

# **Science Fiction**

## **Readings & Assignments: Week Six**

# Science Fiction

## Quiz: Week Six

1. In “The Roots of Science Fiction,” what is the two-word term that Robert Scholes uses to describe science fiction?
2. “In The Golden Age of Science Fiction Is Twelve,” where does David Hartwell say that Harlan Ellison first discovered science fiction?
3. “Problems of Creativeness”: What did Birdie do when taking his first test?
4. “Passengers”: What are passengers?
5. “How the Whip Came Back”: What did the American delegate say to Mrs. Bushman to convince her of the plan?
6. “Eurema’s Dam”: What did the first machine that Albert built do?
7. “Inconstant Moon”: What did Stan and Leslie go out to get initially?
8. “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”: What is the name of the non-habit-forming drug that citizens can take?
9. “A Thing of Beauty”: What did Mr. Ito finally end up buying?
10. “The Screwfly Solution”: What species of fly was Alan trying to find the weak link in?

# Science Fiction

## Journal: Week Six

1. “Problems of Creativeness”: Birdie is not allowed to reproduce unless he is able to prove his intelligence or contribute to society. Is this level of government control necessary for the greater good of society? Or do you feel that reproduction is a right and not a privilege?
2. “Passengers”: Here, people can be possessed by alien spirits that humans call “Passengers” at any moment for any length of time and when released have no memory of the event, which keeps society in a constant state of turmoil. Should they therefore avoid companionship or close relationships? Why or why not? What else could this story be about?
3. “How the Whip Came Back”: In this story an ever-increasing prison population begins to burden society. To combat this issue, Miss Buchanan and the Pope discuss the possibility of re-introducing slavery. Discuss the practicality and morality of enslaving prisoners.
4. “Eurema’s Dam”: In this story, socially awkward geniuses are depicted as everyone’s fool. However, because they are forced to adapt, they create machines to better society. Albert is very intelligent and innovative but is perceived as dumb. Why? Can you discuss contemporary parallels?
5. “Inconstant Moon”: This story revolves around a couple and their adventure when they realize this could be their last day to live. If this happened to you, would you gather supplies and try to survive, try to check off that bucket list, or something else?
6. “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”: Tests the idea that pain of the few is necessary for the betterment of the many. Do you think it is acceptable to sacrifice the happiness of one for the happiness of many? Or is a single person’s happiness just as valuable as many people’s happiness?
7. “A Thing of Beauty”: Here, famous pieces of architecture are made available for purchase. How are private organizations, today, using their purchasing power to buy things which were publically owned by citizens, the local, state, and federal taxpayers? What is Ito trying to tell Mr. Harris with the gold brick in the conclusion?
8. “The Screwfly Solution”: In this story, an alien parasite causes men to convert sexual impulses into violent acts, resulting in mass femicide. The men justify these actions through the ideology of the Sons of Adam, but did institutional misogyny already exist? Explain. Or pick another way in which institutional misogyny has been—or is currently—historically justified and discuss it.

*Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction* examines the roots, history, development, current status, and future directions of the field through the contributions of well-respected science-fiction writers, teachers, and critics. The articles speculate on the definition of science fiction, science fiction as serious literature, the most talented science-fiction writers, and where the genre is headed.

Contributors include Brian Aldiss, Kathryn Granner, Samuel R. Delany, David C. Hartwell, Ursula K. Le Guin, Brian Malzberg, Darko Suvin, Michael Swanwick, and many other outstanding authors. Examining all genres and subgenres of science fiction writing, this book provides differing viewpoints of science fiction, making an ideal basis for dynamic classroom discussions.

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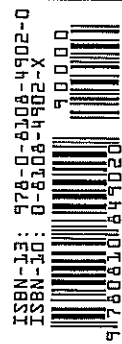
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# Speculations on Speculation

*Theories of Science Fiction*

Edited by  
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## The Roots of Science Fiction

*Robert Scholes*

All fiction—every book even, fiction or not—takes us out of the world we normally inhabit. To enter a book is to live in another place. Out of the nature of this otherness and its relation to our life experiences come all our theories of interpretation and all our criteria of value. Previously, I argued the case for a particular relation between fiction and experience, expressed in temporal terms as “future-fiction.” The polemical nature of my situation as advocate for a popular but critically deprecated form of fiction led me inevitably to make a case which is in certain respects too narrow for its subject. The laws of rhetoric force all radical advocates to choose between betraying their causes by an excess of conciliation or of hostility, and I understand those laws only too well. In compensation, I wish to be more tentative and speculative now, in describing the parameters of a fictional form that is both old and new, rooted in the past but distinctly modern, oriented to the future but not bounded by it.

It is customary in our empirically based Anglo-Saxon criticism to distinguish between two great schools of fiction according to the relationship between the fictional worlds they present and the world of human experience. Thus we have, since the eighteenth century, spoken of novels and romances, of realism and fantasy, and we have found the distinction useful enough at times, even though, because of our empirical

bias, we have tended to value realism more highly than romance. It will be appropriate, then, at least as a beginning, to see the tradition that leads to modern science fiction as a special case of romance, for this tradition always insists upon a radical discontinuity between its world and the world of ordinary human experience. In its simplest and most ancient form this discontinuity is objectified as another world, a different place—Heaven, Hell, Eden, Fairyland, Utopia, the Moon, Atlantis, Lilliput. This radical dislocation between the world of romance and the world of experience has been exploited in different ways. One way, the most obvious, has been to suspend the laws of nature in order to give more power to the laws of narrative, which are themselves projections of the human psyche in the form of enacted wishes and fears. These pure enactments are at the root of all narrative structures, and are themselves the defining characteristics of all narrative forms, whether found in “realistic” or “fantastic” matrices. In the sublimative narratives of pure romance they are merely more obvious than elsewhere because less disguised by other interests and qualities. But there is another way to exploit the radical discontinuity between the world of romance and that of experience, and this way emphasizes cognition. The difference can be used to get more vigorous purchase on certain aspects of that very reality which has been set aside in order to generate a romantic cosmos. When romance returns deliberately to confront reality it produces the various forms of didactic romance or fabulation that we usually call allegory, satire, fable, parable, and so on—to indicate our recognition that reality is being addressed indirectly through a patently fictional device.

Fabulation, then, is fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way. Traditionally, it has been a favorite vehicle for religious thinkers, precisely because religions have insisted that there is more to the world than meets the eye, that the common-sense view of reality—“realism”—is incomplete and therefore false. Science, of course, has been telling us much the same thing for several hundred years. The world we see and hear and feel—“reality” itself—is a fiction of our senses, and dependent on their focal ability, as the simplest microscope will easily demonstrate. Thus it is not surprising that what we call “science” fiction should employ the same narrative vehicle as the religious fictions of our past. In a sense, they are fel-

low travelers. But there are also great differences between these kinds of fiction, which must be investigated.

There are two varieties of fabulation or didactic romance, which corresponds roughly to the distinction between romances of religion and romances of science. We may call these two forms “dogmatic” and “speculative” fabulation, respectively. This distinction is neither complete nor invidious. It represents a tendency rather than delineating a type, but most didactic romances are clearly dominated by one tendency or the other. Even within the Christian tradition, we can recognize Dante’s *Commedia* as a dogmatic fabulation and More’s *Utopia* as a speculative one. Dante’s work is greater by most accepted standards of comparison. But it works out of a closed, anti-speculative system of belief. A *Utopia* admits in its title that it is nowhere. A *Commedia*, human or divine, on the other hand, must fill the known cosmos. As opposed to dogmatic narrative, speculative fabulation is a creature of humanism, associated from its origins with attitudes and values that have shaped the growth of science itself. Swift detested the science of his time, which drove him to dogmatic posturing in Book III of *Gulliver*. But surely without the microscope and telescope Books I and II could not have been as they are. And Book IV is a speculation beyond all dogma. Since Dante, dogmatic fabulation has declined, though it always lurks in the worlds of satire. Since More, speculative fabulation has grown and developed. Born of humanism it has been fostered by science. But it has never flourished as it does at present—for reasons that it is now our business to explore.

As Claudio Guillen has taught us, literature may be usefully seen as aspiring toward system—as a collection of entities constantly rearranging themselves in search of an equilibrium never achieved. In the course of this process certain generic forms crystallize and persist or fade from existence, and among these forms some come into dominance at particular moments of history, only to yield their dominant position with the passage of time. In every age, as the Russian Formalists were fond of observing, certain generic forms are regarded as “canonical”—the accepted forms for the production of serious literature—and other forms are considered outside the pale, being either too esoteric (“covert literature”) or too humble (“popular literature”). But with the passage of time canonical forms become rigid, heavy, mannered, and lose



their vital power. Even the dominant forms eventually give up their privileged position and move toward the edges of the literary canon. The reasons for this may be seen in purely formal terms—as the exhaustion of the expressive resources of the genre. Or they may be seen in broader cultural terms—as responses to social or conceptual developments outside the literary system itself. To my way of thinking, since fiction is a cognitive art it cannot be considered adequately in purely formal terms. Formal changes, to be understood, must be seen in the light of other changes in the human situation.

I propose, then, to examine a small—but important—part of the system of literature: the interaction of certain forms of fictional representation over a period of a few centuries, ending with the present time. And I further propose to see this interaction as an aspect of a larger movement of mind. My treatment will be extremely brief; the model I generate will be very sketchy. But in matters of this kind true persuasion is not to be achieved by the amassing of argumentative detail. I ask you simply to consider the fictional universe from the perspective of this model and then see if your old perspective can ever be comfortably assumed again. I will begin by raising a question seldom considered—perhaps because it is too large to admit of an answer. The question is, simply, “What makes a form dominant?” Admitting the phenomenon of dominance, why, for instance, should drama dominate the western countries of Europe for a hundred years from the late sixteenth through the seventeenth century? In general terms it has been argued, and I think convincingly, that drama was ideally suited to an era in which monolithic feudalism had lost its power over individual existence but bourgeois democracy had not yet come into being as a regulator of the power vacuum left behind by the crumbling feudal system. An age of princes (in the Machiavellian sense) made heroic drama conceivable as neither an earlier age of kings nor a later age of ministers ever could. The dramatic disposition of the age, with its incredible reversals of fortune, as seen, for instance, in the life of an Essex or a Raleigh, enabled a specific literary form to realize its maximum potential.

In the case of the novel, we find a form that came into dominance for parallel cultural reasons. The rise of the middle class did not “cause” the rise of the novel, but new concepts of the human situation enabled

both of these phenomena to take place. In particular, a new grasp of history, as a process with its own dynamics resulting from the interaction of social and economic forces, generated a new concept of man as a creature struggling against these impersonal entities. And this struggle could hardly be represented on the stage in the same way as man’s struggle with fortune or his own ambitious desires. It is not that plays dealing with socio-economic man could not be written. Writers from Steele to Ibsen struggled manfully to generate a rich social canvas on stage. But what the novel achieved easily and naturally, the drama could do only with great pains and clumsy inadequacy. The novel naturally came to be the literary form in which an age conscious of history as a shaping force could express itself most satisfyingly. The novel was the diachronic form of a diachronic age. In each volume of the great nineteenth-century realists we find the history of an individual against a background of the forces shaping his moment of history. And in the sequences of novels produced by writers like Balzac and Zola we can see whole eras taking human shape, becoming protagonists struggling in the grip of the large designs of History itself. For this, of course, was the age in which History acquired a capital H, becoming a substitute for God, with a Grand Purpose in Mind, which His angel the Time-Spirit sought to effect.

Let us narrow the focus, now, to the narrative forms of representation only, for dominance can be considered not only among the great generic kinds, and even among whole arts, but also within the boundaries of a single kind of literature. In the novel itself we can trace the rise and fall from dominance of sentimental fiction in the eighteenth century, of a more sociological and historical fiction in the nineteenth, and finally a more inward and psychological fiction in the early twentieth century. All of these forms have gone under the name of realism, and as an evolving tradition this realism preserved a dominant place among the forms of fiction from the time of Defoe and Marivaux until well into the present century. Other fictional forms have coexisted with the dominant realism—such as the gothic, which first emerged in the late eighteenth century to fill an emotive gap opened in the system by the move of social and sentimental forms away from situations of heroic intensity. And after Swift a speculative fabulation with satirical tendencies was kept alive by writers like Johnson in *Rasselas* and Carlyle

in *Sartor Resartus*. But it is fair to say that this tradition lacked vigor and continuity—lacked generic certainty—until new conceptual developments put fictional speculation on an entirely different footing, changing the fabric of man's vision in ways that inevitably led to changes in his fiction.

This revolution in man's conception of himself was begun by Darwin's theory of evolution. It was continued by Einstein's theory of relativity. And it has been extended by developments in the study of human systems of perception, organization, and communication that range from the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein and the gestalt psychology of Kohler to the structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss and the cybernetics of Wiener. This century of cosmic rearrangement, crudely indicated here by this list of names and concepts, has led to new ways of understanding human time and space-time, as well as to a new sense of the relationship between human systems and the larger systems of the cosmos. In its broadest sense, this revolution, has replaced Historical Man with Structural Man.

Let us explore this great mental shift a bit. Darwin, and those who have continued his work, put human history in a frame of reference much grander than that of Historical Man. This stretched man's entire sense of time into a new shape and finally altered his familiar position in the cosmos. Early reactions to the evolutionary theory often tried to accommodate Darwinian evolutionary theory within the familiar dimensions of historical time, suggesting that some Superman lurked just around the evolutionary comet—in much the same way that people once believed the apocalypse to be scheduled for the very near future. But by expanding our sense of time the Darwinians reduced history to a moment and man to a bit player in a great unfinished narrative. The possibility of further evolution, with species more advanced than ourselves coming into being on this earth, displaced man from the final point of traditional cosmic teleology as effectively as Galileo had displaced man's planet from the center of the spatial cosmos. Thus Darwinian time, which has been continually extended with the discovery of new geological and archeological evidence, has had a profound effect on man's sense of himself and his possibilities. Historical time, then, is only a tiny fragment of human time, which is again a tiny fragment of geologic time, which is itself only a bit of cosmic time.

The theories of relativity have worked in a similar fashion to shake man out of his humanist perspective. By demonstrating that space and time are in a more intimate perspectival relation than we had known, Einstein too called history into question. When we think in terms of the cosmic distances and absolute velocities of the Einsteinian universe, not only do we lose our grasp on fundamental human concepts like "simultaneity" and "identity," we lose also our confidence in that common-sense apprehension of the world which replaced man's mythic consciousness as the novel replaced the epic in the hierarchy of narrative forms. And on the smaller scale of purely human studies in anthropology, psychology, and linguistics, ideas no less earthshaking have been developed. What does it do to our time sense to think of stone-age men living their timeless lives in the year 1974 in some remote jungle on our earth? And what does it do to our confidence in human progress when we see that though they lack all the things that our science and technology have given us, they live in a harmony with the cosmos that shames us, and know instinctively, it seems, lessons that we are painfully relearning by having to face the consequences of our ecological wantonness? At every turn we run into patterns of shaping forces that have gone unobserved by our instrumental approach to the world. We learn that men's visual perceptions are governed by mental leaps to whole configurations or "gestalts" rather than by patient accumulation of phenomenal details. We learn that we acquire language in similar quantum jumps of grammatical competence. And we know that our acquired languages in turn govern and shape our perceptions of this world. Finally, we have begun to perceive that our social systems and our linguistic systems share certain similarities of pattern, that even our most intimate forms of behavior are ordered by behavioral configurations beyond our perception and controlled through biological feedback systems that may be altered by the input of various drugs, hormones, and other biochemical messages.

In short, we are now so aware of the way that our lives are part of a patterned universe that we are free to speculate as never before. Where anything may be true—sometimes, someplace—there can be no heresy. And where the patterns of the cosmos itself guide our thoughts so powerfully, so beautifully, we have nothing to fear but our own lack of courage. There are fields of force around us that even our finest instruments of thought

and perception are only beginning to detect. The job of fiction is to play in these fields. And in the past few decades fiction has begun to do just this, to dream new dreams, confident that there is no gate of ivory, only a gate of horn, and that all dreams are true. It is fiction—verbal narrative—that must take the lead in such dreaming, because even the new representational media that have been spawned in this age cannot begin to match the speculative agility and imaginative freedom of words. The camera can capture only what is found in front of it or made for it, but language is as swift as thought itself and can reach beyond what is, or seems, to what may or may not be, with the speed of a synopsis. Until the mind can speak in its own tongueless images, the word will be its fleetest and most delicate instrument of communication. It is not strange, then, that the modern revolution in human thought should find expression in a transformation of a form of fictional speculation that has been available for centuries. It took only a quantum jump in fictional evolution for speculative fabulation to become structural, and the mutation took place sometime early in this century.

What, then, is structural fabulation? I shall begin to explore specific instances of this modern fictional form in my next lecture, but here it will be appropriate to sketch the parameters of the form in a general way, as a preparation for that discussion. Considered generically, structural fabulation is simply a new mutation in the tradition of speculative fiction. It is the tradition of More, Bacon, and Swift, as modified by new input from the physical and human sciences. Considered as an aspect of the whole system of contemporary fiction, it has grown in proportion to the decline of other fictional forms. For instance, to the extent that the dominant realistic novel has abandoned the pleasures of narrative movement for the cares of psychological and social analysis, a gap in the system has developed which a number of lesser forms have sought to fill. All the forms of adventure fiction, from western, to detective, to spy, to costume—have come into being in response to the movement of “serious” fiction away from plot and the pleasures of fictional sublimation. Because many human beings experience a psychological need for narration—whether cultural or biological in origin—the literary system must include works which answer to that need. But when the dominant canonical form fails to satisfy such a basic drive, the system becomes unbalanced. The result is that readers resort se-

cretly and guiltily to lesser forms for that narrative fix they cannot do without. And many feel nearly as guilty about it as we could hope to make any habitual offender against our official mores. The spectacle (reported by George Moore, as I recollect) of W. B. Yeats explaining with great embarrassment why he happened to be reading a detective story can stand as a paradigm of the guilt felt by intellectuals whose emotional needs drive them to lesser literary forms for pleasure. We do call people “addicts” if they seem inordinately fond of detective stories, or even of science fiction. But the metaphor of addiction is a dangerously misleading one. For this is emotional food, not a mind-bending narcotic, that we are considering.

Thus the vacuum left by the movement of “serious” fiction away from storytelling has been filled by “popular” forms with few pretensions to any virtues beyond those of narrative excitement. But the very emptiness of these forms, as they are usually managed, has left another gap, for forms which supply readers’ needs for narration without starving their needs for intellection. The “letdown” experienced after finishing many detective stories or adventure tales comes from a sense of time wasted—time in which we have deliberately suspended not merely our sense of disbelief but also far too many of our normal cognitive processes. And this letdown grows to a genuine and appropriate feeling of guilt to the extent that we do become addicted and indulge in the reading of such stories beyond our normal need for diversion and sublimation. Even food should not be taken in abnormal quantities, especially if much of it is empty calories. We require a fiction that satisfies our cognitive and sublimative needs together, just as we want food that tastes good and provides some nourishment. We need suspense with intellectual consequences, in which questions are raised as well as solved, and in which our minds are expanded even while focused on the complications of a fictional plot.

These may be described as our general requirements—needs which have existed as long as man has been sufficiently civilized to respond to a form that combines sublimation and cognition. But we also have to consider here the special requirements of our own age—our need for fictions which provide a sublimation relevant to the specific conditions of being in which we find ourselves. The most satisfying fictional response to these needs takes the form of what may be called structural

fabulation. In works of structural fabulation the tradition of speculative fiction is modified by an awareness of the nature of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures, and the insights of the past century of science are accepted as fictional points of departure. Yet structural fabulation is neither scientific in its methods nor a substitute for actual science. It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science. Its favorite themes involve the impact of developments or revelations derived from the human or the physical sciences upon the people who must live with those revelations or developments.

In the previous era, historicist views of human culture led to a vision of man's future as guided by some plan beyond human comprehension, perhaps, in its totality, but solicitous of man and amenable to human cooperation. Thus great fictional narratives could be couched in terms of individual men and women seeking to align themselves with or struggle against the social forces through which history was working its will to achieve its idea. But now structuralism dominates our thought, with its view of human existence as a random happening in a world which is orderly in its laws but without plan or purpose. Thus man must learn to live within laws that have given him his being but offer him no purpose and promise him no triumph as a species. Man must make his own values, fitting his hopes and fears to a universe which has allowed him a place in its systematic working, but which cares only for the system itself and not for him. Man must create his future himself. History will not do it for him. And the steps he has already taken to modify the biosphere can be seen as limiting the future options of the human race. It is in this atmosphere that structural fabulation draws its breath, responding to these conditions of being, in the form of extrapolative narrative. The extrapolations may be bold and philosophical or cautious and sociological, but they must depart from what we know and consider what we have due cause to hope and fear. Like all speculative fabulations they will take their origin in some projected dislocation of our known existence, but their projections will be based on a contemporary apprehension of the biosphere as an ecosystem and the universe as a cosmosystem.

Obviously, not all works that are called "science fiction" meet this kind of standard. Many writers are so deficient in their understanding

of the cosmic structure itself that they have no sense of the difference between purposeful discontinuity and a magical relaxation of the cosmic structure. And many others seek to present traditional romance as if it had some structural or speculative significance. But, if a writer fails to understand the discontinuity on which his work is based as a discontinuity from a contemporary view of what is true or natural, he is powerless to make that discontinuity function structurally for us. Thus any cognitive thrust in his work will be accidental and intermittent. And if a writer transports men to Mars merely to tell a cowboy story, he produces not structural fabulation but star dreck—harmless, perhaps, but an abuse of that economy of means that governs mature esthetic satisfaction. Or if he allows such a variety of magical events that his fictional world seems deficient in its own natural laws, his work will fail structurally and cognitively, too, though it may retain some sublimative force. But in the most admirable of structural fabulations, a radical discontinuity between the fictional world and our own provides both the means of narrative suspense and of speculation. In the perfect structural fabulation, idea and story are so wedded as to afford us simultaneously the greatest pleasures that fiction provides: sublimation and cognition.

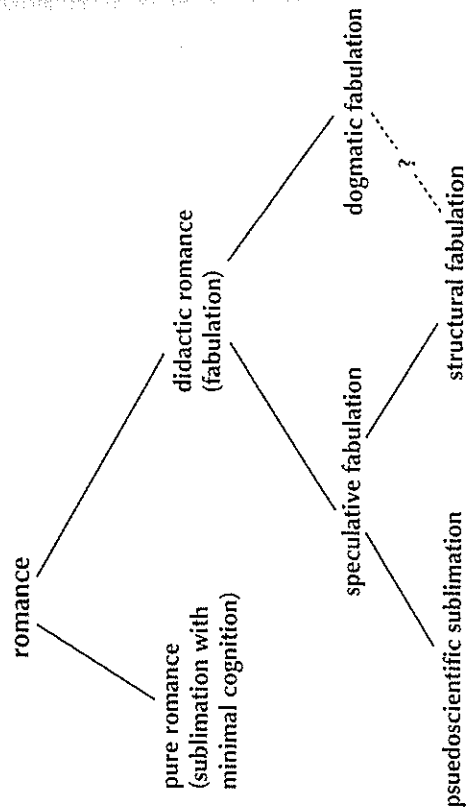
### Afterword

Some tying together of things may be in order, here, though I would hesitate to seek a "conclusion" to a study necessarily so open ended as this one. First, a review of terminology may be useful. And second, some discussion of problems raised by this terminology itself and the concepts it attempts to signify. I have at times accepted the traditional Anglo-Saxon distinction between romance and realism, and have at times rejected it. This needs some clarification. The distinction itself was made by an empirically oriented race in an age of developing empiricism. Thus, it must have some value, if only a historical one. The distinction was originally and has been traditionally invidious, with realism being the privileged form. This suited a materialistic and positivistic age, and the science of that age seemed to lend support to a realistic notion of the cosmos. But science has become increasingly removed from the world of common sense, increasingly imaginative and "unrealistic" in its search for the true structure of the cosmos, and this

has ultimately strengthened the potential of didactic romance or fabulation as a form of cognitive fiction—thus striking at the roots of the very notion of “realism.” That modern body of fictional works which we loosely designate “science fiction” either accepts or pretends to accept a cognitive responsibility to imagine what is not yet apparent or existent, and to examine this in some systematic way. The acceptance of this responsibility by a writer capable of measuring up to it leads to what I have called structural fabulation.

