd like a scientist companion. Beside, he'll never let you go. He wants to enlarge his collection."

"I to be part of a mollusc's menagerie! You bet!" I rolled over and out of the cleft — he had taken his grip off me and I was on my feet out in the large Memorial Chapel with a couple of twists. A fish-researcher caught by a fish! To be pinned down under such grotesquely turned tables — why, the absurd humour of it roused me to make a get-away on the spot. The fish-

monster would find that it had caught a tartar in catching an ichthyologist.

I ran through again in my mind all I knew about the cephalopods. Yes, they were quite the strongest, cunningest, cleverest of all the true underwater creatures. And, without a doubt, this was a sport, a super-squid genius. But he couldn't come onto land. There, of course, he had to rely on his amphibian ally — his decoy.

The word slipped into my mind. Why hadn't I realised it before! This verdigris salt-water-sodden-slippery diver — of course he had trapped me for his master's collection, decoyed me to look for the pearls and then neatly enough tipped me into the lurking monster's embrace. In a moment the situation was plain as a prison. Of course it was nonsense to try and persuade my glaucous gaoler to escape with me! He was there to hold me while the owner of the two-piece menagerie, with mortician museum attached, was away on deeper business. So seeing the lie of the land and the depth of the seaplot I switched over onto the new knowledge.

It was clear that I'd never get out of this trap without my warder's help. The only path out of these cells was through the tidefilled tunnels and so, by a long diving swim, up to the shore. But whatever the green diver might be he was clearly no liar about his diving powers.

He, too, had now come out into the skeleton-girt cave. "It's being under such long stretches and then having to breathe so oddly, that gives your skin that color?" I questioned as carelessly as I could. Few people can resist answering admiring enquiries about their prowess, and when so selfcentred generally cease to attend carefully to their questioner.

"Yes," he answered readily enough, "that and the adaptation of the skin to constant soaking. You'll get like that too. Then instead of wanting to dry your skin you'll hate not having it wet always."

It was certainly not a prospect that gave me anything but a distinctly negative cutaneous thrill. But I didn't let my reaction get into my voice. On the contrary I remarked, "Well, you'd better start giving me a few practise dives, hadn't you? Anyhow I need to be taken out for a drink. One doesn't dehydrate here but still you know I need to be fresh-watered off and on!"

He took my joke in good part and naturally was willing to show off. I'm far from a bad swimmer and know a little about respiration exercises to get the lung super-oxygenated for extensive breath-retention. I took a series of deepened and accelerated breaths and then with my hand on his shoulder we struck down through the water out of the museum of our collector, headed for the sunlight.

But though he did almost all the actual swimming I nearly didn't make it. He dragged me out and slumped me like a sack on the spit of sand that led

to the causeway which so linked it to the mainshore. As I lay gasping on my back I saw that the sun had just begun to heel over to the West. I had been under not 24 hours — but for the age it seemed, I might have been buried at sea and now after an aeon of submersion here was the resurrection — 'the deep giving up its dead.'

I was too spent to try any exact time-tabling. And when having pummelled and first-aided me, making me vomit a lot of sea-water, he hauled me onto his shoulder, carried me to the main shore and there settled me in the warm sand I just let him. I fell to sleep, sinking down as though I really had drowned. Once I recall waking to find a large shell with fresh water in it. I gulped that and fell off again as though it had been opium.

It was only on my second waking that my time-orientation flashed back on me. Of course I must get back! Perhaps all that I had gone through was a nightmare — a touch of sun after having lain down to dry myself after a dip? Across the time-gap, filled with this fantasy, I saw the real past, clearly enough, urgently enough! Of course the yacht was due to go. They would wait for me but they'd be sore at being kept waiting. I must go at once.

I looked round. There wasn't a sign of life anywhere. And beside me (and they were warm in the levelling light of the sun and with the hot sand under them) were my clothes. As I slipped them on my mind too took civilised sensible shape. Of course — a touch of sun after a doze after a dip. I certainly felt groggy enough on my legs when I got on them. But without delay I set off stumbling along the shore, back toward the island's north end. The effort restarted my circulation and though my head ached, I wasn't making bad going, till on looking back to see how far I'd come I saw something that certainly made me think I'd been too slow and must mend my pace. There was a figure running over the sands in pursuit of me.