Seen in cultural terms, then, structural fabulation is a kind of narrative which is genuinely fictional but strongly-influenced by modern science. It is specifically romantic in that it breaks, consciously and deliberately, with what we know or accept to be the case. But it develops its arbitrary parameters with a rigor and consistency that imitates in its fictional way the rigor of scientific method. Seen in purely formal terms, structural fabulation is a development of a tradition of speculative fabulation that has a long history in Western culture. This tradition itself is rooted in the genre of didactic romance, and can be seen as a dialectical antithesis of dogmatic fabulation. This whole history can be seen in the diagram.

Perhaps the most crucial question or objection raised in the debates initiated by these lectures has involved the status of structural fabulation with respect to dogma. To some critics I have seemed to invoke a



new orthodoxy and to preach a new dogma called structuralism, thus establishing for structural fabulation a kind of religious sanction based on science. There is a certain amount of truth in this charge, and I have acknowledged this by the dotted line with the question mark in the diagram. Can speculation be evaluated for truth-value and still be speculative? Can we ask for rigor without insisting on dogma? Can we expect the imagination to be regulated by something unimaginative without stifling creativity itself? Great questions—with social as well as literary implications. And I have no easy answers for them. I hope and believe these questions can be answered in the affirmative. Partly because our science itself must be speculative in order to continue. And even more because fabulation is not a science. It does not ask “What is?” It asks “What if?” And by doing so it forces us to think about what is and what may be. The surge of pleasure we get when we begin to read any new work of science fiction comes through the lift off from our land of Is into the land of May Be. But the final joy of structural fabulation, as Ursula Le Guin shows us so beautifully in her new book, *The Dispossessed*, comes not from the departure, nor even from the trip itself, but from the return. As an aging dogmatist once said:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.



have alluded to, but not undertaken, and for this reason, among others, Hartwell's section is useful here. Hartwell addresses the connections between the fans of science fiction, the publishers, and the writers, as well as their interactions with the various media forms in which the genre appears. He asks us to examine our own science fiction expertise and come to a better understanding of the way each of us subjectively creates our own referent for the term.

Samuel Delany's theories of the reading conventions of science fiction are among the most important tools for any modern student of the genre. Both his selections in this anthology address the issue to some degree, but "Some Presumptuous Approaches to Science Fiction" takes a number of interesting approaches to the study. In this essay, Delany's conversational style is crucial, for its characteristic digressiveness allows him to build an almost hyper-textual analysis not only of the differences between readers of science fiction and those of "mundane" literature, but of the entire linguistic and cultural context which causes people to ask the "baroque unanswerables that plague an SF writer's life."

James Gunn's essay, "Touchstones," is also almost hypertextual, although in a very different way from Delany's. While "Some Presumptuous Approaches" explores the ways that science fiction readers and writers approach the text from both sides, "Touchstones" comes entirely from the direction of the reader, seeking the source of pleasure that science fiction provides, what Sam Moskowitz and Damon Knight (and Hartwell after them) termed "wonder." Gunn shows how the joy of science fiction comes from the individual moments in which the created world of the text stands out sharply in our mind against the mundane world in which we live, coincidentally, the very moments that Delany shows to be incomprehensible to readers unversed in the genre's particular idiom. Unlike Hartwell's book, this essay is directed at longtime readers of science fiction, and newer readers are encouraged to revisit it at a later date.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN



# The Golden Age of Science Fiction Is Twelve

David Hartwell

Immersed in science fiction. Bathing in it, drowning in it; for the adolescent who leans this way it can be better than sex. More accessible, more compelling. And the outsider can only wonder, What's the matter with him? What is he into, what's the attraction, why is it so intense?

Grown men and women, sixty years old, twenty-five years old, sit around and talk about "the golden age of science fiction," remembering when every story in every magazine was a masterpiece of daring, original thought. Some say the golden age was circa 1928; some say 1939; some favor 1953, or 1970. The arguments rage till the small of the morning, and nothing is ever resolved.

Because the real golden age of science fiction is twelve.

This is a book about the science-fiction field and that body of contemporary writing known as science fiction, or SF. Over the years there have been a number of books on the writing the field has produced, its artwork and illustration, histories, memoirs, even a book devoted to the amateur publications of the fans. But no general attempt to describe both the literature and the specific subculture out of which the literature flows has ever been presented to the world at large. Donald A. Wollheim, in *The Universe Makers*, and Lester del Rey, in *The World of Science Fiction 1926-1976*, come closer than any others and you might try them, though both are dated.

For one thing, the world at large, especially all who do not read and do not wish to read SF, couldn't have cared less. "Everyone" knows that science fiction is not serious literature and that since the word "science" occurs in the name you wouldn't be interested or able to understand if you did try to read it—so why try?

Despite the fact that twelve-year-olds who read it understand it perfectly, and that millions of readers over the years have found it great fun (it is supposed to be fun), the majority of educated readers in the English-speaking world spurn SF without reading it or knowing anymore about it than what "everyone" knows. Well, this book is not an attempt to convert anyone (although later on I do recommend some SF for people who have not read in the field before). What I do intend is to offer a book that informs you about an amusing and significant phenomenon that reaches into every home and family in the country and influences the way we all see the world around us.

This is an outsider's guidebook and road map through the world of science fiction, pointing out the historical monuments, backyard follies, highways, and back streets of the SF community—a tour of main events and sideshows, and a running commentary on why the SF world is the way it is. I hope it will be particularly useful for the casually curious, the neophyte reader, and of course the person who knows people in SF and wonders why they are that way. Is your child threatened by this strange stuff, or by the companionship of lovers of science fiction? Does SF rot the mind and ruin the character? Just how wild and crazy are those SF people and what do they really do, where do they come from, why do they stay in the SF world? This tour, if successful, should take you not only through the nooks and crannies of the SF world, but into some unsuspected aspects of the everyday world as well.

Written science fiction, like cooking, mathematics, or rock 'n' roll, is a whole bunch of things that some people can understand or do and some not. We all know people who love cooking, math, or rock (perhaps all three), and others who can hardly boil water, add two plus two, or distinguish music from noise. Your present tour guide stopped trying to convert people to instant appreciation of science fiction years ago when he finally understood that most new readers have to go through a process of SF education and familiarization before they can love it. Just because someone can read does not mean that he neces-

sarily can read SF, just as the ability to write Arabic numerals and add and subtract doesn't mean you necessarily can or want to perform long division.

So I have set out to describe science fiction without assuming that you have read any or would even know what to do if you were faced with the text of an SF story. I will discuss as clearly as possible all the barriers you might have against understanding SF and all the barriers that SF has erected to keep from being understood by outsiders—like the world of the circus and the circus, the SF world only wants insiders behind the scenes. And more, the SF world does not want an audience (such as the "mass audience") who won't take the time to learn the rules and conventions of the game.

SF is special within its community, which has built complex fortifications and groundworks surrounding its treasures; and for most people, the rewards of reading SF or being an SF-type person are worthless or pernicious or even a bit scary. To one who is comfortable and has adjusted to the compromises of our culture, being or becoming something of an outsider has no advantages.

Wait for a moment though, before you make up your mind that you don't really have to become acquainted with what is going on in this other reality. The underground world of SF interpenetrates with your daily world so thoroughly in so many ways that finding out what those relatively few people who live the SF world are like may let you understand a lot more about how your own world operates. Besides, as Thomas Pynchon so amusingly posited in his eccentric novella, *The Crying of Lot 49*, if you begin to look beneath the surface of everyday life, almost everyone is involved in some sort of underground or underground activity. This kind of activity is so much a part of what everyone does (without ever seeing the big picture) that if you pull back and look at it all, the real world seems very different. That is, in one very real sense, what this book is about.

When you spot a science fiction devotee on a bus, in a library, or on lunch break in the cafeteria, she or he is identifiable only by a display of some kind: She is reading a flashy paperback that says "Science Fiction" on the cover; he is wearing a "Star Trek Lives!" T-shirt over his bathing trunks at the beach; she is quietly asking the bookseller if there is a copy of *Women of Wonder* in the store; he is arguing loudly with a

friend that *Star Wars* is much better than *Close Encounters* (which is not truly SF) while munching a sandwich and sipping Coke.

Otherwise, there are no reliable outward signs, unless you happen to stop over at a hotel or motel anywhere in the United States where one of the at least weekly science fiction conventions is being held—after one look, you switch accommodations, because the whole place is filled with people in costumes, bacchanalian howls, teenagers in capes with swords, normally dressed adults wearing garish name tags that identify them as Gork or Kalinga Joe or Conan or David G. Hartwell or Beardsley Trunium. Your immediate perception of this social situation is either “Feh!” or “Let me back off and view these weirdos from a safe distance, say, at the end of tomorrow’s newscast!”

The science-fiction person, you see, always lives in the SF world, but under cover of normality most of the time—except while attending a gathering of like minds such as the SF conventions given in understated flashes above. The science-fiction reader may be your attorney, your dentist, your children’s schoolteacher, the film projectionist at your local theater, your wife or husband or child, happily living in two worlds at once, the real world of science fiction and the dubious reality of everyday life.

If you have lived with or worked with a science-fiction person you will have noticed how intensely she seems to be involved in science fiction, how much she reads it, watches it, recommends to those around her that they try it, because it is her special kind of fun. And if you examine her behavior in everyday life, you may well notice an impatience with the way things are, an ironic, sometimes sarcastic attitude toward everyday things (particularly imposed tasks of a wearisome nature), a desire for change. This complex of attitudes is closely congruent to the complex of attitudes found in the normal human teenager.

In fact, a majority of all science-fiction readers are under the age of twenty-one. The question is not how they got that way but why it should surprise anyone that they are. Teenagers are not fully integrated into the tedium of adult life and tend to view such everyday life with healthy suspicion. Quite logical. The science-fiction reader preserves this attitude as long in life as his association with science fiction continues, more often these days into full maturity. It makes him act strangely sometimes. But mostly he feeds his head with more science fiction and continues to get the job done, whatever it is.

Nearly a thousand readers of *Locus*, the newspaper of the science-fiction field (a semiprofessional monthly published by California fan Charles N. Brown), responded a couple of years ago to a survey, which indicated that the median age of *Locus* readers is twenty-two but that the initial involvement in science fiction of almost every respondent happened between the ages of ten and fourteen. This lends a great deal of substance to the tradition in the science-fiction world that active involvement starts early and lasts at least until the early twenties. Science fiction is an addiction (or habit) so reasonable in any teenager who can read (and many who can’t very well, in this age of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*) that it is superficially a curiosity that it doesn’t always last. But it doesn’t, and most of us do end up well-adjusted, more or less, resigned to life as it is known to be beyond 1984.

The science-fiction drug is available everywhere to kids, in superhero comics, on TV, in the movies, in books and magazines. It is impossible to avoid exposure, to avoid the least hint of excitement at Marvel Comics superheroes and *Star Trek* reruns and *Star Wars*, impossible not to become habituated even before kindergarten to the language, clichés, basic concepts of science fiction. Children’s culture in the contemporary U.S. is a supersaturated SF environment. By the time a kid can read comic books and attend a movie unaccompanied by an adult, his mind is a fertile environment for the harder stuff. Even the cardboard monsters of TV reruns feed the excitement. The science-fiction habit is established early.

In some cases, accompanied by the hosannas of proud parents, a kid focuses his excitement on the science part and goes on to construct winning exhibits in school science fairs, obtain scholarships, and support proud parents in their old age with his honorable gains as a career corporate technologist. Most often, a kid freezes at the gosh-wow TV/comics/movies stage and carries an infatuation with fantastic and absurd adventure into later life. But sometimes, usually by the age of twelve, a kid progresses to reading science fiction in paperback, in magazines, book club editions—wherever he can find it, because written SF offers more concentrated excitement. This is the beginning of addiction; he buys, borrows, even steals all the science fiction he can get his hands on and reads omnivorously for months or even years, sometimes until the end of high school years, sometimes a book or more a day. But



the classic symptom is intense immersion in written SF for at least six months around age twelve.

Publishers adore this phenomenon, akin to the addiction to mystery and detective fiction that flourished in the decades prior to the mid-1960s. One major publisher of SF had been heard to remark that his books are supported by twelve-year-olds of all ages. Every professional writer, editor, and publisher in the science-fiction field knows that the structure of science-fiction publishing is founded on the large teenage audience, which guarantees a minimally acceptable market for almost every book or magazine published—it requires extreme ignorance and professional incompetence, determination akin to constipating oneself by an act of will, to be unsuccessful when selling science fiction to the omnivorous teenage audience.

What happens to science-fiction omnivores? Well, obviously, most of them discover the compulsive excitement of the opposite (or same) sex, and stop reading much of anything for pleasure, most of them permanently. However, once you have been an omnivore, your life has been permanently altered, if only in minor ways. Years later, you may experience an irrational desire to watch *Battlestar Galactica* on TV, even though you know it's dumb stuff. You tend not to forbid your kids or kid your friends if they want a little token of science fiction from time to time. A news report on solar energy possibilities in the near future doesn't seem like total balderdash, just, perhaps, a bit optimistic in the short run. A front-page newspaper article on the U.S. space probe to Jupiter doesn't read like Sanskrit or form associations with guff like spirit-rapping. Surprise! Your life has been altered and you didn't even notice.

Discovering sex (or competitive sports or evangelical Christianity or demon rum) is not always a total diversion, though. You can, of course, read with one hand. And there are further activities open to the fan in the omnivorous stage: Hundreds, often thousands, of fans gather at conventions every weekend throughout Western civilization (the World Science Fiction Convention of 1979 was in Brighton, England; the 1985 Worldcon will be in Australia) to act strangely together. To a teenage omnivore, such a weekend of license to be maladjusted in the company of and in harmony with the covertly alienated of all ages can be golden. No one much notices how you dress or act as long as you do not injure yourself or others.

Swords and capes (ah! Romance!) are particularly favored among the fat and pimply population, male and female. One wag counted seventy-two Princess Leias at the World SF Convention of 1978 in Phoenix! *Star Trek* costumes still abound in the mid-1980s. Or you can hang out in your everyday slacks and jacket or jeans and T-shirt with like minds. And right there among the crowd are all the big-name professionals, from Asimov to Zelazny, by tradition and in fact approachable for conversation and frivolity. Just being there makes you a potentially permanent member of the SF family.

It's a clique, you see. Just like the ones you are cut out of in the local junior high or whatever, only now you are automatically a member until you do something beyond the pale. You might be so shy as to be tongue-tied for your first ten conventions; still, if you walk into a room party you can sit on the floor and listen to Isaac Asimov sing Gilbert and Sullivan—and join in if you like. And go home and tell your friends that you spent time with Asimov last weekend. Just so you don't feel lonely in the arid stretches between conventions you can afford to attend, there are approximately 4,000 fan magazines produced by individuals and written by themselves and/or other fans to keep you in communication with the SF world day to day.

As you might have gathered, the great family aspect of SF is, in the long run, only for the most ardent—maybe 10,000 active fans in the U.S. at any time. Most often, fans mature socially enough to adjust to their home environment and just read the stuff off and on, attending, perhaps, a World Convention every year or two to keep contact with a few friends. This is the chronic stage of addiction, following the active omnivore phase. And *this* stage can last for life.

If you grew up in isolation from movies, TV, and comics and have never read a work of science fiction (or if you tried one once, and found it dumb, incomprehensible or both), you might ask, at this point, why the fuss? The answer is that even if you have kept yourself in pristine separation from the material, you are interacting daily with people who have progressed to at least a stage-one involvement in science fiction and who have altered your environment because of it.

Science fiction as written and published during the last twenty years is so diverse in every aspect that no reader except at the height of the omnivorous stage can expect to be attracted to all of it. And more science

fiction has been published in the 1970s and 1980s than ever before: twenty or thirty new paperbacks every month, several magazines, even a number of hardbounds—too much even for the most dedicated omnivore to read. The quality of the individual book or story varies from advanced literary craftsmanship to hack trash, from precise and intellectual visions of the future to ignorant swordsmen hacking their way through to beautiful damsels (less than one-quarter clad) across an absurd environment. There are enough varieties of science fiction and fantasy to confuse anybody.

If you look at a wide spectrum of covers in your local SF paperback section, you begin to notice a lot of categories of science fiction. How do the advanced omnivores and chronics select what to read? By this very process. As in any other kind of book, you can tell the importance of the author of a science fiction book by the size of the author's name on the cover. Another reliable gauge to importance, or at least popularity, is how many copies of an individual title by an author the store has and how many of the author's titles are on the shelf.

But popularity and importance aside, how do you identify whether this is the kind of SF you are looking for? By the complex symbology of the cover. Not always, of course, because the paperback industry (never mind hardcover publishers, who tend to be indeterminate) is guilty of lack of confidence, or ignorance, leading to mispackaging fairly regularly—but in the huge majority of cases, science fiction is quite precisely marketed and packaged.

The images on science fiction covers range from futuristic mechanical devices (which connote a story heavily into SF ideas, or perhaps just science fictional clichés) to covers featuring humans against a futuristic setting, with or without machines (which connote adventure SF) to covers with humans carrying swords or other anachronistic weapons (which connote fantasy or fantastic adventure against a cardboard or clichéd SF background) to hypermuscled males carrying big swords and adorned with clinging hyperzafsig females, both scant-clad against a threateningly monstrous background (which connote sword-&-sorcery or heroic-fantasy adventures, with perhaps some SF elements) to covers representing several varieties of pure fantasy (from rich romantic flowery quests to freaky supernatural horror). Every SF omnivore has sampled all the varieties of SF, from Lovecraftian super-

natural horror to the swashbuckling adventure tales of Poul Anderson to the technical and literary conundrums of Samuel R. Delany. Chronic readers usually center their interests in one limited area and read everything packaged to their taste.

The net effect is that there is a rather large number of SF audiences with focused interests, all of which interlock and overlap to form the inchoate SF reading audience. Most individual books reach their targeted audience and prosper from overlap into other related audiences. Occasionally, an SF work satisfies several of these overlapping audiences at once (for example, *Dune* by Frank Herbert) and reaches what the publishing industry calls the mass audience (truly humongous numbers of readers)—and then extends for a decade or more in sales into the audience that consists of normal people who decide to try the stuff and have heard three or four big names (like Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, which paid most of the light bills in the period 1961 to 1984 for its publisher and allows Mr. and Mrs. Heinlein to visit opera festivals in Europe on whim).

The situation is exceedingly complex. Some say that the whole SF audience (the market) is composed of teenagers, for all practical purposes, and turns over almost completely every three to five years. This theory, the omnivore theory, eliminates all chronic readers from consideration. It has the virtue of practicality from the publishing point of view, though it means you can recycle individual books endlessly and can publish practically anything, no matter how crippled, and reach a basic, dependable, supposedly profitable (though small) audience.

The combined, or omnivore/chronic theory, which is the unarticulated basis behind most SF publishing, would sound something like a classier version of the omnivore theory—keep the good books in print for omnivores who pass into the chronic state and for the non-SF reader who wishes to sample the field through books or authors he has heard of, and scatter the rest of your publishing program among the three spectra (fantasy/science fantasy/science fiction) in hopes of discovering chronic sellers—works that everyone who reads SF must sooner or later hear about and read. At its best, this philosophy (if we may so dignify a marketing strategy) leads to the publishing of soaring works of the speculative imagination—but mostly it leads to carefully marketed crap. But even that is okay. Both omnivores and chronics are

patient and have long memories; they are willing to wade through a fair amount of swamp to find islands of rationality and the real thing—wonderful SF.

It's a kind of quixotic quest, you see, admirable in its way. The SF reader is willing to keep trying, reading through rather large numbers of half-cooked ideas, clichés, and cardboard characters and settings in search of the truly original and exciting and good. How many of us outside the SF field could be so determined? The SF reader has fun along the way that is not often visible to outsiders.

The SF reader sneers at fake SF, artificially produced film tie-in novels and stories, most SF films, most TV SF. This he calls sci-fi (or "skiffy")—junk no right-thinking omnivore or chronic should read, watch, or support. But with beatific inconsistency he will pursue his own quest—through endless hours of *Space: 1999*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Monk and Mindy*, *My Favorite Martian*, and some truly horrendous parbacks and magazines—in search of something as good as he remembers finding during his initial omnivore excitement. This quest through the rubble is not without its rewards.

Consider: The aforementioned conventions are broken down into discrete areas of programming and many conventions have a general or even quite limited theme. Aside from the World Science Fiction Convention, which is a general gathering of the clans, there is a World Fantasy Convention, numerous Star Trek conventions, a pulp-magazine convention (Pulpcon), Ambercon (devoted to the Amber novels of Roger Zelazny), an SF film convention, numerous "relaxicons" (at which there is no programming—chronics and omnivores gather to party with like minds for a weekend), and literally dozens of localized conventions, ranging from hundreds to thousands of attendees: Pghlange (Pittsburgh); Boskone (Boston); Lunacon (New York City); Westercon (West Coast); V-con (Vancouver); Kubla Khan Klave (Nashville); Philcon (Philadelphia); Balticon (Baltimore); Disclave (Washington, D.C.). The list is extensive, each with a guest of honor, films, panels, speeches, a roomful of booksellers, an art show, and many special events (often including a masquerade), and parties (pretty dependably twenty-four hours a day). Aside from general saturnalia, these conventions build audiences for name authors (guests of honor and other featured guests) and reflect audience fascination with discrete kinds of SF.

The World Science Fiction Convention, a six-day bash, has nearly five twenty-four-hour days of programming. Iguanacon (Worldcon '78), named after a favorite fan animal (Tennessee Williams, *Night of the Iguana*: "Women are fine, Sheep are divine, but the Iguana is el numero uno."), had attendees who came specifically for the Edgar Rice Burroughs Dum-Dum (famed great ape party); feminists and those interested in women writers came for the several Women in Science Fiction events; film fans came for the twenty-four-hour-a-day film programs (a bargain); Georgette Heyer fans came for the Regency Dress Tea (yes, at a science fiction convention); some came to see and hear their favorite big-name authors—heroic fantasy readers to see Fritz Leiber and L. Sprague de Camp, Darkover fans to see Marion Zimmer Bradley, Amber fans to see Roger Zelazny; L-5 fans came to proselytize for space industrial colonies.

Of the almost five thousand attendees, a variety of audiences were represented, often recognizable from the individual package. Aside from the general run of jeaned teenagers and suited publishing types, the *Star Trek* fans often wore costumes from the show (or at least Spock ears), the regency fans dressed regency, the heroic fantasy fans sported swords and capes, the medieval fans and Society for Creative Anachronism members dressed in a variety of medieval costumes, the women rapped in the special "womenspace" room (the year before there was a "happy gays are here again" party), Princess Leia costumes abounded, and David Gerrold, well-known *Star Trek* author, handed out David Gerrold fan club cards and buttons. These people filled more than four hotels. Each reader discovers his or her special fun at conventions. Sponsoring similar events, Constellation, the 1984 Worldcon in Baltimore, had about six thousand attendees.

Omnivores tend to form preferences early on in their reading spree, and chronics are usually fixed for life. This is a quick rundown of the main possibilities an omnivore might fix on: classic fantasy (ghost stories, legends, tales); supernatural horror (two categories: classic—from Le Fanu, Blackwood, and Machen to Stephen King and Rosemary's Baby; and Lovecraftian, the school of H. P. Lovecraft and his followers); Tolkienesque fantasy (in the manner of *Lord of the Rings*—carefully constructed fantasy worlds as the setting for a heroic quest); heroic fantasy (barely repressed sex fantasy in which a muscular, sword-bearing male

beats monsters, magicians, racial inferiors, and effete snobs by brute force, then services every willing woman in sight—and they are all willing); Burroughsian science fantasy (adventure on another planet or thinly rationalized SF setting in which fantasy and anachronism—sword fighting among the stars—are essentials); space opera (the Western in space); hard science fiction (the SF idea is the center of attention, usually involving chemistry or physics or astronomy); soft science fiction (two alternate types: one in which the character is more important than the SF idea; the other focusing on any science other than physics or chemistry); experimental science fiction (stylistically, that is); fine writing science fiction (may include a work from any of the above categories, hard though that may be to accept); single author (reads all published stories of H. P. Lovecraft, his nonfiction, the five volumes of collected letters, the volumes of posthumous collaborations, all pastiches, and so on. Archetypal fan behavior). You can begin to see the enormous variety available.

The most significant development of the last decade for the future of SF is that by about the mid-1960s, enough “fine writing” had been done in the SF field so that a chronic might fixate on that aspect of SF without running out of reading matter before running out of patience. There has always been excellent writing in the SF field, but now there is an actual audience looking for it—before the 1960s, literate prose was fine when it was found, but was generally irrelevant to the SF omnivores and most chronics.

The increased volume of the fine-writing category has had its effect on outsiders' evaluation of the medium. In the Seventies the academic appraisal of SF moved from “It's trash” to “It's interesting trash” to “Some of it is important and worth attention, even study.” Oh, sigh. Already there are dissertations written by Ph.D.s on science fiction. But SF is alive and still growing, not literary history, and most of the Ph.D. work is a waste of good dissertation paper because many advanced omnivores have read more SF than almost all of the Ph.D.s, and, given the categories presented above, no one has yet been able to define SF well enough so that non-SF readers can figure it out. SF readers know it when they see it, what is real and what is sci-fi (which has come to denote, among the chronics, what is probably admissible as SF but is extremely bad—able to fool some of the people some of the time).

SF people know, for instance, that Superman is real SF. In his book *Seekers of Tomorrow*, Sam Moskowitz tells the story of the teenage fans associated with the creation of the character and its early publication in Action Comics in 1938—and if the first generation of science-fiction people had produced nothing more than Superman and Buck Rogers, the effect of science fiction on American culture still would have been profound. Because to the science-fiction devotee, SF is naturally carried over into every area of everyday life. She tends to solve problems at work with science-fictional solutions or by using the creative methodology learned through reading SF. He tends to see visions of alternative futures that can be influenced by right actions in the present. She tends to be good at extrapolating trends, and especially good at puncturing the inflated predictions of others by pointing out complexities and alternatives. He tends to be optimistic about ecology through technology, has no fear of machines, and tends to be a loner. The science-fiction person never agrees with anybody else in conversation just to be friendly. Ideas are too important to be betrayed. Science-fiction people, among their own kind, are almost always contentious—after all, a favorite activity is to point to an unlabeled work that may be considered SF and argue about whether or not it is, really, SF.

For the science-fiction person, SF is what holds the world together. It is important, exciting, and gives the science-fiction person a basis for feeling superior to the rest of humanity, those who don't know. The early fans, the generation of the Thirties, many of whom (Forrest J. Ackerman, Bradbury, Asimov, Frederik Pohl, Donald A. Wollheim, and a host of others) are among the major writers, publishers, and editors today, evolved a theory to justify the superiority of science-fiction people, then a persecuted, mainly teenage, minority. At the Third Annual World Science Fiction Convention in Denver in 1941, Robert A. Heinlein—then, as now, the most respected author in the field—gave a speech intended to define the science-fiction field for its readers and authors. The theme of the speech was change, and it examined the concept and problem of “future shock” nearly thirty years before Alvin Toffler wrote his famous book.

“I think,” said Heinlein, “that science fiction, even the corniest of it, even the most outlandish of it, no matter how badly it's written, has a distinct therapeutic value because *all* of it has as its primary postulate

that the world does change." He then went on to tell the fascinated audience, in this speech that is legendary even after four decades, that he believed them to be way above average in intelligence and sensitivity—a special group:

Science fiction fans differ from most of the rest of the race by thinking in terms of racial magnitude—not even centuries but thousands of years. . . . Most human beings, and those who laugh at us for reading science fiction, time-bind, make their plans, make their predictions, only within the limits of their immediate personal affairs. . . . In fact, most people, as compared with science fiction fans, have no conception whatsoever of the fact that the culture they live in does change; that it can change.

We can only imagine the impact of such a coherent articulation of alienation and superiority on a bunch of mostly late-adolescent men at the end of the Great Depression. *Though the inferior mass of humanity laughs at us, we are the ones who know, we are the wave of the future, the next evolutionary step in the human race.* If only our pimples would clear up, we could get on with changing the world. Fans are Slans! (*Slan*, a novel by A. E. Van Vogt serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction*, about a superior race living in secret among normal humans, was an instant classic in 1941.)

Adults ignore lousy technique when they are being deceived (in literature or elsewhere) if the deception supports the view of reality they have chosen to embrace. Adults stand to lose their sense of security if they don't cling to everyday reality. Teenagers (and the other groups of people described above) have no sense of security as a rule. They are searching for something—change, a future—and unconvincing, mundane reality does not satisfy. Oddly, then, the assumptions made in a science-fiction story, which are transparently assumptions and which the young social-reject of any age can share as an intellectual exercise, are more acceptable to him than the everyday assumptions made in a "serious" work of fiction about real (mundane adult) life in which he cannot or does not wish to participate.

Thus the science-fiction novel or story is generally aimed at the person who has not embraced a particular set of assumptions about the way things are—this helps to explain both SF's appeal to the young and its seeming shallowness to most "mature" readers. Science fiction is shal-

low in its presentation of adult human relations (most often the sole concern of most other literature), but it is profound in the opportunities it offers the reader to question his most basic assumptions, even if you have to ignore lousy technique a lot of the time to participate in the illusion. This last is easy for the omnivore and chronic reader—in fact, the minute you overcome the suspension of disbelief problem, admittedly much easier in the early teenage years than in later life, you tend to enter your omnivore stage. Make no mistake—you don't lose your critical ability or literary education when you begin to read science fiction. You just have to learn the trick of putting *all* your preconceptions aside every time you sit down to read. Hah! You were right, this is just another piece of hack work. But the next one, or the story after that may be the real thing, innovative, well written, surprising, exciting.

Throughout the past decade, there has been a growing number of adults who have discovered science fiction as a tool without discovering the thing itself. There are now many new uses for SF in the mundane world: It can be used to combat future shock, to teach religion, political science, physics and astronomy, to promote ecology, to support the U.S. space program, to provide an index to pop cultural attitudes toward science, and to advance academic careers and make profits for publishers, film producers, even toy makers. But the business of science fiction is to provide escape from the mundane world, to get at what is real by denying all of the assumptions that enforce quotidian reality for the duration of the work.

This is reflected in what really goes on at science-fiction conventions. Beneath the surface frivolity, cliquishness, costumery, beneath the libertarian or just plain licentious anarchism of the all-night carousing, beyond the author worship, the serious panel discussions, and the family of hail-fellow-fan-well-met, the true core of being a science-fiction person is that the convention is abnormal and alienated from daily life. Not just separated in time and space—different! There is no parallel more apt than the underground movements of the last two hundred years in Western civilization: the Romantics in England, Baudelaire and his circle in France, the Modernists, the Beats. (Note to literary historians: This would make an interesting study.) The difference is that to an outsider, it just looks like fun and games, since these



people go home after a convention go back to work, school, housewifery, unemployment, mundane reality, or so it seems.

While they are spending time in the science-fiction world, though, things are really different. How different? Let's circle around this for a moment. For instance, you can almost certainly talk to people there who, in normal life, are removed from you by taboos or social barriers. No matter how obnoxious you are, people will talk to you unless you insult them directly, and the chances are excellent that you can find one or more people willing to engage in serious, extended, knowledgeable conversation about some of the things that interest you most whether it is the stock market or macramé, clothing design or conservative politics, science or literature or rock 'n' roll. Science-fiction people tend not to be well rounded but rather multiple specialists; the only thing that holds them and the whole SF world together is science fiction. Actually you spend a minority of your time at a convention talking about science fiction, but the reality of science fiction underlies the whole experience and is its basis. For the duration of the science fiction experience, you agree to set aside the assumptions and preconceptions that rule your ordinary behavior and to live free. A science-fiction convention, like a work of science fiction, is an escape into an alternate possibility that you can test, when it is over, against mundane reality. Even the bad ones provide this context.

Harlan Ellison, writer and science-fiction personality, has spoken of his first encounter with science fiction as a kid in a dentist's office, where he discovered a copy of a science-fiction magazine. On the cover, Captain Future was battling Krag the robot for possession of a scantily clad woman; the picture filled his young mind with awe, wonder, and excitement. His life was changed. He wanted more. The reason science fiction creates such chronic addicts as Harlan Ellison is that once you admit the possibility that reality is not as solid and fixed as it used to seem, you feel the need for repeated doses of science fictional reality.

Of course, sometimes what you discover in the science-fiction field that attracts you is *not* the thing itself but one of its associates. A chronic reader may actually read almost entirely classical fantasy and Lovecraftian supernatural horror, or a writer such as Fritz Leiber may spend a career writing in every variety of fantasy and science fiction, and yet always be "in the field." There is an interesting investigation

to be done someday on why the classical fantasy, a main tradition of Western literature for several millennia, is now part of the science-fiction field. In the latter half of the twentieth century, with certain best-selling exceptions, fantasy is produced by writers of science fiction and fantasy, edited by editors of science fiction, illustrated by SF and fantasy artists, read by omnivore fantasy and SF addicts who support the market. Fantasy is not SF but is part of the phenomenon that confronts us.

Since the 1930s, science fiction has been an umbrella under which any kind of estrangement from mundane reality is welcome (though some works, such as the John Norman "Gor" series and the sadomasochistic sex fantasies in a Burroughsian SF setting are admitted but generally despised and generally believed to sell mostly to an audience outside any other SF audience). To present the broad, general context of the SF field, let us consider in more detail the main areas and relationships as they have evolved over the past several decades.

The general question of fantasy has been dealt with frequently, from Freud's well-known essay on the uncanny through recent structuralist works such as Todorov's *The Fantastic*, and is not central to our concern with science fiction. Several things need to be said, however, about fantasy literature before we move on to varieties of science fiction. Fantasy, through its close association with science fiction since the 1920s in America, has developed a complex interaction with science fiction that has changed much of what is written as fantasy today.

H. P. Lovecraft, the greatest writer of supernatural horror of the century, a literary theoretician, and mentor, through correspondence and personal contact, to Frank Belknap Long, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, Fritz Leiber, Clark Ashton Smith, August Derleth, Donald and Howard Wandrei, and a number of others, was an agnostic, a rationalist, and a believer in science. His work was published both in *Weird Tales*, the great fantasy magazine between the Twenties and the early Fifties, and in *Astounding Stories*, the great science fiction magazine of its day. Almost all his acolytes followed the same pattern of commercial and literary ties to both areas.

In 1939, after the greatest SF editor of modern times, John W. Campbell, took the helm at *Astounding*, he proceeded to found the second great fantasy magazine, *Unknown*, encouraging all his newly discovered

writing talents—Heinlein, Sturgeon, L. Sprague de Camp, L. Ron Hubbard, Anthony Boucher, Alfred Bester, H. L. Gold, Frederic Brown, Eric Frank Russell, as well as Henry Kuttner, Jack Williamson, C. L. Moore, and Fritz Leiber—to create a new kind of fantasy, with modern settings and contemporary atmosphere, as highly rationalized and consistent as the science fiction he wanted them to write for *Asounding*. Through Lovecraft and Campbell a strong link was forged not only commercially but also aesthetically between fantasy and science fiction. Today, and for the last two decades, the most distinguished and consistently brilliant publication in the field has been the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, required reading for all who wish to discover the field at its best and broadest, though it has never been the most popular magazine in the field, always surpassed in circulation by more focused magazines.

After Lovecraft and Campbell, the third towering figure in fantasy so far in the twentieth century is J. R. R. Tolkien, whose *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is both a classic of contemporary literature and an example of the dominant position of the science-fiction field as stated above. Tolkien's works, although literary hardcovers at first, were popularized in paperback through SF publishers and have spawned an entire marketing substructure to support works of world-building fantasy in the Tolkien tradition. More books appear every month featuring the quest of a single heroic figure across a detailed and rationalized fantasy world, accompanied by a group of major and minor fantasy characters and ending in a confrontation between Good and Evil, in which Good always wins.

The fourth towering figure is not one person, but is a posthumous collaboration between the artist Frank Frazetta, formerly a comic illustrator, and the author Robert E. Howard, pulp fantasy adventure hack who committed suicide in 1936 the day his mother died and who created a number of fantastic heroes, the best known of which is Conan the Barbarian. Howard's works had been mostly out of print since his death, except for several small press editions and a few paperbacks, until the early 1960s. Then L. Sprague de Camp obtained the rights from Howard's estate to arrange and anthologize the whole Conan series for the first time in paperback, and to write additions and sequels himself and with others. Through a stroke of genius, comic-strip artist Frazetta was hired to illustrate the paperback covers, which seized the imagina-

tion of the audience enough to sell in the millions of copies, established the Howard name, and made Frazetta wealthy and famous. Howard now has nearly fifty books in print in the third decade following his death, and a sword-swinging barbarian hero brutally adventuring across a fantasy/historic landscape (inside a book with a cover by Frazetta or an imitation) is the principal reading focus of a large number of chronic SF readers. This category, which was formerly called sword-and-sorcery fiction, is now referred to more accurately as heroic fantasy. If Mickey Spillane wrote SF, it would be heroic fantasy. In fact, a hundred years from now SF may have acquired Spillane's works under this rubric.

There are only two areas of fantasy that have not been annexed under the SF umbrella, perhaps because these two areas have never fallen into popular disrepute: Arthurian romances and the occult horror best-seller. There are indications that these two areas may remain separate and independent—both types tend to be written by authors who have no desire to associate themselves and their works with low-class, non-literary, low-paying (until recently) snuff.

The only science in all the areas of fantasy is either strawman science (which cannot cope) or black science (used by the evil sorcerer). Amoral science is a recent addition to some heroic fantasy (especially noticeable in the works of Michael Moorcock), as is the idea of magic as a scientific discipline (a contribution of the Campbell era). And I can generalize without fear of contradiction by saying that except in a tiny minority of cases, technology is associated with evil in fantasy literature. So it is particularly curious that the element of estrangement from everyday reality has come to yoke by itself the two separates, fantasy and science fiction, even though SF was invented to exclude "mere" fantasy. This complex of seeming contradiction will be investigated in more depth shortly. For the moment we will move on to a consideration of the subdivisions of the center of the field, science fiction.

Hugo Gernsback, who invented modern science fiction in April 1926, knew what he meant by "scientifiction" (as he named it) and assumed it would be evident to others: all that work Wells and Verne and Poe wrote ("charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision," as Gernsback says in the editorial in the first issue of the first magazine, *Amazing Stories*). In addition to this confusion,

Gernsback, an eccentric immigrant and technological visionary, was tone deaf to the English language, printing barely literate stories about new inventions and the promise of a wondrous technological future cheek by jowl with H. G. Wells, Poe, Edgar Rice Burroughs (!), and a growing number of professional pulp writers who wanted to break into the new market. The new thing was amorphous, formed and reformed over the decades by major editors and writers, and all the chronic readers, into the diversity that is science fiction today.

It is a source of both amusement and frustration to SF people that public consciousness of science fiction has almost never penetrated beyond the first decade of the field's development. Sure, *Star Wars* is wonderful, but in precisely the same way and at the same level of consciousness and sophistication that SF from the late 1920s and early 1930s was: fast, almost plotless stories of zipping through the ether in spaceships, meeting aliens, using futuristic devices, and fighting the bad guys (and winning).

By now it should be obvious that we are dealing not with a limited thing but with a whole reality. More than an alternate literary form or an alternate lifestyle, science fiction is coequal reality, informing the lives of thousands and affecting the lives of millions, a fact of life more intimate than inflation, whose influence is so all-pervasive that it is traceable daily in every home, through the artifacts and ideas that represent all possible futures and all possible change.

## CHAPTER TWENTY



# Some Presumptuous Approaches to Science Fiction

*Samuel R. Delany*

"Do you think science fiction should be taken seriously as literature?" Over the past handful of years, I've found—what with teaching various SF courses at various universities and giving talks on science fiction to both formal and informal groups—that this question threatens to oust, "Where do SF writers get their ideas?" from the number-one position on the list of baroque unanswerables that plague an SF writer's life.

What makes such questions so difficult is that they presume a set of conditions that any accurate answer could not possibly fulfill. For example, the question, "Where do SF writers get their ideas?" presumes that there is a place, or a number of places, where ideas exist quite apart from writers, and that the writers can go there to obtain them. The question has the same grammatical/logical form as, "Where do restaurant chefs get their streaks?" But there is no answer of the grammatical/logical form, "From the better West Side meat packing plants below 14th Street," that can answer it. And an answer in that form is what the question demands.

If, however, we change the form of the question from, "Where do SF writers get their ideas?" to, "By what process do science-fictional ideas come up in SF writers' minds?" then the answer is fairly simple:

By and large, SF writers get their ideas through having quirky and imaginative responses to the everyday, the ordinary, and the humdrum.



'No . . . I'm not,' Benedict gasped. 'No strength. My hands are too weak.'

Looking up he saw the pistol near his head and he reached and tore it from her.

'One less mouth now!' he shouted and pressed the hot muzzle against Mortimer's chest and pulled the trigger. The muffled shot tore into the man who kicked violently once and died.

'Darling, you're all right?' Maria wailed, kneeling and clutching him to her.

'Yes . . . all right. Weak, but that's from loss of blood, I imagine. The bleeding has stopped now. It's all over. We've won. We'll have the food ration now, and they won't bother us any more and everyone will be satisfied.'

'I'm so glad,' she said, and actually managed to smile through her tears. 'I really didn't want to tell you before, not bother you with all this other trouble going on. But there's going to be . . .' She dropped her eyes.

'What?' he asked incredulously. 'You can't possibly mean . . .'

'But I do.' She patted the rounded mound of her midriff. 'Aren't we lucky?'

All he could do was look up at her, his mouth wide and gaping like some helpless fish cast up on the shore.

## PROBLEMS OF CREATIVENESS

THOMAS M. DISCH

There was a dull ache, a kind of hollowness, in the general area of his liver, the seat of the intelligence according to the *Psychology of Aristotle*—a feeling that there was someone inside his chest blowing up a balloon, or that the balloon was his body. Sometimes he could ignore it, but sometimes he could not ignore it. It was like a swollen gum that he must incessantly probe with his tongue or finger. Perhaps it was filled with pus. It was like being sick, but it was different too. His legs ached from sitting.

Professor Offengeld was telling them about Dante. Dante was born in 1265. 1265, he wrote in his notebook.

He might have felt the same way even if it weren't for Milly's coldness, but that made it worse. Milly was his girl, and they were in love, but for the last three nights she had been putting him off, telling him he should study or some other dumb excuse.

Professor Offengeld made a joke, and the other students in the auditorium laughed. Birdie ostentatiously stretched his legs out into the aisle and yawned.

'The hell that Dante describes is the hell that each of us holds inside his own, most secret soul,' Offengeld said solemnly.

Shit, he thought to himself. It's all a pile of shit. He wrote *Shit* in his notebook, then made the letters look three dimensional and shaded their sides carefully.

Offengeld was telling them about Florence now, and about the Popes and things. 'What is simony?' Offengeld asked.

He was listening, but it didn't make any sense. Actually he wasn't listening. He was trying to draw Milly's face in his notebook, but he couldn't draw very well. Except skulls. He could draw very convincing skulls. Maybe he should have gone to art school. He turned Milly's face into a skull with long blond hair. He felt sick.

He felt sick to his stomach. Maybe it was the Synthamon bar he had had in place of a hot lunch. He didn't eat a balanced diet. That was a mistake. For over two years he had been eating in cafeterias

and sleeping in dorms. Ever since high school graduation in fact. It was a hell of a way to live. He needed a home life, regularity. He needed to get laid. When he married Milly they were going to have twin beds. They'd have a two-room apartment all their own, and one room would just have beds in it. Nothing but two beds. He imagined Milly in her spiffy little hostess uniform, and then he began undressing her in his imagination. He closed his eyes. First he took off her jacket with the Pan-Am monogram over the right breast. Then he popped open the snap at her waist and unzipped the zipper. He slid the skirt down over the smooth Antron slip. The slip was the old-fashioned kind with lace along the hem. Her blouse was the old-fashioned kind with buttons. It was hard to imagine unbuttoning all those buttons. He lost interest.

The carnal were in the first circle, because their sin was least. Francesca de Rimini. Cleopatra. Elizabeth Taylor. The class laughed at Offengeld's little joke. They all knew Elizabeth Taylor from the junior year course in the History of Cinema.

Rimini was a town in Italy.

What the hell was he supposed to care about this kind of crap? Who cares when Dante was born? Maybe he was never born. What difference did it make to *him*, to Birdie Ludd?

None.

Why didn't he come right out and ask Offengeld a question like that? Lay it on the line. Put it to him straight. Cut out the crap.

One good reason was because Offengeld wasn't there. What seemed to be Offengeld was in fact a flux of photons inside a large synthetic crystal. The real flesh-and-blood Offengeld had died two years ago. During his lifetime Offengeld had been considered the world's leading Dantean, which was why the National Educational Council was still using his tapes.

It was ridiculous: Dante, Florence, the Simoniac Popes. This wasn't the goddamn Middle Ages. This was the goddamn 21st century, and he was Birdie Ludd, and he was in love, and he was lonely, and he was unemployed, and there wasn't a thing he could do, not a goddamn thing, or a single place to turn in the whole goddamn stinking country.

The hollow feeling inside his chest swelled, and he tried to think about the buttons on Milly's imaginary blouse and the warm, familiar flesh beneath. He did feel sick. He ripped the sheet with the skull on it out of his notebook, not without a guilty glance at the

sign that hung above the stage of the auditorium: PAPER IS VALUABLE. DON'T WASTE IT. He folded it in half and tore it neatly down the seam. He repeated this process until the pieces were too small to tear any further, then he put them in his shirt pocket.

The girl sitting beside him was giving him a dirty look for wasting paper. Like most homely girls, she was a militant Conservationist, but she kept a good notebook, and Birdie was counting on her to get him through the Finals. One way or another. So he smiled at her. He had a real nice smile. Everybody was always pointing out what a nice smile he had. His only real problem was his nose, which was short.

Professor Offengeld said: 'And now we will have a short comprehension test. Please close your notebooks and put them under your seats.' Then he faded away, and the auditorium lights came on. A taped voice automatically boomed out: *No talking please!* Four old Negro monitors began distributing the little answer sheets to the five hundred students in the auditorium.

The lights dimmed, and the first Multiple Choice appeared on the screen:

1. Dante Alighieri was born in (a) 1300, (b) 1265, (c) 1625, (d) Date unknown.

As far as Birdie was concerned the date was unknown. The dog in the seat beside him was covering up her answers. So, when was Dante born? He'd written the date in his notebook, but he didn't remember now. He looked back at the four choices, but the second question was on the screen already. He scratched a mark in the (c) space and then erased it, feeling an obscure sense of unluckiness in the choice, but finally he checked that space anyhow. When he looked up the fourth question was on the screen.

The answers he had to choose from were all wop names he'd never heard of. The goddamn test didn't make any sense. Disgusted, he marked (c) for every question and carried his test paper to the monitor at the front of the room. The monitor told him he couldn't leave the room till the test was over. He sat in the dark and tried to think of Milly. Something was all wrong, but he didn't know what. The bell rang. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

334 East 11th Street was one of twenty identical buildings built in the early 1980s under the Federal Government's first MODICUM programme. Each building was twenty-one storeys high (one floor

for shops, the rest for apartments); each floor was swastika-shaped; each of the arms of the swastikas opened on to four three-room apartments (for couples with children) and six two-room apartments (for childless couples). Thus each building was able to accommodate 2,240 occupants without overcrowding. The entire development, occupying an area of less than six city blocks, housed a population of 44,800. It had been an incredible accomplishment for its time.

SHADDUP, someone, a man, was yelling into the airshaft of 334 East 11th Street. WHY CAN'T YOU ALL SHADDUP? It was half past seven, and the man had been yelling into the airshaft for forty-five minutes already, ever since returning from his day's work (three hours' bussing dishes at a cafeteria). It was difficult to tell whom precisely he was yelling at. In one apartment a woman was yelling at a man, WHADAYA MEAN, TWENTY DOLLARS? And the man would yell back, TWENTY DOLLARS, THAT'S WHAT I MEAN! Numerous babies made noises of dissatisfaction, and older children made louder noises as they played guerrilla warfare in the corridors. Birdie, sitting on the steps of the stairwell, could see, on the floor below, a thirteen-year-old Negro girl dancing in place in front of a dresser mirror, singing along with the transistor radio that she pressed into the shallow declivity of her pubescent breasts. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH I LOVE HIM, the radio sang at full volume. It was not a song that Birdie Ludd greatly admired, though it was Number Three in the Nation, and that meant something. She had a pretty little ass, and Birdie thought she was going to shake the tinselly fringes right off her street shorts. He tried to open the narrow window that looked from the stairwell out into the airshaft, but it was stuck tight. His hands came away covered with soot. He cursed mildly. I CAN'T HEAR MYSELF THINK, the man yelled into the airshaft.