I did manage to break into a run as well as a cold sweat. It was no use, though. He was gaining as quickly as a greyhound on a spent hare. I managed to scramble over a reef of rocks that running out separated a couple of the small bays, dropped down on a pebble-strewn cove, and, knowing that I couldn't run another yard, crouched flat under the rock over which I'd come. The nightmare was true — that was all. I'd been caught — caught on the threshold of escape to be dragged back to be pet No. 2 of this ghastly collector until he tired of my simple antics — or my companion grew jealous when they'd see that I served better as something stiller than the stillest of still-lives.

At that moment my green gaoler lept down from the rocks above. He didn't see me — I think his submarine life had dimmed his sight — as I crouched immediately behind him. He was scanning in a myopic way the crescent bay of sand that stretched away before us. My hand shut on a

sizable pebble just fitting and filling one's fist. I rose. He heard me — or caught sight of me out of the corner of his eye — and whirled round. I whirled round my arm. It was as natural a reflex as beating off a hornet. The crack of stone on skull was so sharp it might have been stone on stone. But that was the only sound. No cry and he settled down gently on the pebbled sand. A new spurt of energy took me. I leapt over the body. I was back at the yacht anchorage without once pausing. But then I did slump with a vengeance — there was the anchorage — but no yacht! They had sailed. No doubt they had tracked my trail and finding that it ended in that pool they were certain I was drowned. No use waiting to find a body in these all too well populated waters.

I don't know how long I sat there. The night had come on before again hunger, the spur of pointless living, made me hunt around. Of course I didn't have much difficulty in finding the cached food. When I'd eaten and made myself some coffee (for one of the island's springs came out here and a cooking lamp was stored in the shed) I felt my energy tide-in again. I found at the back of the shed some tarpaulins and wrapping myself in them slept well enough, for to pillow me I had the comfort that I was now safe from pursuit.

With this morning's light my feelings have gone up from resignation level to something like hope. I have a good chance of making a break-way and indeed of catching up with my party. For on going out of the shed I saw the other side of it. What I'd missed, last evening — for the shed stood in my way. The other side of it was a fissure on the coral which we had cut and cleared till it made a wharf inlet, so that freight could be unloaded from the dinghy right along side of the shed. To my surprised delight I found that the dinghy was left there moored to the wharf side.

Naturally it was clear to me from that moment what to do. Firstly I fetched a notebook from the steel cupboard. It is of primary importance that I put down a clear consecutive account of my adventure through the last couple of days. Unless I have it recorded while every detail is photographically clear in my mind, the whole series of incidents is so improbable that under cross examination (as so often happens when a man has had an anomalous experience) I might easily contradict myself over some detail and my entire narrative be discredited. I certainly realise how I myself should feel if this story were to be told to me instead of my being myself the narrator, and, if I may be permitted to use the word without prejudice, the patient.

Well, I have now come to the end of my account. All that remains is to stow this book in the dinghy's fore-locker. I have hoisted the sail, can scull the dinghy out to where I can catch a breeze. I have on board water and

stores. A good south wind is blowing. I should make the inhabited islet group north of this atoll perhaps by sundown or at latest by tomorrow.

Terminal Note from the Log of the *Thetis*, Captain L. Jackson, Master, F.R.O.S. "It is perhaps hardly necessary to enter that the *Thetis* had *not* left the island. When Dr. Mackay did not return, supplies and the dinghy were left at the north anchorage and the ship sailed to the south of the island to investigate. Having failed to sight him on any of the beaches, a landing was made on the east side of the island and the small hinterland was thoroughly explored for any evidence of the missing man. This necessitated staying on that side of the island for the night. The next morning, coming north, we sighted the dinghy making for the open sea. There was a heavy swell running outside the cover given by the island. Dr. Mackay, who was sailing the dinghy, was signalled by us to turn back. He paid no attention. Through glasses it was clear that he had not seen us. He was bending over his port bow. He seemed, too, to be having trouble with the tiller. The boat appeared to be failing to answer the helm. By this time the dinghy had entered the full ocean swell and disappeared for a couple of seconds in the trough. On its appearing again it was derelict. Dr. Mackay could not be seen. On succeeding in getting a rope round the dinghy's prow, the *Thetis* returned with it to anchorage. On inspecting the dinghy Dr. Mackay's diary was found. On examining the tiller and rudder traces of fine circular indentations, some as much as a couple of inches in diameter, were found on them both. Because of statements in the diary we sailed again down the east coast of the island to settle if possible where Dr. Mackay contracted sunstroke. Coming to the terminal south bay we landed, finding the rock pool that figures so prominently in his story. We discovered, here, above highwater mark, confirmatory traces that he had lain on the beach. We also traced his footsteps part of the way back toward the north anchorage. However, on the spot which seemed to agree with his description of the place where he imagined he fought with a pursuer, there were no traces. At this section of his run he had gone down onto the tidal sand and his own footsteps were obliterated."

In Basil Davenport's recent fine anthology, GHOSTLY TALES TO BE TOLD *(Dodd, Mead), there appears a Dickens story,* Captain Murderer, *so delightfully grisly and so totally unfamiliar that we at once wrote to the editor for further information. Mr. Davenport, one of the Inner Five of the Book-of-the-Month Club and unique among America's more "respectable" men of letters for his profound knowledge of the fantasy field, replied,* "Captain Murderer *I owe to my habit of reading* all *of an author I like," and went on not only to give his source, but to add that we'd find another story for F&SF there.* THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER *is a column-like series of essays, largely autobiographical, which Dickens wrote for his magazine* All the Year Round, *starting in 1860 and continuing almost up to his death in 1870. These collected essays (Volume XXIX of the standard* WORKS) *contain one item of extraordinary interest to the enthusiast of fantasy fiction: Chapter XV,* Nurse's Stories. *"If we all knew our minds . . . ," Dickens writes, "I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to, against our wills"; and certainly Mercy, nurse of the five-year-old Charles, bears no small responsibility for the darker side of the complex adult Dickens. But Mercy was not only a morbid sadist; she had, in the words of Andrew Lang, "obviously a true genius as a narrator," and the stories which her charge re-created half a century later must bestow on her a certain immortality. We advise you to read the whole of Dickens' account of Mercy and her narratives — and meanwhile savor this splendid tale of the consequences of an hereditary bargain with the Devil.*

The Rat That Could Speak

by CHARLES DICKENS

THERE WAS ONCE a shipwright, and he wrought in a Government Yard, and his name was Chips. And his father's name before him was Chips, and *his* father's name before *him* was Chips, and they were all Chipses. And Chips the father had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the grandfather had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips

the great-grandfather had disposed of himself in the same direction on the same terms; and the bargain had run in the family for a long long time. So, one day, when young Chips was at work in the Dock Slip all alone, down in the dark hold of an old Seventy-four that was haled up for repairs, the Devil presented himself, and remarked:

"A Lemon has *pips*,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*'ll have Chips!"

Chips looked up when he heard the words, and there he saw the Devil with saucer eyes that squinted. And whenever he winked his eyes, showers of blue sparks came out, and his eyelashes made a clattering like flints and steels striking lights. And hanging over one of his arms by the handle was an iron pot, and under that arm was a bushel of tenpenny nails, and under his other arm was half a ton of copper, and sitting on one of his shoulders was a rat that could speak. So, the Devil said again:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*'ll have Chips!"

So, Chips answered never a word, but went on with his work. "What are you doing, Chips?" said the rat that could speak. "I am putting in new planks where you and your gang have eaten old away," said Chips. "But we'll eat them too," said the rat that could speak; "and we'll let in the water and drown the crew, and we'll eat them too." Chips, being only a shipwright, and not a Man-of-war's man, said, "You are welcome to it." But he couldn't keep his eyes off the half a ton of copper or the bushel of tenpenny nails; for nails and copper are a shipwright's sweethearts, and shipwrights will run away with them whenever they can. So, the Devil said, "I see what you are looking at, Chips. You had better strike the bargain. You know the terms. Your father before you was well acquainted with them, and so were your grandfather and great-grandfather before him." Says Chips, "I like the copper, and I like the nails, and I don't mind the pot, but I don't like the rat." Says the Devil, fiercely, "You can't have the metal without him — and *he's* a curiosity. I'm going." Chips, afraid of losing the half a ton of copper and the bushel of nails, then said, "Give us hold!" So, he got the copper and the nails and the pot and the rat that could speak, and the Devil vanished. Chips sold the copper, and he sold the nails, and he would have sold the pot; but whenever he offered it for sale, the rat was in it, and the dealers dropped it, and would have nothing to say to the bargain. So, Chips resolved