Hearing someone coming up the steps, Birdie sat back down and pretended to read his schoolbook. He thought it might be Milly (whoever it was wearing heels), and a lump began to form in his throat. If it were Milly, what would he say to her?

It wasn't Milly. It was just some old lady lugging a bag of groceries. She stopped at the landing below him, leaning against the handrail for support, sighed, and set down her grocery bag. She stuck a pink stick of Oraline between her flaccid lips, and after a few seconds it got to her and she smiled at Birdie. Birdie scowled down at the bad reproduction of David's *Death of Socrates* in his text.

'Studying?' the old woman asked.

'Yeah, that's what I'm doing all right. I'm studying.'

'That's good.' She took the tranquilizer out of her mouth, holding it like a cigarette between her index and middle fingers. Her smile broadened, as though she were elaborating some joke, honing it to a fine edge.

'It's good for a young man to study,' she said at last, almost chuckling.

The tune on the radio changed to the new Ford commercial. It was one of Birdie's favourite commercials, and he wished the old bag would shut up so he could hear it.

'You can't get anywhere these days without studying.'

Birdie made no reply. The old woman took a different tack.

'These stairs,' she said.

Birdie looked up from his book, peeved. 'What about them?'

'What about them! The elevators have been out of commission for three weeks. That's what about them—three weeks!'

'So?'

'So, why don't they fix the elevators? But you just try to call up the mobicum office and get an answer to a question like that and see what happens. Nothing—that's what happens!'

He wanted to tell her to can it. She was spoiling the commercial. Besides, she talked like she'd spent all her life in a private building instead of some crummy mobicum slum. It had probably been years, not weeks, since the elevators in this building had been working.

With a look of disgust, he slid over to one side of the step so the old lady could get past him. She smelled of beer and Synthamon and old age. He hated old people. He hated their wrinkled faces and the touch of their cold dry flesh. It was because there were so many old people that Birdie Ludd couldn't get married to the girl he loved and have a baby. It was a goddamned shame.

'What are you studying about?'

Birdie glanced down at the painting. He read the caption, which he had not read before. 'That's Socrates,' he said, remembering dimly something his Art History teacher had said about Socrates. 'It's a painting,' he explained, 'a Greek painting.'

'You going to be an artist? Or what?'

'What,' Birdie replied curtly.

'You're Milly Holt's steady boy, aren't you?' He didn't reply. 'You waiting for Milly tonight?'

'Is there any law against waiting for someone?'

The old lady laughed right in his face. Then she made her way from step to step up to the next landing. Birdie tried not to turn around to look after her, but he couldn't help himself. They looked into each other's eyes, and she laughed again. Finally he had to ask her what she was laughing about. 'Is there a law against laughing?' she asked right back. Her laughing grew harsher and turned into a hacking cough, like in a Health Education movie about the dangers of smoking. He wondered if maybe she was an addict. Birdie knew lots of men who used tobacco, but somehow it seemed disgusting in a woman.

Several floors below there was the sound of glass shattering. Birdie looked down the abyss of the stairwell. He could see a hand moving up the railing. Maybe it was Milly's hand. The fingers were slim, as Milly's fingers would be, and the nails seemed to be painted gold. In the dim light of the stairwell, at this distance, it was difficult to tell. A sudden ache of unbelieving hope made him forget the woman's laughter, the stench of garbage, the screaming. The stairwell became a scene of romance, like a show on television.

People had always told him Milly was pretty enough to be an actress. He wouldn't have been so bad-looking himself, if it weren't for his nose. He imagined how she would cry out 'Birdie!' when she saw him waiting for her, how they would kiss, how she would take him into her mother's apartment . . .

At the eleventh or twelfth floor the hand left the railing and did not reappear. It hadn't been Milly after all.

He looked at his guaranteed Timex watch. It was eight o'clock. He could afford to wait two more hours for Milly. Then he would have to take the subway back to his dorm, an hour's ride. If he hadn't been put on probation because of his grades, he would have waited all night long.

He sat down to study Art History. He stared at the picture of Socrates in the bad light. With one hand he was holding a big cup; with the other he was giving somebody the finger. He didn't seem to be dying at all. His Midterm in Art History was going to be tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock. He really had to study. He stared at the picture more intently. Why did people paint pictures anyhow? He stared until his eyes hurt.

Somewhere a baby was crying. SHADDUP, WHY DONT YA SHADDUP? ARE YA CRAZY OR SOMETHIN? A gang of kids impersonating Burmese nationalists ran down the stairs, and a minute later another gang (US guerrillas) ran down after them, screaming obscenities.

Staring at the picture in the bad light, he began to cry. He was certain, though he would not yet admit it in words, that Milly was cheating on him. He loved Milly so much; she was so beautiful. The last time he had seen her she'd called him stupid. 'You're so stupid,' she said, 'you make me sick.' But she was so beautiful.

A tear fell into Socrates' cup and was absorbed by the cheap paper of the text. The radio started to play a new commercial. Gradually he got hold of himself again. He had to buckle down and study, goddamnit!

Who in hell was Socrates?

Birdie Ludd's father was a fat man with a small chin and a short nose like Birdie's. Since his wife's death he'd lived by himself in a modicum dorm for elderly gentlemen, where Birdie visited him once a month. They never had anything to talk about, but the modicum people insisted that families should stick together. Family life was the single greatest cohesive force in any society. They'd meet in the Visitor's Room, and if either of them had gotten letters from Birdie's brothers or sisters they'd talk about that, and then they might watch some television (especially if there was baseball, for Mr Ludd was a Yankee fan), and then right before he left, Birdie's father would hit him for five or ten dollars, since the allowance he got from modicum wasn't enough to keep him supplied with Thorazine. Birdie, of course, never had anything to spare.

Whenever Birdie visited his father, he was reminded of Mr Mack. Mr Mack had been Birdie's guidance counsellor in senior year at PS 125, and as such he had played a much more central role in Birdie's life than his father had. He was a balding, middle-aged man with a belly as big as Mr Ludd's and a Jewish-type nose. Birdie had always had the feeling that the counsellor was toying with him, that his professional blandness was a disguise for an unbounded contempt, that all his good advice was a snare. The pity was that Birdie could not, in his very nature, help but be caught up in it. It was Mr Mack's game and had to be played by his rules.

Actually Mr Mack had felt a certain cool sympathy for Birdie Ludd. Of the various students who'd failed their REGENTS, Birdie was



certainly the most attractive. He never became violent or rude in interviews, and he always seemed to want so hard to try. 'In fact,' Mr Mack had told his wife in confidence one evening (she was an educational counsellor herself). 'I think this is a splendid example of the basic inequity of the system. Because that boy is *basically* decent.'

'Oh you,' she'd replied. 'Basically, you're just an old softie.'

And, in fact, Birdie's case was not that exceptional. Congress had passed the Revised Genetic Testing Act (or REGENTS, as they were known popularly) in 2011, seven years before Birdie turned eighteen and had to take them. By that time the agitation and protests were over, and the system seemed to be running smoothly. Population figures had held steady since 2014.

By contrast, the first Genetic Testing Act (of 1998) had altogether failed its hoped for effect. This act had merely specified that such obvious genetic undesirables as diabetics, the criminally insane, and morons were not to be allowed the privilege of reproducing their kind. They were also denied suffrage. The act of 1998 had met virtually no opposition, and it had been easy to implement, since by that time civic contraception techniques were practiced everywhere but in the most benighted rural areas. The chief, though unstated, purpose of the Act of 1998 had been to pave the way for the REGENTS system.

The REGENTS were tripartite: there was the familiar Stanford-Binet intelligence test (short form); the Skinner-Waxman Test for Creative Potential (which consisted in large part of picking the punch lines for jokes on a multiple choice test); and the O'Ryan-Army physical performance and metabolism test. Candidates failed if they received scores that fell below one standard deviation in two of the three tests. Birdie Ludd had been nervous on the day of his REGENTS (it was Friday the 13th, for Christ's sake!), and right in the middle of the Skinner-Waxman a sparrow flew into the auditorium and made a hell of a racket so that Birdie couldn't concentrate. He hadn't been at all surprised to find that he'd failed the IQ test and the Skinner-Waxman. On the physical Birdie got a score of 100 (the modal point, or peak, of the normal curve), which made him feel pretty proud.

Birdie didn't really believe in failure, not as a permanent condition. He had failed third grade, but had that kept him from graduating high school? The important thing to remember, as Mr

Mack had pointed out to Birdie and the 107 other failed candidates at a special assembly, was that failure was just a point-of-view. A positive point-of-view and self-confidence would solve most problems. Birdie had really believed him then, and he'd signed up to be retested at the big downtown office of the Health, Education, and Welfare Agency. This time he really crammed. He bought *How You Can Add 20 Points to Your IQ* by L. C. Wedgewood, Ph.D. (who appeared on the bookjacket in an old-fashioned suit with lapels and buttons) and *Your REGENTS Exams*, prepared by the National Educational Council. The latter book had a dozen sample tests, and Birdie worked all the easy problems in each test (the only part that really counted, the book explained, were the first thirty questions; the last thirty were strictly for the junior geniuses). By the day of the retesting, Birdie had a positive point of view and lots of self-confidence.

But the tests were all wrong. They weren't at all what he'd studied up on. For the IQ part of the test he sat in a stuffy cubicle with some old lady with a black dress and repeated telephone numbers after her, forwards and backwards. With the Area Code! Then she showed him different pictures, and he had to tell her what was wrong with them. Usually nothing was wrong. It went on like that for over an hour.

The creativity test was even weirder. They gave him a pair of pliers and took him into an empty room. Two pieces of string were hanging down from the ceiling. Birdie was supposed to tie the two strings together.

It was impossible. If you held the very end of one string in one hand, it was still too short, by a couple feet, to reach the other string. Even if you held the tip of the string in the pliers, it was too short. He tried it a dozen times, and it never worked. He was about ready to scream when he left that room. There were three more crazy problems like that, but he hardly even tried to solve them. It was impossible.

Afterwards somebody told him he should have tied the pliers to the end of the string and set it swinging like a pendulum. Then he could have gone over and got the string, come back with it, and caught the string that was swinging like a pendulum. But then why had they given him pliers!

That bit with the pliers really made him angry. But what could he do about it? Nothing. Who could he complain to? Nobody. He

complained to Mr Mack, who promised to do everything in his power to help Birdie be reclassified. The important thing to remember was that failure was just a negative attitude. Birdie had to think positively and learn to help himself. Mr Mack suggested that Birdie go to college.

At that time college had been the last thing Birdie Ludd had in mind for himself. He wanted to *relax* after the strain of PS 125. Birdie wasn't the college *type*. He wasn't anybody's fool, but on the other hand he didn't pretend to be some goddamn brain. Mr Mack had pointed out that 73 per cent of all high school graduates went on to college and that three-quarters of all college freshmen went on to take their degrees.

Birdie's reply had been, 'Yeah, but . . .' He couldn't say what he was thinking; that Mack himself was just another goddamn brain and that of course *he* couldn't understand the way Birdie felt about college.

'You must remember, Birdie, that this is more now than a question of your educational goals. If you'd received high enough scores on the REGENTS you could drop out of school right now and get married and sign up for a *MOBICUM* salary. Assuming that you had no more ambition than that . . .'

After a glum and weighty silence, Mr Mack switched from scolding to cajoling: 'You do want to get married don't you?'

'Yeah, but . . .'

'And have children?'

'Yeah, of course, but . . .'

'Then it seems to *me* that college is your best bet, Birdie. You've taken your REGENTS and failed. You've taken the reclassification tests and gotten *lower* scores there than on the REGENTS. There are only three possibilities open after that. Either you perform an exceptional service for the country or the national economy, which is hardly something one can count on doing. Or else you demonstrate physical, intellectual, or creative abilities markedly above the level shown in the REGENTS test or tests you failed, which again poses certain problems. Or *else* you get a BA. That certainly seems to be the easiest way, Birdie. Perhaps the only way.'

'I suppose you're right.'

Mr Mack smiled a smile of greasy satisfaction and adjusted his massive stomach above his too-tight belt. Birdie wondered spitefully what sort of score Mack would have got on the O'Ryan-Army fitness test. Probably not 100.

'Now as far as money goes,' Mack went on, opening Birdie's career file, 'you won't have to be concerned over that. As long as you keep a C average, you can get a New York State Loan, at the very least. I assume your parents will be unable to help out?'

Birdie nodded. Mr Mack handed him the loan application form.

'A college education is the right of every United States citizen, Birdie. But if we fail to exercise our rights, we have only ourselves to blame. There's no excuse today for not going to college.'

So Birdie Ludd, lacking an excuse, had gone to college. From the very first, he had felt as though it were all a trap. A puzzle with a trick solution, and everyone had been shown the trick except Birdie. A labyrinth that others could enter and depart from at will, but whenever Birdie tried to get out, no matter which way he turned, it always led him back to the same dead end.

But what choice did he have? He was in love.

On the morning of the day of his Art History test Birdie lay in bed in the empty dorm, drowsing and thinking of his true-love. He couldn't quite sleep, but he didn't want to get up yet either. His body was bursting with untapped energies; it overflowed with the wine of youth, but those energies could not be spent brushing his teeth and going down to breakfast. Come to think of it, it was too late for breakfast. He was happy right here.

Sunlight spilled in through the south window. A breeze rustled the curtain. Birdie laughed from a sense of his own fullness. He turned over on to his left side and looked out the window at a perfect blue rectangle of sky. Beautiful. It was March, but it seemed more like April or May. It was going to be a wonderful day. He could feel it in his bones.

The way the breeze blew the curtain made him think of last summer, the lake breeze in Milly's hair. They had gone away for a weekend to Lake Hopatcong in New Jersey. They found a grassy spot not far from the shore but screened from the view of bathers by a windbreak of trees, and there they had made love almost the entire afternoon. Afterwards they just lay side by side, their heads reclining in the prickly grass, looking into each other's eyes. Milly's eyes were hazel flecked with gold. His were the blue of a cloudless sky. Wisps of her hair, soft and unmanageable after the morning swim, blew across her face. Birdie thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world. When he told her that she just smiled. Her lips had been so soft. She had not said one cruel thing.

He remembered kissing her. Her lips. He closed his eyes, to remember better.

'I love you so much, Birdie, so terribly much.' She had said that to him. And he loved her too. More than anything in the world. Didn't she know that? Had she forgotten?

'I'll do anything for you,' he said aloud in the empty dorm.

She smiled. She whispered into his ear, and he could feel her lips against his earlobe. 'Just one thing, Birdie. I only ask one thing. You know what that is.'

'I know, I know.' He tried to twist his head around to silence her with a kiss, but she held it firmly between her two hands.

'Get reclassified.' It sounded almost cruel, but then she had let him go, and when he looked into her golden eyes again he could see no cruelty, only love.

'I want to have a baby, darling. Yours and mine. I want us to be married and have our own apartment and a baby. I'm sick of living with my mother. I want to be your wife. I'm sick of my job. I only want what every woman wants, Birdie, please.'

'I'm trying. Aren't I trying? I'm going to school. Next year I'll be a junior. The year after that I'll be a senior. Then I'll have my degree. And then I'll be reclassified. We'll get married the same day.' He looked at her with his wounded-puppydog look, which usually stopped all her arguments.

The clock on the wall of the dorm said it was 11.07. *This will be my lucky day*, Birdie promised himself. He threw himself out of bed and did ten push-ups on the linoleum floor, which somehow never seemed to get dirty, though Birdie had never seen anyone cleaning it. Birdie couldn't push himself up from the last push-up, so he just rested there on the floor, his lips pressed against the cool linoleum.

He got up and sat on the edge of the unmade bed, watching the white curtain blow in the wind. He thought of Milly, his own dear, beautiful lovely Milly. He wanted to marry her now. No matter what his genetic classification was. If she really loved him, that shouldn't make any difference. But he knew he was doing the right thing by waiting. He knew that haste was foolish. He knew, certainly, that Milly would have it no other way. Immediately after he'd failed the reclassification test, he had tried to persuade her to take a fertility pill that he had bought on the black market for

twenty dollars. The pill counteracted the contraceptive agent in the city water.

'Are you crazy?' she shouted at him. 'Are you off your rocker?'

'I just want a baby, that's all. Goddamnit, if they won't let us have a baby legal, then we'll have a baby our own way.'

'And what do you think will happen if I have an illegal pregnancy?'

Birdie remained stolidly silent. He *hadn't* thought, he didn't, he wouldn't.

'They'll give me a therapeutic abortion and I'll have a black mark against my record for the rest of my life as a sex offender. My God, Birdie, sometimes you can be positively dumb!'

'We could go to Mexico . . .'

'And what would we do there? Die? Or commit suicide? Haven't you read any newspapers in the last ten years?'

'Well, other women have done it. I've read stories in the papers this year. There was a protest. Civil rights and stuff.'

'And what happened then? All those babies were put in federal orphanages, and the parents were put in prison. *And* sterilized. God, Birdie, you really didn't know that, did you?'

'Yeah, I knew that, but . . .'

'But what, stupid?'

'I just thought—'

'You *didn't* think. That's your problem. You never think. I have to do the thinking for both of us. It's a good thing I've got more brains than I need.'

'Uh-huh,' he said mockingly, smiling his special movie-star smile. She could never resist that smile. She shrugged her shoulders and, laughing, kissed him. She couldn't stay angry with Birdie ten minutes at a time. He'd make her laugh and forget everything but how much she loved him. In that way Milly was like his mother. In that way Birdie was like her son.

11.35. The Art History test was at two o'clock. He'd already missed a ten o'clock class in Consumer Skills. Tough.

He went to the bathroom to brush his teeth and shave. The Muzak started when he opened the door. It played WHAM-O, WHAM-O, WHY AM I SO HAPPY? Birdie could have asked himself the same question.

Back in the dorm he tried to telephone Milly at work, but there was only one phone on each Pan-Am second-class jet, and it was

busy all through the flight. He left a message for her to call him, knowing perfectly well she wouldn't.

He decided to wear his white sweater with white Levis and white sneakers. He brushed whitening agent into his hair. He looked at himself in front of the bathroom mirror. He smiled. The Muzak started to play his favourite Ford commercial. Alone in the empty space before the urinals he danced with himself, singing the words of the commercial.

It was only a fifteen minute subway ride to Battery Park. He bought a bag of peanuts to feed to the pigeons in the aviary. When they were all gone, he walked along the rows of benches where the old people came to sit every day to look out at the sea and wait to die. But Birdie didn't feel the same hatred for old people this morning that he had felt last night. Lined up in rows, in the full glare of the afternoon sun, they seemed remote. They did not pose any threat.

The breeze coming in off the harbour smelled of salt, oil, and decay, but it wasn't a bad smell at all. It was sort of invigorating. Maybe if Birdie had lived centuries ago, he might have been a sailor. He ate two large bars of Synthamon and drank a container of Fun.

The sky was full of jets. Milly could have been on any one of them. A week ago, only a week ago, she'd told him, 'I'll love you forever and a day. There'll never be anyone but you for me.' Birdie felt just great. Absolutely.

An old man in an old-fashioned suit with lapels shuffled along the walk, holding on to the sea-railing. His face was covered with a funny white beard, thick and curly, although his head was as bare as a police helmet. He asked Birdie for a quarter. He spoke with a strange accent, neither Spanish nor French. He reminded Birdie of something.

Birdie wrinkled his nose. 'Sorry. I'm on the dole myself.' Which was not, strictly speaking, true.

The bearded man gave him the finger, and then Birdie remembered who the old man looked like. Socrates!

He glanced down at his wrist, but he'd forgotten to wear his watch. He spun around. The gigantic advertising clock on the façade of the First National Citibank said it was fifteen after two. That wasn't possible. Birdie asked two of the old people on the benches if that was the right time. Their watches agreed.

There wasn't any use trying to get to the test. Without quite knowing why, Birdie Ludd smiled to himself.

He breathed a sigh of relief and sat down to watch the ocean.

'The basic point I'm trying to make, Birdie, if you'll let me finish, is that there are people more qualified than I to advise you. It's been three years since I've seen your file. I've no idea of the progress you've made, the goals you're striving for. Certainly there's a psychologist at the college....'

Birdie squirmed in the plastic shell of his seat, and the look of accusation in his guileless blue eyes communicated so successfully to the counsellor that he began to squirm slightly himself. Birdie had always had the power to make Mr Mack feel in the wrong.

'...and there are other students waiting to see me, Birdie. You managed to pick my busiest time of day.' He gestured pathetically at the tiny foyer outside his office where a fourth student had just taken a seat to wait his three o'clock appointment.

'Well, if you don't want to help me, I guess I can go.'

'Whether I want to or not, what can I possibly do? I still fail to see the reason you missed those tests. You were holding down a good C-average. If you'd just kept plugging away...' Mr Mack smiled weakly. He was about to launch into a set-piece on the value of a positive attitude, but decided on second thought that Birdie would require a tougher approach. 'If reclassification means as much to you as you say, then you should be willing to work for it, to make sacrifices.'

'I said it was a mistake, didn't I? Is it my fault they won't let me take make-ups?'

'Two weeks, Birdie! Two weeks without going to a single class, without even calling in to the dorm. Where were you? And all those midterms! Really, it does look as though you were *trying* to be expelled.'

'I said I'm sorry!'

'You prove nothing by becoming angry with me, Birdie Ludd. There's nothing I can do about it any more—nothing.' Mr Mack pushed his chair back from the desk, preparing to rise.

'But... before, when I failed my reclassification test, you talked about other ways to get reclassified besides college. What were they?'

'Exceptional service. You might want to try that.'



'What's it mean?'

'In practical terms, for you, it would mean joining the Army and performing an action in combat of extraordinary heroism. And living to tell about it.'

'A guerrilla?' Birdie laughed nervously. 'Not this boy, not Birdie Ludd. Who ever heard of a guerrilla getting reclassified?'

'Admittedly, it's unusual. That's why I recommended college initially.'

'The *third* way, what was that?'

'A demonstration of markedly superior abilities.' Mr Mack smiled, not without a certain irony. 'Abilities that wouldn't be shown on the tests.'

'How would I do that?'

'You must file intention with the Health, Education, and Welfare Agency three months in advance of the date of demonstration.'

'But what is the demonstration? What do I do?'

'It's entirely up to you. Some people submit paintings, others might play a piece of music. The majority, I suppose, give a sample of their writing. As a matter of fact, I think there's a book published of stories and essays and such that have all achieved their purpose. Gotten their authors reclassified, that is. The great majority don't, of course. Those who make it are usually nonconformist types to begin with, the kind that are always bucking the system. I wouldn't advise—'

'Where can I get that book?'

'At the library, I suppose. But—'

'Will they let anyone try?'

'Yes. Once.'

Birdie jumped out of his seat so quickly that for an unconsidered moment Mr Mack feared the boy was going to strike him. But he was only holding his hand out to be shaken. 'Thanks, Mr Mack, thanks a lot. I knew *you'd* still find a way to help me. Thanks.'

The Health, Education, and Welfare people were more helpful than he could have hoped. They arranged for him to receive a federal stipend of \$500 to help him through the three month 'developmental period'. They gave him a metal ID tab for his own desk at the Nassau branch of the National Library. They recommended several bona fide literary advisors, at various hourly consultation rates. They even gave him a free copy of the book Mr Mack had

told him about. By *Their Bootstraps* had an introduction by Lucille Mortimer Randolph-Clapp, the architect of the REGENTS system, which Birdie found very encouraging, though he didn't understand all of it too clearly.

Birdie didn't think much of the first essay in the book, 'The Bottom of the Heap, an Account of a Lousy Modicum Childhood'. It was written by 19-year-old Jack Ch——. Birdie could have written the same thing himself; there wasn't a single thing in it that he didn't know without being told. And even Birdie could see that the language was vulgar and ungrammatical. Next was a story that didn't have any point, and then a poem that didn't make any sense. Birdie read through the whole book in one day, something he had never done before, and he did find a few things he liked: there was a crazy story about a boy who'd dropped out of high school to work in an alligator preserve, and an eminently sensible essay on the difficulties of budgeting a modicum income. The best piece of the lot was called 'The Consolations of Philosophy', which was written by a girl who was both blind and crippled! Aside from the textbook for his ethics course, Birdie had never read philosophy, and he thought it might be a good idea, during the three-month developmental period, to try some. Maybe it would give him an idea for something to write about of his own.

For the next three or four days, however, Birdie spent all his time just trying to find a room. He'd have to keep his expenses to a bare minimum if he was going to get along those three months on only \$500. Eventually he found a room in a privately owned building in Brooklyn that must have been built a century ago or longer. The room cost \$30 a week, which was a real bargain spacewise, since it measured fully ten feet square. It contained a bed, an armchair, two floor lamps, a wooden table and chair, a rickety cardboard chest-of-drawers, and a rug made of genuine wool. He had his own private bathroom. His first night there he just walked around barefoot on the woollen rug with the radio turned up full volume. Twice he went down to the phone booth in the lobby in order to call up Milly and maybe invite her over for a little house-warming party, but then he would have had to explain why he wasn't living at the dorm, and (for she certainly must be wondering) why he hadn't called her since the day of the Art History test. The second time he came down to the lobby he got into a conversation with a girl who was waiting for a phone call. She said her name was Fran. She

wore a tight dress of peekaboo plastic, but on her body it wasn't especially provocative since she was too scrawny. It was fun to talk to her though, because she wasn't stuck up like most girls. She lived right across the hall from Birdie, so it was the most natural thing in the world that he should go into her room for a carton of beer. Before they'd killed it, he'd told her his entire situation. Even about Milly. Fran started crying. It turned out that she'd failed the REGENTS herself—all three parts. Birdie was just starting to make out with her when her phone call came and she had to leave.

Next morning Birdie made his first visit (ever) to the National Library. The Nassau branch was housed in an old glass building a little to the west of the central Wall Street area. Each floor was a honeycomb of auditing and micro-viewing booths, except for twenty-eight, the topmost floor, which was given over to the electronic equipment that connected this branch with the midtown Morgan Library and, by relays, with the Library of Congress, the British Museum Library, and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. A page, who couldn't have been much older than Birdie, showed him how to use the dial-and-punch system in his booth. A researcher could call up almost any book in the world or listen to any tape without needing to employ more than a twelve-figure call-code. When the page was gone, Birdie stared down glumly at the blank viewing screen. The only thing he could think of was the satisfaction it would give him to smash in the screen with his fist.

After a good hot lunch Birdie felt better. He recalled Socrates and the blind girl's essay on the 'The Consolations of Philosophy'. So he put out a call for all the books on Socrates at senior high school level and began reading them at random.

At eleven o'clock that night Birdie finished reading the chapter in Plato's *Republic* that contains the famous Parable of the Cave. He left the library in a daze and wandered hours-long in the brilliantly illuminated Wall Street area. Even after midnight it was teeming with workers. Birdie watched them with amazement. Were any of them aware of the great truths that had transfigured Birdie's being that night? Or were they, like the poor prisoners of the cave, turned to the rockface, watching shadows and never suspecting the existence of the sun?

There was so much *beauty* in the world that Birdie had not so much as dreamt of! Beauty was more than a patch of blue sky or the

curve of Milly's breasts. It penetrated everywhere. The city itself, hitherto that cruel machine whose special function it had been to thwart Birdie's natural desires, seemed now to glow from within, like a diamond struck by the light. Every passer-by's face was rife with ineffable significances.

Birdie remembered the vote of the Athenian Senate to put Socrates to death. For corrupting the youth! He hated the Athenian Senate, but it was a different sort of hate from the kind he was used to. He hated Athens for a reason. Justice!

Beauty, truth, justice. Love, too. Somewhere, Birdie realized, there was an explanation for everything! A meaning. *It all made sense.*

Emotions passed over him faster than he could take account of them. One moment, looking at his face reflected in a dark shop-window, he wanted to laugh aloud. The next, remembering Fran sprawled out on her shabby bed in a cheap plastic dress, he wanted to cry. For he realized now, as he had not on the night before, that Fran was a prostitute, and that she could never hope to be anything else. While Birdie might hope for anything, anything at all in the (now suddenly so much wider) world.

He found himself alone in Battery Park. It was darker there, less busy. He stood alone beside the sea-railing and looked down at the dark waves lapping at the concrete shore. Red signal lights blinked on and off as they proceeded across the night sky to and from the Central Park Airport. And even this scene, though it chilled him in ways that he could not explain, he found exhilarating, in ways that he could not explain.

There was a *principle* involved in all this. It was important for Birdie to communicate this principle to the other people who didn't know of it, but he could not, quite, put his finger on just what principle it was. In his newly awakened soul he fought a battle to try to bring it to words, but each time, just as he thought he had it, it eluded him. Finally, towards dawn, he went home, temporarily defeated.

Just as he went in the door of his own room, a guerrilla, wearing the opaque and featureless mask of his calling (with the ID number stencilled on the brow), came out of Fran's room. Birdie felt a brief impulse of hatred for him, followed by a wave of compassion and tenderness for the unfortunate girl. But he did not have the time, that night, to try and help her; he had his own problems.

He slept unsoundly and woke at eleven o'clock from a dream that stopped just short of being a nightmare. He had been in a room in which two ropes hung down from a raftered ceiling. He had stood between the ropes, trying to grasp them, but just as he thought he had one in his grasp, it would swing away wildly, like a berserk pendulum.

He knew what the dream meant. The ropes were a test of his *creativity*. That was the principle he had sought so desperately the night before. Creativity was the key to everything. If he could only learn about it, analyse it, he would be able to solve his problems.

The idea was still hazy in his mind, but he knew he was on the right track. He had some cultured eggs and a cup of coffee for breakfast and went straight to his booth at the library to study. Though he had a slight fever, he seemed to feel better than he had ever felt in his whole life. He was free. Or was it something else? One thing he was sure of: nothing in the past was worth shit. But the future was radiant with promise.

He didn't begin work on his essay until the very last week of the developmental period. There was so *much* that he had had to learn first. Literature, painting, philosophy, everything he had never understood before. There were still many things, he realized, that he couldn't understand, but now he firmly believed that eventually he would. Because he *wanted* to.

When he did begin working on his essay, he found it a more difficult task than he had anticipated. He paid ten dollars for an hour's consultation with a licensed literary advisor, who advised him to cut it. He was trying to cram in too many things. Lucille Mortimer Randolph-Clapp had given more or less the same advice in *Their Bootstraps*. She said that the best essays were often no more than 200 words long. Birdie wondered if future editions of *Their Bootstraps* would contain his essay.

He went through four complete drafts before he was satisfied. Then he read it aloud to Fran. She said it made her want to cry. He did one more draft of it on 8 June, which was his 21st birthday, just for good luck, and then he sent it off to the Health, Education, and Welfare Agency.

This is the essay Birdie Ludd submitted:

PROBLEMS OF  
CREATIVENESS

by Berthold Anthony Ludd

'The conditions of beauty are three: wholeness, harmony, and radiance.'

Aristotle.

*From ancient times to today we have learned that there is more than one criteria by which the critic analyses the products of Creativeness. Can we know which of these measures to use. Shall we deal directly with the subject? Or 'by indirection find direction out'.*

*We are all familiar with the great drama of Wolfgang Amadeus Goethe—'The Faust.' It is not possible to deny it the undisputed literary pinnacle, a 'Masterpiece'. Yet what motivation can have drawn him to describe 'heaven' and 'hell' in this strange way? Who is Faust if not ourselves. Does this not show a genuine need to achieve communication? Our only answer can be 'Yes!'*

*Thus once more we are led to the problem of Creativeness. All beauty has three conditions 1. The subject shall be of literary format. 2. All parts are contained within the whole. And 3. the meaning is radiantly clear. True creativeness is only present when it can be observed in the work of art. This too is the philosophy of Aristotle.*

*The criteria of Creativeness is not alone sought in the domain of 'literature'. Does not the scientist, the prophet, the painter offer his own criteria of judgement towards the same general purpose? Which road shall we choose, in this event?*

*Another criteria of Creativeness was made by Socrates, so cruelly put to death by his own people, and I quote: 'To know nothing is the first condition of all knowledge.' From the wisdom of Socrates may we not draw our own conclusions concerning these problems? Creativeness is the ability to see relationships where none exist.*

The machine that did the preliminary grading gave Berthold Anthony Ludd a score of 12 and fed the paper into the Automatic Reject file, where the essay was photostated and routed to the OUTMAIL room. The OUTMAIL sorter clipped Birdie's essay to a letter explaining the causes which made reclassification impossible at this time and advised him of his right to seek reclassification again 365 days from the day on which his essay had been notarized.

Birdie was waiting in the lobby when the mail came. He was so eager to open the envelope that he tore his essay in two getting it out. The same afternoon, without even bothering to get drunk, Birdie enlisted in the US Marines to go defend democracy in Burma.

Immediately after his swearing-in, the sergeant came forward and slipped the black mask with his ID number stencilled on the brow over Birdie's sullen face. His number was USMC100-7011-D07. He was a guerrilla now.

## HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK

GENE WOLFE

Pretty Miss Bushnan's suite was all red acrylic and green-dyed leather. Real leather, very modern—red acrylic and green, real leather were the modern things this year. But it made her Louis XIV secretary, Sal, look terribly out of place.

Miss Bushnan had disliked the suite from the day she moved in—though she could hardly complain, when there was a chance that the entire city of Geneva and the sovereign Swiss nation might be offended. This evening she did her best to like red and green, and in the meantime turned her eyes from them to the cool relief of the fountain. It was a copy of a Cellini salt dish and lovely, no matter how silly a fountain indoors on the hundred and twenty-fifth floor might be. In a characteristic reversal of feeling she found herself wondering what sort of place she might have gotten if she had had to find one for herself, without reservations, at the height of the tourist season. Three flights up in some dingy suburban *pension*, no doubt.

So bless the generosity of the sovereign Swiss Republic. Bless the openhanded city of Geneva. Bless the hotel. And bless the United Nations Conference on Human Value, which brought glory to the Swiss Republic et cetera and inspired the free mountaineers to grant free hotel suites in the height of the season even to non-voting Conference observers such as she. Sal had brought her in a gibson a few minutes ago, and she picked it up from the edge of the fountain to sip, a little surprised to see that it was already three-quarters gone; *red and green*.

A brawny, naked triton half-reclined, water streaming from his hair and beard, dripping from his mouth, dribbling from his ears. His eyes, expressionless and smooth as eggs, wept for her. Balancing her empty glass carefully on the rim again, she leaned forward and stroked his smooth, wet stone flesh. Smiling she told him—mentally—how handsome he was, and he blushed pink lemonade at the compliment. She thought of herself taking off her clothes and

## ROBERT SILVERBERG

# Passengers

Robert Silverberg won the Hugo Award for Most Promising New Author in 1956, less than two years after his first professional sale. After an apprenticeship that lasted nearly ten years and yielded millions of words, Silverberg emerged in the 1960s as one of the most articulate and conscientious writers of the time. Works from this period of his career are memorable for their psychologically complex character studies, morally trenchant themes, and vivid depictions of oppressive and limiting environments that the individual must try to transcend. "To See the Invisible Man," "Hawksbill Station," and *Thorns* are futuristic studies of the individual alienated through a variety of means: social ostracism, penal exile, and exploitative victimization. Silverberg's crowning achievement in this vein is *Dying Inside*, the poignant tale of a telepath alienated by his uniqueness who is further isolated by the loss of his powers and thus his only means of relating to normal humanity. Both *Nightwings* and *Downward to Earth* present contact with alien species as potentially rejuvenating experiences, with overtones of resurrection and redemption. *The World Inside* chronicles the dehumanizing potential of overpopulation on a society where privacy and intimacy are virtually impossible. The dramatic core of Silverberg's strongest stories involves individuals confronted with mortality. "Born with the Dead" details the difficulties of life in a world that is shared by mortals and the revived dead. *The Second Trip* centers around the idea of the death of identity, in which a man discovers that he is a former criminal punished with obliteration of his true personality, a spark of which is reignited and threatens to overwhelm his new persona. The quest for immortality is a sounding board for ruminations on mortality in *The Book of Skulls*, about the pursuit of an occult sect that has supposedly found the secret of eternal life. Since the late 1970s Silverberg has concentrated on the development of his Majipoor saga, an epic science fantasy series that includes the novels *Lord Valentine's Castle*, *The Majipoor Chronicles*, and *Valentine Pontifex*. He has also written two fantasy novels, *Gilgamesh the King* and *To the Land of the Living*, based on Sumerian mythology. His many short-fiction collections include *Next Stop the Stars*, *To Worlds Beyond*, *Dimension Thirteen*, *Born with the Dead*, and *The Secret Sharer*. He has written many novels and works of nonfiction for children and edited more than seventy anthologies. Silverberg won the first of five Nebula Awards for his story "Passengers," and he is also a multiple winner of the Hugo Award.

THERE ARE ONLY fragments of me left now. Chunks of memory have broken free and drifted away like calved glaciers. It is always like that when a Passenger leaves us. We can never be sure of all the things our borrowed bodies did. We have only the lingering traces, the imprints.

Like sand clinging to an ocean-tossed bottle. Like the throbbings of amputated legs.

I rise. I collect myself. My hair is ruffled; I comb it. My face is creased from too little sleep. There is sourness in my mouth. Has my Passenger been eating dung with my mouth? They do that. They do anything. It is morning.

A gray, uncertain morning. I stare at it awhile, and then, shuddering, I opaque the window and confront instead the gray, uncertain surface of the inner panel. My room looks untidy. Did I have a woman here? There are ashes in the trays. Searching for butts, I find several with lipstick stains. Yes, a woman was here.

I touch the bedsheets. Still warm with shared warmth. Both pillows tousled. She has gone, though, and the Passenger is gone, and I am alone.

How long did it last, this time?

I pick up the phone and ring Central. "What is the date?"

The computer's bland feminine voice replies, "Friday, December fourth, nineteen eighty-seven."

"The time?"

"Nine fifty-one, Eastern Standard Time."

"The weather forecast?"

"Predicted temperature range for today thirty to thirty-eight. Current temperature, thirty-one. Wind from the north, sixteen miles an hour. Chances of precipitation slight."

"What do you recommend for a hangover?"

"Food or medication?"

"Anything you like," I say.

The computer mulls that one over for a while. Then it decides on both, and activates my kitchen. The spigot yields cold tomato juice. Eggs begin to fry. From the medicine slot comes a purplish liquid. The Central Computer is always so thoughtful. Do the Passengers ever ride it, I wonder? What thrills could that hold for them? Surely it must be more exciting to borrow the million minds of Central than to live a while in the faulty, short-circuited soul of a corroding human being!

December 4, Central said. Friday. So the Passenger had me for three nights.

I drink the purplish stuff and probe my memories in a gingerly way, as one might probe a festering sore.

I remember Tuesday morning. A bad time at work. None of the charts will come out right. The section manager irritable; he has been taken by Passengers three times



in five weeks, and his section is in disarray as a result, and his Christmas bonus is jeopardized. Even though it is customary not to penalize a person for lapses due to Passengers, according to the system, the section manager seems to feel he will be treated unfairly. So he treats us unfairly. We have a hard time. Revise the charts, fiddle with the program, check the fundamentals ten times over. Out they come: the detailed forecasts for price variations of public utility securities, February–April 1988. That afternoon we are to meet and discuss the charts and what they tell us.

I do not remember Tuesday afternoon.

That must have been when the Passenger took me. Perhaps at work; perhaps in the mahogany-paneled boardroom itself, during the conference. Pink concerned faces all about me; I cough, I lurch, I stumble from my seat. They shake their heads sadly. No one reaches for me. No one stops me. It is too dangerous to interfere with one who has a Passenger. The chances are great that a second Passenger lurks nearby in the disincorporate state, looking for a mount. So I am avoided. I leave the building.

After that, what?

Sitting in my room on bleak Friday morning, I eat my scrambled eggs and try to reconstruct the three lost nights.

Of course it is impossible. The conscious mind functions during the period of captivity, but upon withdrawal of the Passenger nearly every recollection goes too. There is only a slight residue, a gritty film of faint and ghostly memories. The mount is never precisely the same person afterwards; though he cannot recall the details of his experience, he is subtly changed by it.

I try to recall.

A girl? Yes: lipstick on the butts. Sex, then, here in my room. Young? Old? Blonde? Dark? Everything is hazy. How did my borrowed body behave? Was I a good lover? I try to be, when I am myself. I keep in shape. At 38, I can handle three sets of tennis on a summer afternoon without collapsing. I can make a woman glow as a woman is meant to glow. Not boasting: just categorizing. We have our skills. These are mine.

But Passengers, I am told, take wry amusement in controverting our skills. So would it have given my rider a kind of delight to find me a woman and force me to fail repeatedly with her?

I dislike that thought.

The fog is going from my mind now. The medicine prescribed by Central works rapidly. I eat, I shave, I stand under the vibrator until my skin is clean. I do my exercises. Did the Passenger exercise my body Wednesday and Thursday mornings? Probably not. I must make up for that. I am close to middle age, now; tonus lost is not easily regained.

I touch my toes twenty times, knees stiff.

I kick my legs in the air.

I lie flat and lift myself on pumping elbows.

The body responds, maltreated though it has been. It is the first bright moment of my awakening: to feel the inner tingling, to know that I still have vigor.

Fresh air is what I want next. Quickly I slip into my clothes and leave. There is no need for me to report to work today. They are aware that since Tuesday afternoon I have had a Passenger; they need not be aware that before dawn on Friday the Passenger departed. I will have a free day. I will walk the city's streets, stretching my limbs, repaying my body for the abuse it has suffered.

I enter the elevator. I drop fifty stories to the ground. I step out into the December dreariness.

The towers of New York rise about me.

In the street the cars stream forward. Drivers sit edgily at their wheels. One never knows when the driver of a nearby car will be borrowed, and there is always a moment of lapsed coordination as the Passenger takes over. Many lives are lost that way on our streets and highways; but never the life of a Passenger.

I begin to walk without purpose. I cross Fourteenth Street, heading north, listening to the soft violent purr of the electric engines. I see a boy jiggling in the street and know he is being ridden. At Fifth and Twenty-second a prosperous-looking paunchy man approaches, his necktie askew, this morning's *Wall Street Journal* jutting from an overcoat pocket. He giggles. He thrusts out his tongue. Ridden. I avoid him. Moving briskly, I come to the underpass that carries traffic below Thirty-fourth Street toward Queens, and pause for a moment to watch two adolescent girls quarreling at the rim of the pedestrian walk. One is a Negro. Her eyes are rolling in terror. The other pushes her closer to the railing. Ridden. But the Passenger does not have murder on its mind, merely pleasure. The Negro girl is released and falls in a huddled heap, trembling. Then she rises and runs. The other girl draws a long strand of gleaming hair into her mouth, chews on it, seems to awaken. She looks dazed.

I avert my eyes. One does not watch while a fellow sufferer is awakening. There is a morality of the ridden; we have so many new tribal mores in these dark days. I hurry on.

Where am I going so hurriedly? Already I have walked more than a mile. I seem to be moving toward some goal, as though my Passenger still hunches in my skull, urging me about. But I know that is not so. For the moment, at least, I am free.

Can I be sure of that?

*Cogito ergo sum* no longer applies. We go on thinking even while we are ridden, and we live in quiet desperation, unable to halt our courses no matter how ghastly, no matter how self-destructive. I am certain that I can distinguish between the condition of bearing a Passenger and the condition of being free. But perhaps not. Perhaps I bear a particularly devilish Passenger which has not quitted me at all, but which merely has receded to the cerebellum, leaving me the illusion of freedom while all the time surreptitiously driving me onward to some purpose of its own.

Did we ever have more than that: the illusion of freedom?

But this is disturbing, the thought that I may be ridden without realizing it. I burst out in heavy perspiration, not merely from the exertion of walking. Stop. Stop here. Why must you walk? You are at Forty-second Street. There is the library. Nothing forces you onward. Stop awhile, I tell myself. Rest on the library steps.

I sit on the cold stone and tell myself that I have made this decision for myself.

Have I? It is the old problem, free will versus determinism, translated into the foulest of forms. Determinism is no longer a philosopher's abstraction; it is cold alien tendrils sliding between the cranial sutures. The Passengers arrived three years ago. I have been ridden five times since then. Our world is quite different now. But we have adjusted even to this. We have adjusted. We have our mores. Life goes on. Our governments rule, our legislatures meet, our stock exchanges transact business as usual, and we have methods for compensating for the random havoc. It is the only way. What else can we do? Shriveled in defeat? We have an enemy we cannot fight; at best we can resist through endurance. So we endure.

The stone steps are cold against my body. In December few people sit here.

I tell myself that I made this long walk of my own free will, that I halted of my own free will, that no Passenger rides my brain now. Perhaps. Perhaps. I cannot let myself believe that I am not free.

Can it be, I wonder, that the Passenger left some lingering command in me? Walk to this place, halt at this place? That is possible too.

I look about me at the others on the library steps.

An old man, eyes vacant, sitting on newspaper. A boy of thirteen or so with flaring nostrils. A plump woman. Are all of them ridden? Passengers seem to cluster about me today. The more I study the ridden ones, the more convinced I become that I am, for the moment, free. The last time, I had three months of freedom between rides. Some people, they say, are scarcely ever free. Their bodies are in great demand, and they know only scattered bursts of freedom, a day here, a week there, an hour. We have never been able to determine how many Passengers infest our world. Millions, maybe. Or maybe five. Who can tell?

A wisp of snow curls down out of the gray sky. Central had said the chance of precipitation was slight. Are they riding Central this morning too?

I see the girl.

She sits diagonally across from me, five steps up and a hundred feet away, her black skirt pulled up on her knees to reveal handsome legs. She is young. Her hair is deep, rich auburn. Her eyes are pale; at this distance, I cannot make out the precise color. She is dressed simply. She is younger than thirty. She wears a dark green coat and her lipstick has a purplish tinge. Her lips are full, her nose slender, high-bridged, her eyebrows carefully plucked.

I know her.

I have spent the past three nights with her in my room. She is the one. Ridden, she came to me, and ridden, I slept with her. I am certain of this. The veil of memory opens; I see her slim body naked on my bed.

How can it be that I remember this?

It is too strong to be an illusion. Clearly this is something that I have been permitted to remember for reasons I cannot comprehend. And I remember more. I remember her soft gasping sounds of pleasure. I know that my own body did not betray me those three nights, nor did I fail her need.

And there is more. A memory of sinuous music; a scent of youth in her hair; the rustle of winter trees. Somehow she brings back to me a time of innocence, a time when I am young and girls are mysterious, a time of parties and dances and warmth and secrets.

I am drawn to her now.

There is an etiquette about such things, too. It is in poor taste to approach someone you have met while being ridden. Such an encounter gives you no privilege; a stranger remains a stranger, no matter what you and she may have done and said during your involuntary time together.

Yet I am drawn to her.

Why this violation of taboo? Why this raw breach of etiquette? I have never done this before. I have been scrupulous.

But I get to my feet and walk along the step on which I have been sitting, until I am below her, and I look up, and automatically she folds her ankles together and angles her knees as if in awareness that her position is not a modest one. I know from that gesture that she is not ridden now. My eyes meet hers. Her eyes are hazy green. She is beautiful, and I rack my memory for more details of our passion.

I climb step by step until I stand before her.

"Hello," I say.

She gives me a neutral look. She does not seem to recognize me. Her eyes are veiled, as one's eyes often are, just after the Passenger has gone. She purses her lips and appraises me in a distant way.

"Hello," she replies coolly. "I don't think I know you."

"No. You don't. But I have the feeling you don't want to be alone just now. And I know I don't." I try to persuade her with my eyes that my motives are decent. "There's snow in the air," I say. "We can find a warmer place. I'd like to talk to you."

"About what?"

"Let's go elsewhere, and I'll tell you. I'm Charles Roth."

"Helen Martin."

She gets to her feet. She still has not cast aside her cool neutrality; she is suspicious, ill at ease. But at least she is willing to go with me. A good sign.

"Is it too early in the day for a drink?" I ask.

"I'm not sure. I hardly know what time it is."  
"Before noon."

"Let's have a drink anyway," she says, and we both smile.

We go to a cocktail lounge across the street. Sitting face to face in the darkness, we sip drinks, daiquiri for her, bloody mary for me. She relaxes a little. I ask myself what it is I want from her. The pleasure of her company, yes. Her company in bed? But I have already had that pleasure, three nights of it, though she does not know that. I want something more. Something more. What?

Her eyes are bloodshot. She has had little sleep these past three nights. I say, "Was it very unpleasant for you?"