to kill the rat, and, being at work in the Yard one day with a great kettle of hot pitch on one side of him and the iron pot with the rat in it on the other, he turned the scalding pitch into the pot, and filled it full. Then, he kept his eye upon it till it cooled and hardened, and then he let it stand for twenty days, and then he heated the pitch again and turned it back into the kettle, and then he sank the pot in water for twenty days more, and then he got the smelters to put it in the furnace for twenty days more, and then they gave it him out, red hot, and looking like red-hot glass instead of iron — yet there was the rat in it, just the same as ever! And it said with a jeer:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*'ll have Chips!"

Now, as the rat leaped out of the pot when it had spoken, and made off, Chips began to hope that it wouldn't keep its word. But, a terrible thing happened next day. For, when dinner-time came, and the Dock-bell rang to strike work, he put his rule into the long pocket at the side of his trousers, and there he found a rat — not that rat, but another rat. And in his hat, he found another; and in his pocket-handkerchief, another. And from that time he found himself so frightfully intimate with all the rats in the Yard, that they climbed up his legs when he was at work, and sat on his tools while he used them. And they could all speak to one another, and he understood what they said. And they got into his lodging, and into his bed, and into his teapot, and into his beer, and into his boots. And he was going to be married to a corn-chandler's daughter; and when he gave her a workbox he had himself made for her, a rat jumped out of it; and when he put his arm round her waist, a rat clung about her; so the marriage was broken off, though the banns were already twice put up — which the parish clerk well remembers, for, as he handed the book to the clergyman for the second time of asking, a large fat rat ran over the leaf.

You may believe that all this was very terrible to Chips; but even all this was not the worst. He knew besides, what the rats were doing, wherever they were. So, sometimes he would cry aloud, when he was at his club at night, "Oh! Keep the rats out of the convicts' burying-ground! Don't let them do that!" Or, "There's one of them at the cheese down-stairs!" Or, "There's two of them smelling at the baby in the garret!" Or, other things of that sort. At last, he was voted mad, and lost his work in the Yard, and could get no other work. But, King George wanted men, so before very long he got pressed for a sailor. And so he was taken off in a boat one evening to his ship, lying at Spithead, ready to sail. And so the first thing he made out in her as he got near her, was the figure-head of the old Seventy-four,

where he had seen the Devil. She was called the Argonaut, and they rowed right under the bowsprit where the figure-head of the Argonaut, with a sheepskin in his hand and a blue gown on, was looking out to sea; and sitting staring on his forehead was the rat who could speak, and his exact words were these: "Chips ahoy! Old boy! We've pretty well eaten them too, and we'll drown the crew, and will eat them too!"

The ship was bound for the Indies; and if you don't know where that is, you ought to, and angels will never love you. The ship set sail that very night, and she sailed, and sailed, and sailed. Chips's feelings were dreadful. Nothing ever equalled his terrors. No wonder. At last, one day he asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. Chips went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Your Honour, unless your Honour, without a moment's loss of time, makes sail for the nearest shore, this is a doomed ship, and her name is the Coffin!" "Young man, your words are a madman's words." "Your Honour, no; they are nibbling us away." "They?" "Your Honour, them dreadful rats. Dust and hollowness where solid oak ought to be! Rats nibbling a grave for every man on board! Oh! Does your Honour love your Lady and your pretty children?" "Yes, my man, to be sure." "Then, for God's sake, make for the nearest shore, for at this present moment the rats are all stopping in their work, and are all looking straight towards you with bare teeth, and are all saying to one another that you shall never, never, never, never, see your Lady and your children more." "My poor fellow, you are a case for the doctor. Sentry, take this man!"