"What?"

"The Passenger."

A whiplash of reaction crosses her face. "How did you know I've had a Passenger?"

"I know."

"We aren't supposed to talk about it."

"I'm broadminded," I tell her. "My Passenger left me some time during the night. I was ridden since Tuesday afternoon."

"Mine left me about two hours ago, I think." Her cheeks color. She is doing something daring, talking like this. "I was ridden since Monday night. This was my fifth time."

"Mine also."

We toy with our drinks. Rapport is growing, almost without the need of words. Our recent experiences with Passengers give us something in common, although Helen does not realize how intimately we shared those experiences.

We talk. She is a designer of display windows. She has a small apartment several blocks from here. She lives alone. She asks me what I do. "Securities analyst," I tell her. She smiles. Her teeth are flawless. We have a second round of drinks. I am positive, now, that this is the girl who was in my room when I was ridden.

A seed of hope grows in me. It was a happy chance that brought us together again, so soon after we parted as dreamers. A happy chance, too, that some vestige of the dream lingered in my mind.

We have shared something, who knows what, and it must have been good to leave such a vivid imprint on me, and now I want to come to her conscious, aware, my own master, and renew that relationship, making it a real one this time. It is not proper, for I am trespassing on a privilege that is not mine except by virtue of our Passengers' brief presence in us. Yet I need her. I want her.

She seems to need me, too, without realizing who I am. But fear holds her back. I am frightened of frightening her, and I do not try to press my advantage too quickly. Perhaps she would take me to her apartment with her now, perhaps not, but

I do not ask. We finish our drinks. We arrange to meet by the library steps again tomorrow. My hand momentarily brushes hers. Then she is gone.

I fill three ashtrays that night. Over and over I debate the wisdom of what I am doing. But why not leave her alone? I have no right to follow her. In the place our world has become, we are wisest to remain apart.

And yet—there is that stab of half-memory when I think of her. The blurred lights of lost chances behind the stairs, of girlish laughter in second-floor corridors, of stolen kisses, of tea and cake. I remember the girl with the orchid in her hair, and the one in the spangled dress, and the one with the child's face and the woman's eyes, all so long ago, all lost, all gone, and I tell myself that this one I will not lose, I will not permit her to be taken from me.

Morning comes, a quiet Saturday. I return to the library, hardly expecting to find her there, but she is there, on the steps, and the sight of her is like a reprieve. She looks wary, troubled; obviously she has done much thinking, little sleeping. Together we walk along Fifth Avenue. She is quite close to me, but she does not take my arm. Her steps are brisk, short, nervous.

I want to suggest that we go to her apartment instead of to the cocktail lounge. In these days we must move swiftly while we are free. But I know it would be a mistake to think of this as a matter of tactics. Coarse haste would be fatal, bringing me perhaps an ordinary victory, a numbing defeat within it. In any event her mood hardly seems promising. I look at her, thinking of string music and new snowfalls, and she looks toward the gray sky.

She says, "I can feel them watching me all the time. Like vultures swooping overhead, waiting, waiting. Ready to pounce."

"But there's a way of beating them. We can grab little scraps of life when they're not looking."

"They're *always* looking."

"No," I tell her. "There can't be enough of them for that. Sometimes they're looking the other way. And while they are, two people can come together and try to share warmth."

"But what's the use?"

"You're too pessimistic, Helen. They ignore us for months at a time. We have a chance. We have a chance."

But I cannot break through her shell of fear. She is paralyzed by the nearness of the Passengers, unwilling to begin anything for fear it will be snatched away by our tormentors. We reach the building where she lives, and I hope she will relent and invite me in. For an instant she wavers, but only for an instant: she takes my hand in both of hers, and smiles, and the smile fades, and she is gone, leaving me only with the words, "Let's meet at the library again tomorrow. Noon."

I make the long chilling walk home alone.



Some of her pessimism seeps into me that night. It seems futile for us to try to salvage anything. More than that: wicked for me to seek her out, shameful to offer a hesitant love when I am not free. In this world, I tell myself, we should keep well clear of others, so that we do not harm anyone when we are seized and ridden.

I do not go to meet her in the morning.

It is best this way, I insist. I have no business trifling with her. I imagine her at the library, wondering why I am late, growing tense, impatient, then annoyed. She will be angry with me for breaking our date, but her anger will ebb, and she will forget me quickly enough.

Monday comes. I return to work.

Naturally, no one discusses my absence. It is as though I have never been away. The market is strong that morning. The work is challenging; it is mid-morning before I think of Helen at all. But once I think of her, I can think of nothing else. My cowardice in standing her up. The childishness of Saturday night's dark thoughts. Why accept fate so passively? Why give in? I want to fight, now, to carve out a pocket of security despite the odds. I feel a deep conviction that it can be done. The Passengers may never bother the two of us again, after all. And that flickering smile of hers outside her building Saturday, that momentary glow—it should have told me that behind her wall of fear she felt the same hopes. She was waiting for me to lead the way. And I stayed home instead.

At lunchtime I go to the library, convinced it is futile.

But she is there. She paces along the steps; the wind slices at her slender figure. I go to her.

She is silent a moment. "Hello," she says finally.

"I'm sorry about yesterday."

"I waited a long time for you."

I shrug. "I made up my mind that it was no use to come. But then I changed my mind again."

She tries to look angry. But I know she is pleased to see me again—else why did she come here today? She cannot hide her inner pleasure. Nor can I. I point across the street to the cocktail lounge.

"A daiquiri?" I say. "As a peace offering?"

"All right."

Today the lounge is crowded, but we find a booth somehow. There is a brightness in her eyes that I have not seen before. I sense that a barrier is crumbling within her.

"You're less afraid of me, Helen," I say.

"I've never been afraid of you. I'm afraid of what could happen if we take the risks."

"Don't be. Don't be."

"I'm trying not to be afraid. But sometimes it seems so hopeless. Since *they* came here—"

"We can still try to live our own lives."

"Maybe."

"We have to. Let's make a pact, Helen. No more gloom. No more worrying about the terrible things that might just maybe happen. All right?"

A pause. Then a cool hand against mine.

"All right."

We finish our drinks, and I present my Credit Central to pay for them, and we go outside. I want her to tell me to forget about this afternoon's work and come home with her. It is inevitable, now, that she will ask me, and better sooner than later.

We walk a block. She does not offer the invitation. I sense the struggle inside her, and I wait, letting that struggle reach its own resolution without interference from me. We walk a second block. Her arm is through mine, but she talks only of her work, of the weather, and it is a remote, arm's-length conversation. At the next corner she swings around, away from her apartment, back toward the cocktail lounge. I try to be patient with her.

I have no need to rush things now, I tell myself. Her body is not a secret to me. We have begun our relationship topsy-turvy, with the physical part first; now it will take time to work backward to the more difficult part that some people call love.

But of course she is not aware that we have known each other that way. The wind blows swirling snowflakes in our faces, and somehow the cold sting awakens honesty in me. I know what I must say. I must relinquish my unfair advantage.

I tell her, "While I was ridden last week, Helen, I had a girl in my room."

"Why talk of such things now?"

"I have to, Helen. You were the girl."

She halts. She turns to me. People hurry past us in the street. Her face is very pale, with dark red spots growing in her cheeks.

"That's not funny, Charles."

"It wasn't meant to be. You were with me from Tuesday night to early Friday morning."

"How can you possibly know that?"

"I do. I do. The memory is clear. Somehow it remains, Helen. I see your whole body."

"Stop it, Charles."

"We were very good together," I say. "We must have pleased our Passengers because we were so good. To see you again—it was like waking from a dream, and finding that the dream was real, the girl right there—"

"No!"

"Let's go to your apartment and begin again."

She says, "You're being deliberately filthy, and I don't know why, but there wasn't any reason for you to spoil things. Maybe I was with you and maybe I wasn't, but you wouldn't know it, and if you did know it you should keep your mouth shut about it, and—"

"You have a birthmark the size of a dime," I say, "about three inches below your left breast."

She sobs and hurls herself at me, there in the street. Her long silvery nails rake my cheeks. She pummels me. I seize her. Her knees assail me. No one pays attention; those who pass by assume we are ridden, and turn their heads. She is all fury, but I have my arms around hers like metal bands, so that she can only stamp and snort, and her body is close against mine. She is rigid, anguished.

In a low, urgent voice I say, "We'll defeat them, Helen. We'll finish what they started. Don't fight me. There's no reason to fight me. I know, it's a fluke that I remember you, but let me go with you and I'll prove that we belong together."

"Let—go—"

"Please. Please. Why should we be enemies? I don't mean you any harm. I love you, Helen. Do you remember, when we were kids, we could play at being in love? I did; you must have done it too. Sixteen, seventeen years old. The whispers, the conspiracies—all a big game and we knew it. But the game's over. We can't afford to tease and run. We have so little time, when we're free—we have to trust, to open ourselves—"

"It's wrong."

"No. Just because it's the stupid custom for two people brought together by Passengers to avoid one another, that doesn't mean we have to follow it. Helen—Helen—"

Something in my tone registers with her. She ceases to struggle. Her rigid body softens. She looks up at me, her tear-streaked face thawing, her eyes blurred.

"Trust me," I say. "Trust me, Helen!"

She hesitates. Then she smiles.

In that moment I feel the chill at the back of my skull, the sensation as of a steel needle driven deep through bone. I stiffen. My arms drop away from her. For an instant, I lose touch, and when the mists clear all is different.

"Charles?" she says. "Charles?"

Her knuckles are against her teeth. I turn, ignoring her, and go back into the cocktail lounge. A young man sits in one of the front booths. His dark hair gleams with pomade; his cheeks are smooth. His eyes meet mine.

I sit down. He orders drinks. We do not talk.

My hand falls on his wrist, and remains there. The bartender, serving the drinks, scowls but says nothing. We sip our cocktails and put the drained glasses down.

"Let's go," the young man says.

I follow him out.

## FREDERIK POHL

# The Tunnel under the World

Before he was a science fiction writer, Frederik Pohl was a science fiction editor who worked at the pulp magazines *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*, where he provided opportunities for James Blish, Cyril M. Kornbluth, Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight, and other colleagues in the Futurian science fiction society. Much of his career until 1980 was divided between writing and either serving as a literary agent for science fiction writers or shaping editorial policy on the fiction published at publishing houses or science fiction magazines. His earliest novels, written in collaboration with Cyril M. Kornbluth, show the impact of his familiarity with science fiction at all levels of conception. *The Space Merchants*, *Gladiator at Law*, and *Wolffbane* are among the wittiest satires in all science fiction, not only for their speculative extrapolations of the absurdities of American culture, but for their understanding of the appropriateness of science fiction constructs for elaborating that absurdity. Pohl is an insightful observer of modern society and its ills and a number of his short stories in the years following World War II are perceptive and even prophetic social critiques, notably "The Midas Plague," about consumerism run amuck; "What to Do till the Analyst Comes," a dark comedy about the culture of addiction; and "The Snowmen," which foresees the energy crisis and the greenhouse effect. Much of Pohl's fiction from this period has been collected in *Alternating Current*, *The Case against Tomorrow*, *Tomorrow Times Seven*, *The Man Who Ate the World*, and *Turn Left at Thursday*. Pohl hit his stride as a novelist in the 1970s with his Heechee chronicles, comprising *Gateway*, *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*, *Heechee Rendezvous*, *The Annals of Heechee*, and *The Gateway Trip*. The central idea of this series—an apparently abandoned space transportation terminus created by a sophisticated alien race that gives humans access to unpredictable adventures on interstellar worlds—gave Pohl the perfect instrument for taking the measure of human motives and objectives in the face of the unknown. *Man-Plus*, in which a man who loses more than he gains when he agrees to physical transformation that will allow him to adapt to the Martian environment, and *Jem*, about an earth colony doomed to recapitulate the aggressions and prejudices that have destroyed the mother planet, are among his most memorable works. In addition to his scores of novels and short-fiction collections, Pohl has written essays on the craft of science fiction,

Birdie was waiting in the lobby when the mail came. He was so eager to open the envelope that he tore his essay in two getting it out. The same afternoon, without even bothering to get drunk, Birdie enlisted in the US Marines to go defend democracy in Burma.

Immediately after his swearing-in, the sergeant came forward and slipped the black mask with his ID number stencilled on the brow over Birdie's sullen face. His number was USMC100-7011-D07. He was a guerrilla now.

## HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK

GENE WOLFE

Pretty Miss Bushnan's suite was all red acrylic and green-dyed leather. Real leather, very modern—red acrylic and green, real leather were the modern things this year. But it made her Louis XIV secretary, Sal, look terribly out of place.

Miss Bushnan had disliked the suite from the day she moved in—though she could hardly complain, when there was a chance that the entire city of Geneva and the sovereign Swiss nation might be offended. This evening she did her best to like red and green, and in the meantime turned her eyes from them to the cool relief of the fountain. It was a copy of a Cellini salt dish and lovely, no matter how silly a fountain indoors on the hundred and twenty-fifth floor might be. In a characteristic reversal of feeling she found herself wondering what sort of place she might have gotten if she had had to find one for herself, without reservations, at the height of the tourist season. Three flights up in some dingy suburban *pension*, no doubt.

So bless the generosity of the sovereign Swiss Republic. Bless the openhanded city of Geneva. Bless the hotel. And bless the United Nations Conference on Human Value, which brought glory to the Swiss Republic et cetera and inspired the free mountaineers to grant free hotel suites in the height of the season even to non-voting Conference observers such as she. Sal had brought her in a gibson a few minutes ago, and she picked it up from the edge of the fountain to sip, a little surprised to see that it was already three-quarters gone; *red and green*.

A brawny, naked triton half-reclined, water streaming from his hair and beard, dripping from his mouth, dribbling from his ears. His eyes, expressionless and smooth as eggs, wept for her. Balancing her empty glass carefully on the rim again, she leaned forward and stroked his smooth, wet stone flesh. Smiling she told him—mentally—how handsome he was, and he blushed pink lemonade at the compliment. She thought of herself taking off her clothes and

climbing in with him, the cool water soothing her face, which now felt hot and flushed. Not, she told herself suddenly, that she would metamorphosed to flesh. If she wanted men in her bed she could find ten any evening, and afterward edit the whole adventure from Sal's memory bank. She wanted a man, but she wanted only one who lived in the back of her skull, the woman the gibson had not quite drowned, reminded her, had proved at his trial to be Aaron). The triton vanished and Brad was there instead, laughing and dripping Atlantic water on the sand as he threw up his arms to catch the towel she flung him. Brad running through the surf... Sal interrupted her reverie, rolling in on silent casters. 'A gentleman to see you, Miss Bushnan.' Sal had real metal drawer-pulls on her false drawers, and they jingled softly when she stopped to deliver her message, like costume jewelry.

'Who?' Miss Bushnan straightened up, pushing a stray wisp of brown hair away from her face.

Sal said blankly, 'I don't know.' The gibson had made Miss Bushnan feel pleasantly muzzy, but even so the blankness came through as slightly suspicious.

'He didn't give you his name or a card?'

'He did, Miss Bushnan, but I can't read it. Even though, as I'm sure you're already aware, Miss Bushnan, there's an Italian language software package for me for only two hundred dollars. It includes reading, writing, speaking, and an elementary knowledge of great Italian art.'

'The advertising package,' Miss Bushnan said with wasted sarcasm, 'is free. And compulsory with your lease.'

'Yes,' Sal said. 'Isn't it wonderful?'

Miss Bushnan swung around in the green leather chair from which she had been watching the fountain. 'He did give you a card. I see it in one of your pigeonholes. Take it out and look at it.'

As if the Louis XIV secretary had concealed a silver snake, one of Sal's arms emerged. With steel fingers like nails it took the card and held it in front of a swirl of ornament hiding a scanner.

'Now,' Miss Bushnan said patiently, 'pretend that what you're reading isn't Italian. Let's say instead that it's English that's been garbled by a translator post-processor error. What's your best guess at the original meaning?'

'His Holiness Pope Honorius V...'  
'Ah,' Miss Bushnan sat up in her chair. 'Please show the gentleman in.'

With a faint hum of servomotors Sal rolled away. There was just time for a last fragment of daydream. Brad with quiet eyes alone with her on the beach at Cape Cod. Talking about the past, talking about the divorce, Brad really, *really* sorry...

The Pope wore a plain dark suit and a white satin tie embroidered in gold with the triple crown. He was an elderly man, never tall and now stooped. Miss Bushnan rose. She sat beside him every day at the council sessions, and had occasionally exchanged a few words with him during the refreshment breaks (he had a glass of red wine usually, she good English tea or the horrible Swiss coffee laced with brandy), but it had never so much as occurred to her that he might ever have anything to discuss with her in private.

'Your Holiness,' she said as smoothly as the gibson would let her manage the unfamiliar words, 'this is an unexpected pleasure.'

Sal chimed in with, 'May we offer you something?' and looking sidelong Miss Bushnan saw that she had put Scotch, a bottle of club soda, and two glasses of ice on her fold-out writing shelf.

The Pope waved her away, and when he had settled in his chair said pointedly, 'I deeply appreciate your hospitality, but I wonder if it would be possible to speak with you privately.'

Miss Bushnan said, 'Of course,' and waited until Sal had coasted off in the direction of the kitchen. 'My secretary bothers you, Your Holiness?'

Taking a cigar from the recesses of his coat, the Pope nodded. 'I'm afraid she does. I have never had much sympathy with furniture that talks—you don't mind if I smoke?' He had only the barest trace of an Italian accent.

'If it makes you more comfortable I should prefer it.'

He smiled in appreciation of the little speech, and struck an old-fashioned kitchen match on the imitation marble of the fountain. It left no mark, and when he tossed in the matchstick a moment later, it bobbed only twice in the crystal water before being whisked away. 'I suppose I'm out of date,' the Pope continued. 'But back in my youth when people speculated about the possibility of those things we always thought of them as being shaped more or less like us. Something like a suit of armour.'

'I can't imagine why,' Miss Bushnan said. 'You might as well

shape a radio like a human mouth—or a TV screen like a keyhole. The Pope chuckled. 'I didn't say I was going to defend the idea. I only remarked that that was what we expected.'

'I'm sure they must have considered it, but—'

'But too much extra work would have had to go into just making it look human,' the Pope continued for her, 'and besides, a furniture cabinet is much cheaper than articulated metal and doesn't make the robot look dead when it's turned off.'

She must have looked flustered because he continued, smiling. 'You Americans are not the only manufacturers, you see. It happens that a friend of mine is president of Olivetti. A skeptic like all of them today, but...'

The sentence trailed away in a shrug and a puff of smoke from the black cigar. Miss Bushnan recalled the time she had asked the French delegate about him. The French delegate was handsome in that very clean and spare fashion some Frenchmen have, and she liked him better than the paunchy businessman who represented her own country.

'You do not know who the man is who sits by you, mademoiselle? he asked quizzically. 'But that is most interesting. You see, I know who he is, but I do not know who *you* are. Except that I see you each day and you are much more pretty than the lady from Russia or the lady from Nigeria, and perhaps in your way as chic as that bad girl who reports on us for *Le Figaro*—but I hope not quite so full of tricks. Now I will trade you information.'

So she had had to tell him, feeling more like a fool each second as the milling crush of secretaries of delegates, and secretaries of secretaries, and unidentifiable people from the Swiss embassies of all the participating nations, swirled around them. When she had finished he said, 'Ah, it is kind of you to work for charity, and especially for one that does not pay you, but is it necessary? This is no longer the twentieth century after all, and the governments take care of most of us quite well.'

'That's what most people think; I suppose that's why so few give much any more. But we try to bring a little human warmth to the people we help, and I find I meet the class of people I want to meet in connection with it. I mean my co-workers, of course. It's really rather exclusive.'

He said, 'How very great-hearted you are,' with a little twist to the corner of his mouth that made her feel like a child talking to a

grown-up. 'But you asked the identity of the old gentleman. He is Pope.'

'Who?' Then she had realized what the word meant and added, 'I thought there weren't any more.'

'Oh no.' The French delegate winked. 'It is still there. Much, much smaller, but still there... But we are so crowded here, and I think you are tired of standing. Let me buy you a liqueur and I will tell you all about it.'

He had taken her to a place at the top of some building overlooking the lake, and it had been very pleasant listening to the waiters pointing him out in whispers to the tourists, even though the tourists were mostly Germans and no one anyone knew. They were given a table next to the window of course, and while they sipped and smoked and looked at the lake he told her, with many digressions, about a great-aunt who had been what he called 'a believer' and two ex-wives who had not. (History at Radcliffe had somehow left her with the impression that the whole thing had stopped with John XXIII, just as the Holy Roman Empire had managed to vanish out of sheer good manners when it was no longer wanted. On the teaching machines you filled in a table of Holy Roman Emperors and Popes and Sultans and such things by touching multiple-choice buttons. Then when you had it all done the screen glowed with rosy light for a minute—which was called reinforcement—and told you your grade. After which, unless you were lucky, there was another table to be filled—but Popes had disappeared and you put the Kings of Sweden in that column instead.)

She remembered having asked the French delegate, 'There are only a hundred thousand left? In the whole world?'

'That is my guess, of real believers. Of course many more who continue to use the name and perhaps have their children wetted if they think of it. It may be that that is too low—say a quarter million. But it has been growing less for a long time. Eventually—who knows? It may turn about and grow more. It would not be the first time that happened.'

She had said, 'It seems to me the whole thing should have been squashed a long time ago.'...

The Pope straightened his shoulders a little and flicked ashes into the fountain. 'At any rate, they make me uncomfortable,' he said. 'I always have the feeling they don't like me. I hope you don't mind.'



She smiled and said something about the convenience factor, and having Sal shipped in a crate from New York.

'I suppose it's a good thing my predecessor got the government to take responsibility for the Vatican,' the Pope said. 'We couldn't possibly staff it now, so we'd be using those things. Doubtless ours would have stained glass in them.'

Miss Bushnan laughed politely. Actually she felt like coughing. The Pope's cigar was the acrid, cheap kind smoked in the poorer sort of Italian cafés. Briefly she wondered if he himself had not been born into the lowest class. His hands were gnarled and twisted like an old gardener's, as though he'd been weeding all his life.

He was about to say something else, but Sal, re-entering on silent wheels, interrupted him. 'Phone, Miss Bushnan,' Sal said at her elbow.

She swivelled in her chair again and touched the 'On' and 'Record' buttons on the communications console, motioning as she did for the Pope to keep his seat. The screen lit up, and she said, 'Good evening,' to the office robot who had placed the call.

The robot answered with an announcement: 'Her Excellency the Delegate Plenipotentiary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Comrade Natasha Nikolayeva.' The image flickered and a striking blonde, about forty and somewhat overblown and overdressed, but with a remarkably good complexion and enormous eyes, replaced the robot. The Russian delegate had been an actress at one time and was currently the wife of a general; gossip said that she owed her position at the conference to favours granted to the Party Secretary. 'Good evening,' Miss Bushnan said again, and added, 'Comrade Nikolayeva.'

The Russian delegate gave her a dazzling smile. 'I called, darling, to ask if you like my little speech today. I was not too long? You did not find it difficult, wearing the headphones for translation?'

'I thought it was very moving,' Miss Bushnan said carefully. Actually, she had been appalled by the Russian delegate's references to Hitler's gas chambers and her cant phrases about restoring economic value to human life. It came to saying that if people had no value alive they should be made into soap, but she had no intention of telling the Russian delegate that.

'I convinced you?'

Brad made into soap. It should have been funny, but it wasn't. One of Brad's fingers slowly exposed as she scrubbed herself with

the bar. The Russian delegate was still looking at her, waiting for her to reply.

'It isn't necessary that you convince me, is it?' She smiled, trying to turn the question aside. 'I'm merely an observer, after all.'

'It is necessary to me,' the Russian delegate said, 'in my *soul*.' She pressed a hand flashing with diamonds against one upholstered breast. 'I myself feel it so deeply.'

'I'm sure you do. It was a wonderful speech. Very dramatic.'

'You understand, then.' The Russian delegate's mood changed in an instant. 'That is wonderful, darling. Listen, you know I am staying at our embassy here—would you have dinner with us? It will be Tuesday, and nearly everyone will be there.'

Miss Bushnan hesitated for a moment, looking briefly at the Pope, seated out of range of the Russian's vision, for guidance. He was expressionless.

'Dating, I will tell you a secret. I have sworn not to, but what is an oath when it is for you? The French delegate asked me to invite you. I would have in any case, of course, but he came to me. He is so shy; but if you come I have promised him I will seat you beside him. Do not say I told you.'

'I'd be delighted to come.'

'That too is wonderful then.' The Russian delegate's smile said: *We are women together and I love you, little one.*

'Tuesday? The day after the final vote?'

'Yes, Tuesday. I will be looking forward so much.'

When the screen went dark Miss Bushnan said to the Pope, 'Something's up.'

The Pope only looked at her, as though trying to weigh what might be behind her attractive but not arresting face and brown eyes.

After a moment Miss Bushnan continued, 'The French delegate might buy me a dinner, but he wouldn't ask for me as a dinner partner at an official function, and that Russian woman has been ignoring you and me ever since the conference opened. What's going on?'

'Yes,' the Pope said slowly, 'something has happened, as you say. I see you hadn't heard.'

'No.'

'I was more fortunate. The Portuguese delegate confides in me sometimes.'

'Will you tell me?'

'That is why I came. The delegates caucused this afternoon after the public session. They decided to ask for our votes at the final meeting.'

'Us?' Miss Bushnan was nonplussed. 'The observers?'

'Yes. The votes will have no legal validity, of course. They cannot be counted. But they want total unanimity—they want to get us down on the record.'

'I see,' said Miss Bushnan.

'Church and charity. People surrendered their faith in us to put it in the governments, but they're losing that now, and the delegates sense it. Perhaps the faith won't return to us, but there's a chance it might.'

'And so I'm to be wined and dined.'

The Pope nodded. 'And courted too, I should imagine. The French are very enthused about this; their penal system has been at loose ends ever since they lost their African colonies over fifty years ago.'

Miss Bushnan had been staring at her lap, smoothing her skirt absently where it lay across her knees; she looked up suddenly, meeting his eyes. 'And you? What are they going to offer you?'

'Not the lost sees of eastern Europe, you may be sure. Mostly flattery, I suspect.'

'And if we oppose them—'

'If we oppose them we will be raising standards about which all the millions who detest the idea, and all the millions more who will come to detest it when they see it in operation, can rally.'

'My husband—my former husband, technically—is in prison, Your Holiness. Did you know that?'

'No, of course not. If I had—'

'We plan to be remarried when he is released, and I know from visiting him what the alternative to the motion is. I know what we've got now. It's not as though they're going to be snatched from some Arcadia.'

Unexpectedly Sal was at her elbow again. 'Phone, Miss Bushnan.' The American delegate's puffy face filled the screen. 'Miss—ah—Bushnan?'

She nodded.

'This is—ah—a pleasure I have had to postpone too long.'

In order to save him time she said, 'I've heard about the decision to ask the observers to vote.'

'Good, good.' The American delegate drummed his fingers on his desk and seemed to be trying to avoid her eyes. 'Miss Bushnan, are you aware of the—ah—financial crisis now confronting our nation?'

'I'm not an economist—'

'But you are an informed laywoman. You know the situation. Miss Bushnan, there are close to a quarter of a million men and women in state and federal prisons today, and to maintain each of them there costs—costs us, Miss Bushnan, the taxpayers—five thousand dollars a year *each*. That's a total of a billion dollars a year.'

'I believe you brought out those figures during your speech at the third session.'

'Perhaps I did. But we are all interested in restoring the pre-eminent place the United States once held in world affairs, aren't we? Miss Bushnan, to do that we have had to take quite a few pages from the Soviet book. And it's been good for us. We've learned humility, if you like.'

She nodded.

'We used to believe in job security for everybody, and a wage based on classification and seniority. That was what we called Free Enterprise, and we were proud of it. Well, the Communists showed us differently: incentives, and discipline for underachievers. They forced us to the wall with those until we learned our lesson, and now—well, you can say whatever you like, but by God things are better.'

'So I understand,' Miss Bushnan said. Here it came.

'Now they've got a new trick,' the American delegate continued. 'They used, you know, to have these gangs of—ah—labourers out in Siberia. Then one day some smart commissar thought to himself: By God, if the peasants can grow more vegetables on private plots, couldn't the prisoners be used more effectively that way too?'

'If I recall your speech correctly,' Miss Bushnan said, 'you pointed out that if half the federal and state prisoners could be leased out to private owners at five thousand a year, the revenue would take care of the remaining half.'

'Lessees, not owners,' the American delegate said. 'Lessees with option to renew. It will lift a billion dollar millstone from about our nation's neck.'

'But,' Miss Bushnan continued innocently, 'surely we could do



the same thing without entering into the international agreement being discussed here'

'No, no.' The American delegate waved a hand in protest. 'We should enter the world community with this. After all, Miss Bushnan, international trade is one of the few, and one of the strongest, cohesive forces. We need by all means to establish a supranational market structure.'

The Pope, sitting outside the range of the American delegate's view, said softly, 'Ask him if they're still going to call them slaves.' Miss Bushnan inquired obediently, 'Are you still going to call them slaves? I mean in the final agreement.'

'Oh, yes.' The American delegate leaned closer to the scanner and lowered his voice. 'In English language usage. I don't mind telling you, however, that we—I mean the British and Canadians as well as our own country—have had a hard time getting that one past the Soviets. It comes from the root-word 'slav', you know, and they don't like that. But it's a *selling* word. People like the idea of having slaves; robots have gotten us used to it and tranquilizers and anti-aggressants have made it practical; what's more, it's a link with the past at a time when too many such links are phasing out. People feel manipulated today, Miss Bushnan. They want to be master of someone themselves.'

'I see. And it will get them out of prison. Place them in decent surroundings.'

'Oh, it certainly will. And—ah—you asked about the necessity of an international agreement and an international market a moment ago. You must remember that our nation needs hard currencies very badly today; and we have the curse—or, ah—the blessing, blessing if you think of it in a positive fashion, of having the highest crime rate among major nations. The United States will be an exporter in this market, Miss Bushnan.'

'I see,' Miss Bushnan said again.

'You may have heard of some of these rumours about the Soviets pressing a certain number of—ah—country people into the market to satisfy the demand. These are slanders, of course, and in any event that sort of thing would be unthinkable in the United States. I understand you're a wealthy woman, Miss Bushnan; your father is in the government, I suppose?'

'He was,' Miss Bushnan said. 'He's dead now. The Department of Agriculture.'

'Then with a family background of public service you understand that in a democracy we have to listen to the voice of the people; and the people want this. The—ah—most recent polls have shown seventy-nine per cent favouring. I won't try to hide the fact that it would be an embarrassment to our country if you voted in opposition, and it would not benefit the organization you represent—in fact it would do it a great deal of harm.'

'Are you threatening us?'

'No, of course not. But I'm asking you to consider what would happen to your organization if you lost your tax-exempt status. I believe a vote in opposition to the motion might—ah—make Washington feel that you were engaged in political activity. That would mean loss of the exemption, naturally.'

'But a vote in favour of the motion wouldn't be political activity?'

'Washington would expect your organization to support this humanitarian cause as a matter of course. I doubt very much that the matter would come up. You must understand, Miss Bushnan, that when—ah—a measure as revolutionary as this is under consideration humanity must be practically unanimous. Even a token opposition could be disastrous.'

Paraphrasing the Pope, Miss Bushnan said, 'It would raise a standard about which all the millions who detest the idea could rally.'

'Millions is surely an exaggeration; thousands perhaps. But in principle you are correct, and that must not be allowed to happen. Miss Bushnan, Washington has sent me a dossier on you. Did you know that?'

'How could I?'

'Your former husband is confined in the federal penitentiary at Ossining, New York. In the letters you have exchanged both of you have stated an intention to remarry upon his release. Were those letters sincere, Miss Bushnan?'

'I don't see what my personal life has to do with this.'

'I merely wish to use your own case as an example—one which will strike home, so to speak. It will be at least five years before your former husband will be released under the present system; but if the motion passes it will be possible for you to lease—ah—' The American delegate paused, looking at some paper on his desk.

'Brad,' Miss Bushnan said.

'Yes, Brad. You could lease Brad from the government for those

five years. You would have him, he would have you, and your government would be twenty-five thousand dollars to the better as the direct result of your happiness. What's the matter with that, eh? In fact, in your case I think I could promise that your husband would be one of the first prisoners to be made available for the plan, and that he would be, so to speak, reserved. There would be no danger of someone else leasing him, if that's worrying you. Of course you would be expected to supervise him.'

Miss Bushnan nodded slowly. 'I understand.'

'May I ask then if you intend to support the measure?'

'I hesitate to tell you. I know you're going to misunderstand me.'

'Oh?' The American delegate leaned forward until his face filled the small screen. 'In what way?'

'You think that this is going to help Brad and me, and that because of that I'm going to consent to your selling the Americans you don't want, selling them to die in somebody's mines. You are wrong. This is going to ruin whatever may be left between Brad and me, and I know it. I know how Brad is going to feel when his wife is also his keeper. It will strip away whatever manhood he has left, and before the five years are out he'll hate me—just as he will if I don't buy him when he knows I could. But you are going to do this thing whether the organization I represent favours it or not, and to save this organization—for the good it does now and the good it will do among the slaves when you have them—I am going to vote for the motion.'

'You will support the motion?' His eyes seemed to bore into her.

'I will support the motion. Yes.'

'Fine.'

The American delegate's hand was moving toward the 'Off' switch on his console, but Miss Bushnan called, 'Wait. What about the other observer? The Pope?'

'He can be taken care of, I feel sure. His Church is almost entirely dependent today on the goodwill of the Italian government.'

'He hasn't agreed yet?'

'Don't worry,' the American delegate said, 'the Italians will be contacting him.' His hand touched the switch and his image vanished.

'So you gave in,' the Pope said.

'And you wouldn't?' Miss Bushnan asked. 'Even if you knew you'd be running your Church from an empty store the day after you voted no?'

'I might abstain,' the Pope admitted slowly, 'but I could never bring myself to give a favourable vote.'

'How about lying to them, if that were the only way you could get to vote?'

The Pope looked at her in surprise, then his eyes smiled.

Miss Bushnan continued, 'Could you tell them you were going to vote yes when you were really going to vote against them. Your Holiness?'

'I don't suppose I could. It would be a matter of my position, if you understand me, as well as my conscience.'

'Fortunately,' Miss Bushnan said, 'I don't feel that way. Hasn't it occurred to you that this business of asking for our votes must be predicated on the idea that they'll be favourable? It hasn't been announced, has it?'

The Pope nodded. 'I see what you mean. If the decision had been made public they couldn't change it; but as it is, if they don't like what they hear from us—'

'But they'll have every news agency in the world there when the vote is actually taken.'

'You are a clever girl.' The Pope shook his head. 'It is a lesson to me to think of how very much I have underestimated you, sitting in the gallery there beside me all these days, and even this evening when I came here. But that is good; God wants me to learn humility, and He has chosen a child to teach it, as He so often does. I hope you understand that after the council I will be giving you all the support I can. I'll publish an encyclical—'

'If you feel you can't lie to them,' Miss Bushnan interposed practically, 'we'll need some excuse for your being absent from the vote.'

'I have one,' the Pope said. 'I don't'—he paused—'suppose you've heard of Mary Catherine Bryan?'

'I don't think so. Who is she?'

'She is—or at least she was—a nun. She was the last nun, actually, for the past three years. Ever since Sister Carmela Rose died. I received a call this morning telling me Mary Catherine passed away last night, and her rites are to be this coming Tuesday. The government still lets us use St Peter's sometimes for that sort of thing.'

'So you won't be here.' Miss Bushnan smiled. 'But a nun sounds so interesting. Tell me about her.'

'There isn't a great deal to tell. She was a woman of my mother's

generation, and for the last four years she lived in an apartment on the Via del Fori. Alone, after Sister Carmela Rose died. They never got along too well, actually, being from different orders, but Mary Catherine cried for weeks, I remember, after Sister Carmela Rose was gone.

'Did she wear those wonderful flowing robes you see in pictures?' 'Oh, no,' the Pope said. 'You see, nuns no longer have to—' He stopped in the middle of the sentence, and the animation left his face, making him at once a very old man. 'I'm sorry,' he said after a moment, 'I had forgotten. I should have said that for the last seventy years or so of their existence nuns no longer wore those things. They abandoned them, actually, just a few years before we priests dropped our Roman collars. You have to understand that from time to time I have tried to persuade someone to . . .'

'Yes?'

'Well, the old phrase was "take the veil". It would have kept the tradition alive and would have been so nice for Mary Catherine and Sister Carmela Rose. I always told the girls all the things they wouldn't have to give up, and they always said they'd think about it, but none of them ever came back.'

'I'm sorry your friend is dead,' Miss Bushnan said simply. To her surprise she found she really was.

'It's the end of something that had lived almost as long as the Church itself—oh, I suppose it will be revived in fifty or a hundred years when the spirit of the world turns another corner, but a revival is never really the same thing. As though we tried to put the Kyrie back into the mass now.'

Miss Bushnan, who did not know what he was talking about, said, 'I suppose so, but—'

'But what has it to do with the matter at hand? Not a great deal, I'm afraid. But while they are voting that is where I shall be. And afterward perhaps we can do something.' He stood up, adjusting his clothing, and from somewhere in the back of the apartment Sal came rolling out with his hat positioned on her writing shelf. It was red, Miss Bushnan noticed, but the feather in the band was black instead of green. As he put it on he said, 'We started among slaves, more or less, you know. Practically all the early Christians who weren't Jews were either slaves or freedmen. I'll be going now to say the funeral mass of the last nun. Perhaps I'll also live to administer the vows of the first.'

Sal announced, 'Saint Macrina, the sister of Saint Basil, founded the first formal order of nuns in three fifty-eight.' The Pope smiled and said, 'Quite right, my dear,' and Miss Bushnan said vaguely, 'I bought her the World's Great Religions package about a year ago. I suppose that's how she knew who you were.' She was thinking about Brad again, and if the Pope made any reply she failed to hear it. Brad a slave . . .

Then the door shut and Sal muttered, 'I just don't trust that old man, he makes me feel creepy,' and Miss Bushnan knew he was gone.

She told Sal, 'He's harmless, and anyway he's going to Rome now,' and only then, with the tension draining away, did she feel how great it had been. 'Harmless,' she said again. 'Bring me another drink, please, Sal.'

Tuesday would be the day. The whole world would be watching, and everyone at the conference would be in red and green, but she would wear something blue and stand out. Something blue and her pearls. In her mind Brad would somehow be waiting behind her, naked to the waist, with his wrists in bronze manacles. 'I'll have them made at Tiffany's,' she said, speaking too softly for Sal, busy with the shaker in the kitchen, to hear. 'Tiffany's, but no gems or turquoise or that sort of junk.'

Just the heavy, solid bronze with perhaps a touch here and there of silver. Sal would make him keep them polished.

She could hear herself telling their friends, 'Sal makes him keep them shined. I tell him if he doesn't I'm going to send him back— just kidding, of course.'

## Eurema's Dam

Eccentric, outrageous, and packed with bizarre characters and incidents, R. A. Lafferty's stylistically unconventional short stories are as much a part of the oral tall tale tradition as they are fantasy and science fiction. Lafferty began publishing fiction in the 1960s and was a prominent figure in science fiction's iconoclastic New Wave, where his gnomic, challenging variations on standard science fiction and fantasy themes bridged the gap between speculative and mainstream fiction. A stylistic maverick, Lafferty fills his stories with puns and wordplay that create incongruous associations between their disparate elements. The style of his narratives is similarly adventurous and includes mixtures of sermons, riddles, doggerel, epigrams, imagined reference works, and textbook treatises. He has written on subjects ranging from supernatural conspiracy to evil adolescents, celestial revolutionaries, Native American lore, utopia, demons, and carnal love. In his novels he is fond of creating modern corollaries for classic myths and legends. *Space Chanitey* works the basic story of Homer's *Odyssey* into a wild space opera. In the Argos cycle, which includes *Archipelago*, *The Devil Is Dead*, and *Episodes of the Argo*, Jason and the Argonauts are reincarnated as members of a former World War II battle unit. In *Past Master*, Sir Thomas More is transported in time and space to the planet Astrobe, where he falls afoul of political intrigue and suffers his seemingly inescapable martyr's death. Lafferty's preoccupation with religious archetypes and the battle (and sometimes collusion) between Good and Evil gives much of his writing a mythic character. His short fiction has been collected in *Nine Hundred Grandmothers Strange Doings*, *Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?* and numerous other collections. His novels include *The Reefs of Earth*, *Fourth Mansions*, *The Annals of Klepsis*, and *Arrive at Easternwine*. He has also written a volume of essays on fantastic literature, *It's Down the Slippery Cellar Stairs*. Interviews with him have been collected in *Cranky Old Man from Tulsa*.

HE WAS ABOUT the last of them.

What? The last of the great individualists? The last of the true creative geniuses of the century? The last of the sheer precursors?

No. No. He was the last of the dots.

Kids were being born smarter all the time when he came along, and they would be so forever more. He was about the last dumb kid ever born.

Even his mother had to admit that Albert was a slow child. What else can you call a boy who doesn't begin to talk till he is four years old, who won't learn to handle a spoon till he is six, who can't operate a doorknob till he is eight? What else can you say about one who put his shoes on the wrong feet and walked in pain? And who had to be told to close his mouth after yawning?

Some things would always be beyond him—like whether it was the big hand or the little hand of the clock that told the hours. But this wasn't something serious. He never did care what time it was.

When, about the middle of his ninth year, Albert made a breakthrough at telling his right hand from his left, he did it by the most ridiculous set of mnemonics ever put together. It had to do with the way a dog turns around before lying down, the direction of whirlpools and whirlwinds, the side a cow is milked from and a horse is mounted from, the direction of twist of oak and sycamore leaves, the maze patterns of rock moss and of tree moss, the cleavage of limestone, the direction of a hawk's wheeling, of a shrike's hunting, and of a snake's coiling (remembering that the mountain boomer is an exception, and that it isn't a true snake), the lay of cedar fronds and of balsam fronds, the twist of a hole dug by a skunk and by a badger (remembering pungently that skunks sometimes use old badger holes). Well, Albert finally learned to remember which was right and which was left, but an observant boy would have learned his right hand from his left without all that nonsense.

Albert never learned to write a readable hand. To get by in school he cheated. From a bicycle speedometer, a midget motor, tiny eccentric cams, and batteries stolen from his grandfather's hearing aid, Albert made a machine to write for him. It was small as a doodlebug and fitted onto a pen or pencil so that Albert could conceal it with his fingers. It formed the letters beautifully as Albert had set the cams to follow a copybook model. He triggered the different letters with keys no bigger than whiskers. Sure it was crooked, but what else can you do when you're too dumb to learn how to write passably?

Albert couldn't figure at all. He had to make another machine to figure for him. It was a palm-of-the-hand thing that would add and subtract and multiply and divide. The next year when he was in the ninth grade they gave him algebra, and he had to devise a flipper to go on the end of his gadget to work quadratic and simultaneous equations. If it weren't for such cheating Albert wouldn't have gotten any marks at all in school.

HE HAD ANOTHER difficulty when he came to his fifteenth year. People, that is an understatement. There should be a stronger word than "difficulty" for it. Albert was afraid of girls.

What to do?

"I will build me a machine that is not afraid of girls," Albert said. He set to work on it. He had it nearly finished when a thought came to him: "But no machine is afraid of girls. How will this help me?"

His logic was at fault and analogy broke down. He did what he always did. He cheated.

He took the programming rollers out of an old player piano in the attic, found a gear case that would serve, used magnetized sheets instead of perforated music rolls, fed a copy of *Wormwood's Logic* into the matrix, and he had a logic machine that would answer questions.

"What's the matter with me that I'm afraid of girls?" Albert asked his logic machine.

"Nothing the matter with you," the logic machine told him. "It's logical to be afraid of girls. They seem pretty spooky to me too."

"But what can I do about it?"

"Wait for time and circumstances. They sure are slow. Unless you want to cheat—"

"Yes, yes, what then?"

"Build a machine that looks just like you, Albert, and talks just like you. Only make it smarter than you are, and not bashful. And, ah, Albert, there's a special thing you'd better put into it in case things go wrong. I'll whisper it to you. It's dangerous."

So Albert made Little Danny, a dummy who looked like him and talked like him, only he was smarter and not bashful. He filled Little Danny with quips from *Mad Magazine* and from *Quip*, and then they were set.

Albert and Little Danny went to call on Alice.

"Why, he's wonderful," Alice said. "Why can't you be like that, Albert? Aren't you wonderful, Little Danny. Why do you have to be so stupid, Albert, when Little Danny is so wonderful?"

"I, uh, uh, I don't know," Albert said. "Uh, uh, uh."

"He sounds like a fish with the hiccups," Little Danny said.

"You do, Albert, really you do!" Alice screamed. "Why can't you say smart things like Little Danny does, Albert? Why are you so stupid?"

This wasn't working out very well, but Albert kept on with it. He programmed Little Danny to play the ukulele and to sing. He wished that he could program himself to do it. Alice loved everything about Little Danny, but she paid no attention to Albert. And one day Albert had had enough.

"Wha-wha-what do we need with this dummy?" Albert asked. "I just made him to am-to amu-to to make you laugh. Let's go off and leave him."

"Go off with you, Albert?" Alice asked. "But you're so stupid. I tell you what:

Let's you and me go off and leave Albert, Little Danny. We can have more fun without him."

"Who needs him?" Little Danny asked. "Get lost, buster."

Albert walked away from them. He was glad that he'd taken his logic machine's advice as to the special thing to be built into Little Danny. Albert walked fifty steps. A hundred.

"Far enough," Albert said, and he pushed a button in his pocket.

Nobody but Albert and his logic machine ever did know what that explosion was. Tiny wheels out of Little Danny and small pieces of Alice rained down a little later, but there weren't enough frag fragments for anyone to identify.

Albert had learned one lesson from his logic machine: never make anything that you can't unmake.

Well, Albert finally grew to be a man, in years at least. He would always have something about him of a very awkward teen-ager. And yet he fought his own war against those who were teen-agers in years, and he defeated them completely. There was enmity between them forever. Albert hadn't been a very well-adjusted adolescent, and he hated the memory of it. And nobody ever mistook him for an adjusted man.

Albert was too awkward to earn a living at an honest trade. He was reduced to peddling his little tricks and contrivances to shysters and promoters. But he did back into a sort of fame, and he did become burdened with wealth.

He was too stupid to handle his own monetary affairs, but he built an actuary machine to do his investing and he became rich by accident. He built the damned thing too good and he regretted it.

Albert became one of that furtive group that has saddled us with all the mean things in our history. There was that Punic who couldn't learn the rich variety of hieroglyphic characters and who devised the crippled short alphabet for wan-wits. There was the nameless Arab who couldn't count beyond ten and who set up the ten-number system for babies and idiots. There was the double-Dutchman with his movable type who drove fine copy out of the world. Albert was of their miserable company.

Albert himself wasn't much good for anything. But he had in himself the low knack for making machines that were good at everything.

His machines did a few things. You remember that anciently there was smog in the cities. Oh, it could be drawn out of the air easily enough. All it took was a tickler. Albert made a tickler machine. He would set it fresh every morning. It would clear the air in a circle three hundred yards around his hovel and gather a little over a ton of residue every twenty-four hours. This residue was rich in large polysyllabic molecules which one of his chemical machines could use.

"Why can't you clear all the air?" the people asked him.

"This is as much of the stuff as Clarence Deoxyribonucleiconibus needs every day," Albert said. That was the name of this particular chemical machine.



"But we die of the smog," the people said. "Have mercy on us."  
"Oh, all right," Albert said. He turned it over to one of his reduplicating machines to make as many copies as were necessary.

YOU REMEMBER THAT once there was a teen-ager problem? You remember when those little buggers used to be mean? Albert got enough of them. There was something ungainly about them that reminded him too much of himself. He made a teen-ager of his own. It was rough. To the others it looked like one of themselves, the ring in the left ear, the dangling side-locks, the brass knucks and the long knife, the guitar pluck to jab in an eye. But it was incomparably rougher than the human teen-agers. It terrorized all in the neighborhood and made them behave, and dress like real people. And there was one thing about the teen-age machine that Albert made: it was made of such polarized metal and glass that it was invisible except to teen-ager eyes.

"Why is your neighborhood different?" the people asked Albert. "Why are there such good and polite teen-agers in your neighborhood and such mean ones everywhere else? It's as though something had spooked all those right around here."