So, he was bled and he was blistered, and he was this and that, for six whole days and nights. So, then he again asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. He went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Now, Admiral, you must die! You took no warning; you must die! The rats are never wrong in their calculations, and they make out that they'll be through, at twelve to-night. So, you must die! — With me and all the rest!" And so at twelve o'clock there was a great leak reported in the ship, and a torrent of water rushed in and nothing could stop it, and they all went down, every living soul. And what the rats — being water-rats — left of Chips, at last floated to shore, and sitting on him was an immense overgrown rat, laughing, that dived when the corpse touched the beach and never came up. And there was a deal of seaweed on the remains. And if you get thirteen bits of seaweed, and dry them and burn them in the fire, they will go off like in these thirteen words as plain as plain can be:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*'ve got Chips!"

Every first-rate fantasy writer must be capable of adjusting his mind so that it works along the lines of the peculiar logic dictated by his story; but occasionally (and with great rejoicing) you find a man whose mind needs no adjustment, who automatically thinks, with cogency and clarity, in terms of the impossible — a Saki, a Gilbert, a Collier. Or, we're delighted to say, a Nelson. Your letters expressed your delight with Alan Nelson's absurd Narapoia *in a recent F&SF; and you're certainly familiar with his more serious* Professor Pfaff's Last Recital *from its numerous reprintings elsewhere. Now meet a grimmer Nelson in this convincing and terrible development of a classic fantasy theme — the hand with a life of its own.*

Cattivo

by ALAN NELSON

THEY told me that at Marsello's there was a man named Dubini with live hands. So I went there and found him sitting alone in the far corner, leaning on a table with oilcloth roses and staring at a glass of black ale.

"They tell me your hands are alive," I said, sitting opposite him and ordering whisky.

His face was large and blank and putty-colored. A simple face. All the strength was in his shoulders and arms. His hands hung below the table.

"Your hands," I repeated. "People say . . ."

And now I am going to tell you what seemed to happen:

From the edge of the table, I thought I saw a revolting tarantula-like insect of monstrous size and thick tentacles scrabble up on to the oilcloth and start waddling across the table toward me. It hesitated halfway. A thick bulb of a head peered at me from the crotch of two tentacles. It lumbered forward again, edged up to my glass of whisky. The ugly bulb-like head explored the rim of the glass. Then with irritation it kicked the glass off onto the floor and scampered back across the table and disappeared off the edge.

It was only Dubini's hand, of course. His fingers were as thick as sausages and supple as snakes and he could make them into almost anything he wanted. It was like watching a puppet — you look at it long enough and soon you begin to see it breathe.

Dubini laughed. A thin childish laugh. Then he held up his left hand.

"It is Cattivo," he said, looking at the hand with pride. "He is the evil one. He does bad things."

Then the dancer appeared. She ran out onto the oilcloth with flashing legs and started waltzing to the rhythm of the radio music. She pirouetted. She glided and swayed and kicked. She performed intricate steps and tremendous leaps. I found myself staring at her and falling into her rhythm. She was very graceful. The music ended.

Dubini held up his right hand.

"And this is Angelina. She is the good one. She and Cattivo are enemies. They do not like each other."

Can you imagine such a fool? Naming his hands?

Dubini sighed, stretched them both out side by side on the table, examining the powerful double-jointed fingers with interest.

"Did you ever see two hands so much alike and yet so different?" he asked.

It was a clever performance. No props. No make-up. Nothing but hands. Clever. Very clever. But I had not come halfway across the city to see a man play with his fingers. I laid a ten dollar bill on the table.

"How would you like to work for me?" I asked.

Dubini's simple face clouded.

"No," he said. "I know who you are. You are evil — like Cattivo."

"Cattivo and I could become friends." It embarrassed me to call the hand by a name. And yet, if that is what its name *was*, why not?

I laid another ten on top of the first. Dubini finished his ale, licked his lips, and eyed the money.

From the edge of the table, Cattivo scrabbled onto the oilcloth once more and quickly ran the length of the table. He sniffed at the money. Nervously he prodded it once like it was something good to eat but which might strike back. Then slowly he began to wad it up into his belly like an octopus absorbing its prey.

Then Angelina appeared. She ran to Cattivo and danced around him angrily. She jumped on top of him. She jumped off him, and stood in front accusingly. Cattivo paused in his dinner. Angelina advanced on him again. She kicked. She scratched. She did everything to get him to disgorge the half digested wad. Cattivo finally let it drop, backed off, and waddled toward the table edge. Angelina followed.

Dubini shrugged at me.

"You see? Angelina will not allow it. She knows you." That simple fool Dubini! I really believe he thought they *were* alive!

"It is better than working in a brush factory," I told him. "You could

have money. Easy money. A nice little room. With a spring mattress and mahogany table."

Dubini's face grew sad. I thought he was going to cry. I continued:

"All the ale you could drink. Days in the sun. A blue suit with a pin stripe."

"Cattivo is not *really* bad," he protested. "He only pretends to be."

"It is too bad Angelina will not allow him to do as he wants."

He didn't answer; just sat there in the chair, frowning with indecision, his hands in his lap. I picked up the money and left. I was in no hurry.

Every evening for four evenings I returned. Every evening we played our little game. It was a long way to come and the air in the bar was very bad, but Dubini had such strong useful hands. Useful to me.

When I arrived on the fifth night they were playing checkers — Cattivo and Angelina. Angelina danced about the board, gently kicking the checkers into place. Cattivo squatted across from her.

"They play frequently?" I asked.

"Frequently," Dubini answered without looking at me.

"Who wins?"

"Angelina. Always. She is the smart one."

Well, we would see just how smart. I piled five bills neatly on the edge of the table. They played a while longer. It was obvious Angelina was trying to keep Cattivo's interest on the game. Between moves she jumped and pirouetted. Anything to keep him distracted from the money. I added one more bill. Then still another. Suddenly the board overturned and the checkers scattered in all directions. Quickly Cattivo ran to the money and snatched it up. Hungrily. Then he ran off. Angelina just stood there.

Well, I taught him many things. He was a simple soul — Dubini — but he was a good pupil; he had such clever fingers. I taught him how to rest his hands on the counter at second-rate jewelry stores and come away with rings and trinkets. I taught him how to board a crowded street car and get off three blocks later with a wallet or woman's purse. I taught him how to wrap his loot up neatly in a little jewel box so that it looked like a box of cigars. I taught him to bring it all to *my* apartment.

And I got him his pin-stripe suit and his case of black ale and his apartment with the mahogany table. I even gave him money. But he wasn't happy.

"Look what you've done to me!" he'd wail after placing the oak box on my desk. He'd stretch the long fingers out and gaze at them with a frightened look on his face. "You've made a thief of Cattivo! And Angelina! She won't dance any more! You and your smooth tongue!" Then he'd wad his fingers into fists and beat his temples.

"But you are becoming a man of means," I'd tell him. Then I would place five bills on the edge of the table. As if I'd pressed a button, Cattivo appeared and crawled over to them. He seemed to have grown larger. Uglier. More insolent. He would strut in front of the bills. Lunge at them. Retreat. Like a cat playing with a mouse. I didn't like to look at Dubini's face at these times.

"He was not *really* evil before!" he'd groan. "Now look at him! A thief! All on account of your tongue. Some day I silence it! Forever!"

"You will not do that because Cattivo and I are friends. He would not let you harm me."

"Then Angelina will!"

"Cattivo would allow *no one* to harm me."

Dubini's moral struggles bored me. Any conflict does whose outcome I know. But I tolerated them. I even humored them during the weeks that followed when Dubini came to me, writhing with guilt, and bringing me the little box filled with watches and wallets.

In three months I was ready.

You think my hours of instruction went for the sake of a few gold-plated baubles worth maybe $25 apiece? You think I endured Dubini's threats and remorse for the pleasure of stripping old ladies' purses of car tokens and five dollar bills? You underestimate me.

I had an enemy. Congor. It is hard to determine whether he was my enemy because I wanted the ring; or whether I wanted the ring because he was my enemy. Does it matter?

What mattered was the ring. The emerald ring. Why did I want this ring? Certainly not because I like to wear jewelry. Certainly not because the stone possessed any strange hypnotic fascination. Nor because I liked the color green. I wanted it simply because I knew where I could sell it. Quickly. For $35,000. That's the reason. You call that greedy? With $35,000 in my pocket, you can call it any name you want.

When I told Dubini that in order to get the emerald it was necessary for Congor to die, he refused to have any part of it. Naturally. He didn't get excited; just sat there and said no. And Angelina came out and danced a bit. She was awkward. Stiff. As though she had forgotten how. I did not press the matter.

The following week when Dubini returned with his jewel box of trinkets I outlined the plan to him in detail. He jumped from the chair and shouted:

"No! No! I told you *no!*"

I waited for him to calm.

I outlined the plan once more.

"No!" he screamed in a rage.

It was then I told him about the jail. He didn't like that at all. First he stared in disbelief at me; then in horror at his left hand as though it didn't belong to him at all.

"You can't send *me* to jail," he shouted. "It is *you* that should be there."

"Cattivo has been very bad," I said. "You would remain there a long time."

From an inner pocket I removed a stack of bills. There were twenty-five ten dollar greenbacks. They were new and crisp and made a crinkly sound as I stacked them on the desk edge. I looked up. Dubini leaned across the desk with a revolver pointed at me. Angelina's legs curled about the trigger.

"Your slick tongue!" he snarled. "It's made Cattivo a thief. Next a murderer. I will silence it forever." He aimed the gun at my heart.

I laughed at him.

"You cannot harm me!" I told him. "Not while Cattivo and I are friends. We understand each other. He won't allow it."

The gun came closer, wavering. I riffled the edges of the bills, waiting for Cattivo. I smiled up at Dubini's drawn face, then back to the table top. Cattivo was there now. How glad I was to see my friend! My very dear friend, Cattivo! How was it possible such a simple clod as Dubini could possess such a wonderful hand? Cattivo was stalking about the blotter. Dubini looked at Cattivo with a blank, unbelieving face. When the gun dropped to the table, Cattivo hovered over it. As though he had killed it. Then he moved toward the money. . . .

It took three more days to perfect the details. Everything had to be just right. And then on *the* night, I waited at Dubini's apartment — the one with the mahogany table and pin-stripe suit hanging in the closet. I wanted no trail leading to *my* house. Not on the night Congor died.

It was difficult just waiting. I had scheduled Dubini's moves minute by minute, and when nine o'clock came and I knew he would be wrapping the ring up in the jewel box, my heart began to pound. I gave him thirty-five minutes to get home and when he didn't arrive I had to force myself into the chair to keep from throwing open the window and looking down the street for him.

I waited. A half hour. Then another. I moved from chair to chair, digging my nails into the chair arms. I waited. At the end of the second hour, I had no cigarettes left. And still I waited, peeling many paper matches into many small strips.

And then finally he came, lunging through the door with a sick look on his face. He slumped into the chair. His eyes were feverish and never left my face.

"The emerald?" I asked.

He tossed the jewel box wrapped in brown paper toward me. He watched me strangely as I snatched it up and tugged at the knotted string. I looked at him again.

"And Congor?"

"Dead."

I returned to the string. But there was something about Dubini I didn't like. The sick look. The way he kept his left hand in his pocket. The way his left arm hugged his side. The way he kept staring at me.

"You all right?" I asked.

"I'm all right," he said dully. "But Cattivo. He . . . he strangled a man tonight."

I threw the string on the floor and folded back the brown paper. Something made me look up.

Dubini had risen and was moving toward me. I knew now why his left arm had been hugging his ribs: there had been a short gleaming hatchet concealed there. It was concealed no longer. It was raised in his right hand — by Angelina who no longer looked like a dancer.

He moved closer.

"Put it down, Dubini," I said quietly. "You know you can't injure me." I wasn't afraid. Now the emerald was in my hands I was even calm.

But why did he keep Cattivo hidden in his coat pocket? Why was his face so white?

He inched forward.

"Put it down!" I commanded. "Cattivo will not let you!" I stared at the coat pocket waiting for him to appear. My fingers trembled on the hinged lid of the box — I wanted to see the emerald so badly. But I did not dare look down. My eyes kept moving from the side coat pocket to the axe and back again. Would Cattivo *never* appear!

"Maybe you'd like to be sure I actually brought the emerald." Dubini nodded to the box in my hands.

"Yes, the emerald. . . ." I was uneasy now. But I must not appear uneasy. I lifted the lid.

The emerald was in the box, all right. But when I saw it I was afraid. For the first time in my life I was really afraid. For Cattivo was wearing it. . . .

With horror I glanced at the side coat pocket; now I understood why it was so flat. A crimson edge of the tourniquet was just visible. Once more I stared down at the motionless fingers of Cattivo.

"Cattivo cannot help you any longer," Dubini cried, coming closer.

"You? You did this. . . ." Sweat prickled my forehead. I found myself trembling all over.

"With this." Dubini raised the hatchet a trifle.

"But . . . But why?" That fool Dubini! That crazy fool!

"Because he would not leave me alone." His voice quivered. "Never will it bother me again. It is what happens to all evil things that will not leave me alone!"

He stared at me. I took a step back, looking for something sharp. Something heavy. Dubini followed.

"You have your emerald. You also have your friend." He nodded to the box. "But not for long. . . ."

I continued searching for a weapon, frantically. Then I found one. I had been holding it in my hand all the time.

Quickly I fished him out of the box. Cattivo — my friend, my dearly departed friend — might still save me. But I must act decisively. Boldly. Speak aloud — as though I believed my words. Holding Cattivo high, I took two steps toward Dubini. I pointed a finger at Dubini — one of his own.

"You fool!" I screamed. "*You* are the evil one! *You* and not Cattivo! *You* are the guilty one! You see? He is accusing *you*!"

I advanced slowly. I watched. Dubini's mouth slackened. His eyes fixed upon his own finger and could not let go. His chest heaved. I lifted Cattivo even higher — over my head. I took another step. Dubini backed slightly, his eyes still fixed on the pointing finger, his face so very white.

Then the spell broke. With a sob he drew back his arm and threw with all his force. But not at me. I heard the clatter of the broken glass window behind me as the weapon sailed over my head. Dubini's face was ugly with hate. He shrieked a single curse as he turned toward the door. I listened to his lumbering steps growing fainter down the outside stairs.

Quickly I snatched at the ring. But it would not move from the cold, rigid finger. The swollen knuckle held it fast. I worked at it — carefully, precisely, turning it gently, trying to ease it over the knuckle. It would not move. I cursed softly.

From below I thought I heard noises. I laid Cattivo on the desk and hurried to the door. Listened. No sound. But I must leave. Now! They would be back in a minute — Dubini and whomever he brought with him: neighbors, a doctor, the police. They *must* not find me here. I must be home in bed. Then it would be my story — a sane, believable story — against whatever wild tale the hysterical Dubini might relate.

I rushed back to the ring. In growing panic I yanked. I tugged. It would not move.

The jewel box! I'd take the whole thing with me in the box. I looked on the floor. . . . But what if I was stopped on the way out? Searched? A ring I could conceal. But not a hand. I'd have to leave without the ring.

Once more I started for the door. Once more I hesitated. Have you ever tried walking away from $35,000? I couldn't do it.

Sweat blinded me as I returned to the desk for the third time. I felt my self-control slipping away. I would not be done out of $35,000 by a dead hand! No lump of cold clay was going to cheat me of a fortune. I reached out for it — then drew my arm back as a new thought suddenly struck me.

Could it be possible . . . ?

I hovered over the hand suspiciously. Gingerly I prodded it. I studied it closely from different angles. Cattivo had once performed a similar routine on an oilcloth table. I continued to stare.

And then I knew.

Oh, it wasn't that Cattivo moved. Not a muscle twitched. You had to look very, very close. You had to have very sharp eyes. But I could tell. Just by the way he squatted there. Silent. Motionless. Fingers curled in greed. Holding tight to the ring he liked and wouldn't give up. Waiting. Waiting for me to go away so he could have it himself. Oh, Cattivo was clever all right. Much cleverer than that fool Dubini who thought he'd finished him.

"Give me the ring!" I shouted. Not a muscle quivered. Cattivo sat very quiet. Waiting. The emerald blinked up at me like a monstrous eye.

"Give it to me!" I screamed again. "Isn't there any end to your greed? Must you ruin me with it too?"

Motionless he waited. A terrible anger boiled within me. From a distance I heard muffled voices. I seized Cattivo — viciously, furiously. . . .

They broke in on us — Cattivo and me — a few minutes later. And just in time. They had to pry his fingers from around my throat.

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