"Oh, I thought I was the only one who didn't like the regular kind," Albert said. "Oh, no, no," the people answered him. "If there is anything at all you can do about them—"

So Albert turned his mostly invisible teen-ager machine over to one of his reduplicating machines to make as many copies as were necessary, and set one up in every neighborhood. From that day till this the teen-agers have all been good and polite and a little bit frightened. But there is no evidence of what keeps them that way except an occasional eye dangling from the jab of an invisible guitar pluck.

So the two most pressing problems of the latter part of the twentieth century were solved, but accidentally, and to the credit of no one.

AS THE YEARS went by, Albert felt his inferiority most when in the presence of his own machines, particularly those in the form of men. Albert just hadn't their urbanity or sparkle or wit. He was a clod beside them, and they made him feel it.

Why not? One of Albert's devices sat in the President's Cabinet. One of them was on the High Council of World-Watchers that kept the peace everywhere. One of them presided at Riches Unlimited, that private-public-international instrument that guaranteed reasonable riches to everyone in the world. One of them was the guiding hand in the Health and Longevity Foundation which provided those things to everyone. Why should not such splendid and successful machines look down on their shabby uncle who had made them?

"I'm rich by a curious twist," Albert said to himself one day, "and honored through a mistake in circumstance. But there isn't a man or a machine in the world

who is really my friend. A book here tells how to make friends, but I can't do it that way. I'll make one my own way."

So Albert set out to make a friend.

He made Poor Charles, a machine as stupid and awkward and inept as himself. "Now I will have a companion," Albert said, but it didn't work. Add two zeros together and you still have zero. Poor Charles was too much like Albert to be good for anything.

Poor Charles! Unable to think, he made a—(but wait a moleskin-gloved minute here, Colonel, this isn't going to work at all)—he made a machi—(but isn't this the same blamed thing all over again?)—he made a machine to think for him and to—

Hold it, hold it! That's enough. Poor Charles was the only machine that Albert ever made that was dumb enough to do a thing like that.

Well, whatever it was, the machine that Poor Charles made was in control of the situation and of Poor Charles when Albert came onto them accidentally. The machine's machine, the device that Poor Charles had constructed to think for him, was lecturing Poor Charles in a humiliating way.

"Only the inept and deficient will invent," that damned machine's machine was droning. "The Greeks in their high period did not invent. They used neither adjunct power nor instrumentation. They used, as intelligent men or machines will always use, slaves. They did not descend to gadgets. They, who did the difficult with ease, did not seek the easier way."

"But the incompetent will invent. The insufficient will invent. The depraved will invent. And knaves will invent."

Albert, in a seldom fit of anger, killed them both. But he knew that the machine of his machine had spoken the truth.

Albert was very much cast down. A more intelligent man would have had a hunch as to what was wrong. Albert had only a hunch that he was not very good at hunches and would never be. Seeing no way out, he fabricated a machine and named it Hunchy.

In most ways this was the worst machine he ever made. In building it he tried to express something of his unease for the future. It was an awkward thing in mind and mechanism, a misfit.

Albert's more intelligent machines gathered around and hooted at him while he put it together.

"Boy! Are you lost!" they taunted. "That thing is a primitive! To draw its power from the ambient! We talked you into throwing that away twenty years ago and setting up coded power for all of us."

"Uh—someday there may be social disturbances and all centers of power seized," Albert stammered. "But Hunchy would be able to operate if the whole world were wiped smooth."

"It isn't even tuned to our information matrix," they jibed. "It's worse than Poor Charles. That stupid thing practically starts from scratch."

"Maybe there'll be a new kind of itch for it," said Albert.

"It's not even housebroken!" the urbane machines shouted their indignation. "Look at that! Some sort of primitive lubrication all over the floor."

"Remembering my childhood, I sympathize," Albert said.

"What's it good for?" they demanded.

"Ah—it gets hunches," Albert mumbled.

"Duplication!" they shouted. "That's all you're good for yourself, and not very good at that. We suggest an election to replace you as—pardon our laughter—the head of these enterprises."

"Boss, I've got a hunch how we can block them there," the unfinished Hunchy whispered.

"They're bluffing," Albert whispered back. "My first logic machine taught me never to make anything that I can't unmake. I've got them there and they know it. I wish I could think up things like that myself."

"Maybe there will come an awkward time and I will be good for something," Hunchy said.

ONLY ONCE, AND that rather late in life, did a sort of honesty flare up in Albert. He did one thing (and it was a dismal failure) on his own. That was the night of the year of the double millennium when Albert was presented with the Finnerty-Hochmann Trophy, the highest award that the intellectual world could give. Albert was certainly an odd choice for it, but it had been noticed that almost every basic invention for thirty years could be traced back to him or to the devices with which he had surrounded himself.

You know the trophy. Atop it was Eurema, the synthetic Greek goddess of invention, with arms spread as if she would take flight. Below this was a stylized brain cut away to show the convoluted cortex. And below this was the coat of arms of the Academicians: Ancient Scholar rampant (argent); the Anderson Analyzer sinister (gules); the Mondeman Space-Drive dexter (vair). It was a fine work by Groben, his ninth period.

Albert had a speech composed for him by his speech-writing machine, but for some reason he did not use it. He went on his own, and that was disaster. He got to his feet when he was introduced, and he stuttered and spoke nonsense!

"Ah—only the sick oyster produces naure," he said, and they all gaped at him. What sort of beginning for a speech was that? "Or do I have the wrong creature?" Albert asked weakly.

"Eurema doesn't look like that!" Albert gawked out and pointed suddenly at the

trophy. "No, no, that isn't her at all. Eurema walks backward and is blind. And her mother is a brainless hulk."

Everybody was watching him with pained expression.

"Nothing rises without a leaven," Albert tried to explain, "but the yeast is itself a fungus and a disease. You be regularizers all, splendid and supreme! But you cannot live without the irregulars. You will die, and who will tell you that you are dead? When there are no longer any deprived or insufficient, *who will invent?* What will you do when there is none of us detectives left? Who will leaven your lump then?"

"Are you unwell?" the master of ceremonies asked him quietly. "Should you not make an end to it? People will understand."

"Of course I'm unwell. Always have been," Albert said. "What good would I be otherwise? You set the ideal that all should be healthy and well adjusted. No! No! Were we all well adjusted, we would ossify and die. The world is kept healthy only by some of the unhealthy minds lurking in it. The first implement made by man was not a scraper or celt or stone knife. It was a crutch, and it wasn't devised by a hale man."

"Perhaps you should rest," a functionary said in a low voice, for this sort of rambling nonsense talk had never been heard at an awards dinner before.

"Know you," said Albert, "that it is not the fine bulls and wonderful cattle who make the new paths. Only a crippled calf makes a new path. In everything that survives there must be an element of the incongruous. Hey, you know the woman who said, 'My husband is incongruous, but I never liked Washington in the summertime.'"

Everybody gazed at him in stupor.

"That's the first joke I ever made," Albert said lamely. "My joke-making machine makes them a lot better than I do." He paused and gaped, and gulped a big breath.

"Dolts!" he croaked out fiercely then. "What will you do for dolts when the last of us is gone? How will you survive without us?"

Albert had finished. He gaped and forgot to close his mouth. They led him back to his seat. His publicity machine explained that Albert was tired from overwork, and then that machine passed around copies of the speech that Albert was supposed to have given.

It had been an unfortunate episode. How noisome it is that the innovators are never great men, and that the great men are never good for anything but just being great men.

IN THAT YEAR a decree went forth from Caesar that a census of the whole country should be taken. The decree was from Cesare Panebianco, the President of the country. It was the decimal year proper for the census, and there was nothing unusual about the decree. Certain provisions, however, were made for taking a census of the drifters and decrepits who were usually missed, to examine them and to see why they were

so. It was in the course of this that Albert was picked up. If any man ever looked like a drifter and decrepit, it was Albert.

Albert was herded in with other derelicts, set down at a table, and asked tortuous questions. As:

"What is your name?"

He almost muffed that one, but he rallied and answered, "Albert."

"What time is it by that clock?"

They had him in his old weak spot. Which hand was which? He gaped and didn't answer.

"Can you read?" they asked him.

"Not without my—" Albert began. "I don't have with me my—No, I can't read very well by myself."

"Try."

They gave him a paper to mark up with true and false questions. Albert marked them all true, believing that he would have half of them right. But they were all false. The regularized people are partial to falsehood. Then they gave him a supply-the-word test on proverbs.

"——— is the best policy" didn't mean a thing to him. He couldn't remember the names of the companies that he had his own policies with.

"A——— in time saves nine" contained more mathematics than Albert could handle.

"There appear to be six unknowns," he told himself, "and only one positive value, nine. The equating verb 'saves' is a vague one. I cannot solve this equation. I am not even sure that it is an equation. If only I had with me my——"

But he hadn't any of his gadgets or machines with him. He was on his own. He left half a dozen other proverb fill-ins blank. Then he saw a chance to recoup. Nobody is so dumb as not to know one answer if enough questions are asked.

"——— is the mother of invention," it said.

"Stupidity," Albert wrote in his weird ragged hand. Then he sat back in triumph.

"I know that Eurema and her mother," he snickered. "Man, how I do know them!" But they marked him wrong on that one too. He had missed every answer to every test. They began to fix him a ticket to a progressive booby hatch where he might learn to do something with his hands, his head being hopeless.

A couple of Albert's urbane machines came down and got him out of it. They explained that, while he was a drifter and a derelict, yet he was a rich drifter and derelict, and that he was even a man of some note.

"He doesn't look it, but he really is—pardon our laughter—a man of some importance," one of the fine machines explained. "He has to be told to close his mouth after he has yawned, but for all that he is the winner of the Finnerty-Hochmann Trophy. We will be responsible for him."

ALBERT WAS MISERABLE as his fine machines took him out, especially when they asked that he walk three or four steps behind them and not seem to be with them. They gave him some pretty rough banter and turned him into a squirming worm of a man. Albert left them and went to a little hide-out he kept.

"I'll blow my crawfishing brains out," he swore. "The humiliation is more than I can bear. Can't do it myself, though. I'll have to have it done."

He set to work building a device in his hide-out.

"What you doing, boss?" Hunchy asked him. "I had a hunch you'd come here and start building something."

"I'm building a machine to blow my pumpkin-picking brains out," Albert shouted. "I'm too yellow to do it myself."

"Boss, I got a hunch there's something better to do. Let's have some fun."

"Don't believe I know how to," Albert said thoughtfully. "I built a fun machine once to do it for me. He had a real revel till he flew apart, but he never seemed to do anything for me."

"This fun will be for you and me, boss. Consider the world spread out. What is it?"

"It's a world too fine for me to live in any longer," Albert said. "Everything and all the people are perfect, and all alike. They're at the top of the heap. They've won it all and arranged it all neatly. There's no place for a clutter-up like me in the world. So I get out."

"Boss, I've got a hunch that you're seeing it wrong. You've got better eyes than that. Look again, real canny, at it. Now what do you see?"

"Hunchy, Hunchy, is that possible? Is that really what it is? I wonder why I never noticed it before. That's the way of it, though, now that I look closer.

"Six billion patsies waiting to be took! Six billion patsies without a defense of any kind! A couple of guys out for some fun, man, they could mow them down like fields of Albert-Improved Concho Wheat!"

"Boss, I've got a hunch that this is what I was made for. The world sure had been getting stuffy. Let's tie into it and eat off the top layer. Man, we can cut a swath."

"We'll inaugurate a new era!" Albert gloated. "We'll call it the Turning of the Worm. We'll have fun, Hunchy. We'll gobble them up like goobers. How come I never saw it like that before? Six billion patsies!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY began on this rather odd note.

## Inconstant Moon

Larry Niven established his credentials as a master of the hard-science-fiction story with his Nebula Award-winning novel *Ringworld*, about a ribbonlike planetary body with a million-mile radius and six-hundred-million-mile circumference that rings a remote star and poses unique technical problems in navigation and escape for its human inhabitants. The novel and its sequels *Ringworld Engineers* and *Ringworld Throne* are part of Niven's vast Tales of Known Space saga, an acclaimed future history of humankind's populating of interstellar space that has accommodated exploration of a wide variety of themes including alien cultures, immortality, time travel, terraforming, genetic engineering, and teleportation. The novels *The World of Plavvs*, *A Gift from Earth*, *Protector*, *The Patchwork Girl*, *The Integral Trees*, and *The Smoke Ring*, as well as the story collections *Neutron Star*, *The Shape of Space*, *Crashlander*, and *Flatlander*, elaborate an epic billion-and-a-half-year history that integrates innovative technologies with colorful developments of alien races and human and extraterrestrial interactions. The allure of Niven's invention can be measured by the seven volumes in the *Man-Kzin Wars* anthology series, which have attracted his colleagues in hard science fiction to contribute stories, bolstering the plausibility of the series through a shared-world sensibility. Niven has also written the novel *A World Out of Time*, a far-future projection in which human evolution leads to immortality, and the series of science fiction mystery stories collected in *The Long ARM of Gil Hamilton*. Much of his work at novel length has been written in collaboration. *The Mote in God's Eye*, coauthored by Jerry Pournelle, is a memorable first-contact story about the accidental discovery of an alien race determined to seed our solar system with its proliferating population. Niven and Pournelle have also written a sequel, *The Gripping Hand*, the disaster novel *Lucifer's Hammer*, and *Inferno*, which transports a science fiction writer to a Dantesque hell. With Steve Barnes, Niven has written *Dream Park*, *The Barsroom Project*, and *The Voodoo Game*, all set in a future amusement park where imagined realities are manifested through virtual reality. Niven has also written a series of fantasies concerned with primitive magic that includes *The Magic Goes Away* and *Time of the Warlock*.

I WAS WATCHING the news when the change came, like a flicker of motion at the corner of my eye. I turned toward the balcony window. Whatever it was, I was too late to catch it.

The moon was very bright tonight.

I saw that, and smiled, and turned back. Johnny Carson was just starting his monologue.

When the first commercials came on I got up to reheat some coffee. Commercials came in strings of three and four, going on midnight. I'd have time.

The moonlight caught me coming back. If it had been bright before, it was brighter now. Hypnotic. I opened the sliding glass door and stepped out onto the balcony.

The balcony wasn't much more than a railed ledge, with standing room for a man and a woman and a portable barbecue set. These past months the view had been lovely, especially around sunset. The Power and Light Company had been putting up a glass-slab-style office building. So far it was only a steel framework of open girders. Shadow-blackened against a red sunset sky, it tended to look stark and surrealistic and hellishly impressive.

Tonight . . .

I had never seen the moon so bright, not even in the desert. *Bright enough to read by*, I thought, and immediately, *but that's an illusion*. The moon was never bigger (I had read somewhere) than a quarter held nine feet away. It couldn't possibly be bright enough to read by.

It was only three-quarters full!

But, glowing high over the San Diego Freeway to the west, the moon seemed to dim even the streaming automobile headlights. I blinked against its light, and thought of men walking on the moon, leaving corrugated footprints. Once, for the sake of an article I was writing, I had been allowed to pick up a bone-dry moon rock and hold it in my hand . . .

I heard the show starting again, and I stepped inside. But, glancing once behind me, I caught the moon growing even brighter—as if it had come from behind a wisp of scudding cloud.

Now its light was brain-searing, lunatic.

THE PHONE RANG five times before she answered.

"Hi," I said. "Listen—"

"Hi," Leslie said sleepily, complainingly. Damn. I'd hoped she was watching television, like me.

I said, "Don't scream and shout, because I had a reason for calling. You're in bed, right? Get up and—Can you get up?"

"What time is it?"

"Quarter of twelve."

"Oh, Lord."

"Go out on your balcony and look around."

"Okay."

The phone clunked. I waited. Leslie's balcony faced north and west, like mine, but it was ten stories higher, with a correspondingly better view.

Through my own window, the moon burned like a textured spotlight.

"Stan? You there?"

"Yah. What do you think of it?"

"It's gorgeous. I've never seen anything like it. What could make the moon light up like that?"

"I don't know, but isn't it gorgeous?"

"You're supposed to be the native." Leslie had only moved out here a year ago.

"Listen, I've *never* seen it like this. But there's an old legend," I said. "Once every hundred years the Los Angeles smog rolls away for a single night, leaving the air as clear as interstellar space. That way the gods can see if Los Angeles is still there. If it is, they roll the smog back so they won't have to look at it."

"I used to know all that stuff. Well, listen, I'm glad you woke me up to see it, but I've got to get to work tomorrow."

"Poor baby."

"That's life. 'Night."

"'Night."

Afterward I sat in the dark, trying to think of someone else to call. Call a girl at midnight, invite her to step outside and look at the moonlight. . . . and she may think it's romantic or she may be furious, but she won't assume you called six others.

So I thought of some names. But the girls who belonged to them had all dropped away over the past year or so, after I started spending all my time with Leslie. One could hardly blame them. And now Joan was in Texas and Hildy was getting married, and if I called Louise I'd probably get Gordie too. The English girl? But I couldn't remember her number. Or her last name.

Besides, everyone I knew punched a time clock of one kind or another. Me, I worked for a living, but as a freelance writer I picked my hours. Anyone I woke up tonight, I'd be ruining her morning. Ah, well . . .

The Johnny Carson show was a swirl of gray and a roar of static when I got back to the living room. I turned the set off and went back out on the balcony.

The moon was brighter than the flow of headlights on the freeway, brighter than

Westwood Village off to the right. The Santa Monica Mountains had a magical pearly glow. There were no stars near the moon. Stars could not survive that glare.

I wrote science and how-to articles for a living. I ought to be able to figure out what was making the moon do that. Could the moon be suddenly larger? Inflating like a balloon? No.

Closer, maybe. The moon falling?

Tides! Waves fifty feet high . . . and earthquakes! San Andreas Fault splitting apart like the Grand Canyon! Jump in my car, head for the hills . . . no, too late already . . . Nonsense. The moon was brighter, not bigger. I could see that. And what could possibly drop the moon on our heads like that?

I blinked, and the moon left an afterimage on my retinae. It was *that* bright.

A million people must be watching the moon right now, and wondering, like me. An article on the subject would sell big . . . if I wrote it before anyone else did . . . There must be some simple, obvious explanation.

Well, how could the moon grow brighter? Moonlight was reflected sunlight. Could the sun have gotten brighter? It must have happened after sunset, then, or it would have been noticed . . .

I didn't like that idea.

Besides, half the Earth was in direct sunlight. A thousand correspondents for *Life* and *Time* and *Newsweek* and Associated Press would all be calling in from Europe, Asia, Africa . . . unless they were all hiding in cellars. Or dead. Or voiceless, because the sun was blanketing everything with static, radio and phone systems and televisions . . . Television. Oh my God.

I was just barely beginning to be afraid.

All right, start over. The moon had become very much brighter. Moonlight, well, moonlight was reflected sunlight; any idiot knew that. Then . . . something had happened to the sun.

## II

"HELLO?"

"Hi. Me," I said, and then my throat froze solid. Panic! What was I going to tell her?

"I've been watching the moon," she said dreamily. "It's wonderful. I even tried to use my telescope, but I couldn't see a thing; it was too bright. It lights up the whole city. The hills are all silver."

That's right, she kept a telescope on her balcony. I'd forgotten.

"I haven't tried to go back to sleep," she said. "Too much light."

I got my throat working again. "Listen, Leslie love, I started thinking about how I woke you up and how you probably couldn't get back to sleep, what with all this light. So let's go out for a midnight snack."



"Are you out of your mind?"

"No, I'm serious. I mean it. Tonight isn't a night for sleeping. We may never have a night like this again. To hell with your diet. Let's celebrate. Hot fudge sundaes, Irish coffee—"

"That's different. I'll get dressed."

"I'll be right over."

LESLIE LIVED ON the fourteenth floor of Building C of the Barrington Plaza. I rapped for admission, and waited.

And waiting, I wondered without any sense of urgency: Why Leslie?

There must be other ways to spend my last night on Earth than with one particular girl. I could have picked a different particular girl, or even several not too particular girls, except that that didn't really apply to me, did it? Or I could have called my brother, or either set of parents . . .

Well, but brother Mike would have wanted a good reason for being hauled out of bed at midnight. "But, Mike, the moon is so beautiful . . ." Hardly. Any of my parents would have reacted similarly. Well, I had a good reason, but would they believe me?

And if they did, what then? I would have arranged a kind of wake. Let 'em sleep through it. What I wanted was someone who would join my . . . farewell party without asking the wrong questions.

What I wanted was Leslie. I knocked again.

She opened the door just a crack for me. She was in her underwear. A stiff, misshapen girdle in one hand brushed my back as she came into my arms. "I was about to put this on."

"I came just in time, then." I took the girdle away from her and dropped it. I stooped to get my arms under her ribs, straightened up with effort, and walked us to the bedroom with her feet dangling against my ankles.

Her skin was cold. She must have been outside.

"So!" she demanded. "You think you can compete with a hot fudge sundae, do you?"

"Certainly. My pride demands it." We were both somewhat out of breath. Once in our lives I had tried to lift her cradled in my arms, in conventional movie style. I'd damn near broken my back. Leslie was a big girl, my height, and almost too heavy around the hips.

I dropped us on the bed, side by side. I reached around her from both sides to scratch her back, knowing it would leave her helpless to resist me, *ah* ha hahaha. She made sounds of pleasure to tell me where to scratch. She pulled my shirt up around my shoulders and began scratching my back.

We pulled pieces of clothing from ourselves and each other, at random, dropping them over the edges of the bed. Leslie's skin was warm now, almost hot . . .

All right, now *that's* why I couldn't have picked another girl. I'd have had to teach her how to scratch. And there just wasn't time.

Some nights I had a nervous tendency to hurry our lovemaking. Tonight we were performing a ritual, a rite of passage. I tried to slow it down, to make it last. I tried to make Leslie like it more. It paid off incredibly. I forgot the moon and the future when Leslie put her heels against the backs of my knees and we moved into the ancient rhythm.

But the image that came to me at the climax was vivid and frightening. We were in a ring of blue-hot fire that closed like a noose. If I moaned in terror and ecstasy, then she must have thought it was ecstasy alone.

We lay side by side, drowsy, torpid, clinging together. I was minded to go back to sleep then, renege on my promise, sleep and let Leslie sleep . . . but instead I whispered into her ear: "Hot fudge sundaes." She smiled and stirred and presently rolled off the bed.

I wouldn't let her wear the girdle. "It's past midnight. Nobody's going to pick you up, because I'd trash the blackguard, right? So why not be comfortable?" She laughed and gave in. We hugged each other once, hard, in the elevator. It felt much better without the girdle.

### III

THE GRAY-HAIRED COUNTER waitress was cheerful and excited. Her eyes glowed. She spoke as if confiding a secret. "Have you noticed the moonlight?"

Ship's was fairly crowded, this time of night and this close to UCLA. Half the customers were university students. Tonight they talked in hushed voices, turning to look out through the glass walls of the twenty-four-hour restaurant. The moon was low in the west, low enough to compete with the street globes.

"We noticed," I said. "We're celebrating. Get us two hot fudge sundaes, will you?" When she turned her back I slid a ten-dollar bill under the paper place mat. Not that she'd ever spend it, but at least she'd have the pleasure of finding it. I'd never spend it either.

I felt loose, casual. A lot of problems seemed suddenly to have solved themselves. Who would have believed that peace could come to Vietnam and Cambodia in a single night?

This thing had started around eleven-thirty, here in California. That would have put the noon sun just over the Arabian Sea, with all but a few fringes of Asia, Europe, Africa, and Australia in direct sunlight.

Already Germany was reunited, the Wall melted or smashed by shock waves. Israelis and Arabs had laid down their arms. Apartheid was dead in Africa.

And I was free. For me there were no more consequences. Tonight I could satisfy all my dark urges, rob, kill, cheat on my income tax, throw bricks at plate-glass

windows, burn my credit cards. I could forget the article on explosive metal forming, due Thursday. Tonight I could substitute cinnamon candy for Leslie's Pills. Tonight—"Think I'll have a cigarette."

Leslie looked at me oddly. "I thought you'd given that up."

"You remember. I told myself if I got any overpowering urges, I'd have a cigarette. I did that because I couldn't stand the thought of never smoking again."

She laughed. "But it's been months!"

"But they keep putting cigarette ads in my magazines!"

"It's a plot. All right, go have a cigarette."

I put coins in the machine, hesitated over the choice, finally picked a mild filter. It wasn't that I wanted a cigarette. But certain events call for champagne, and others for cigarettes. There is the traditional last cigarette before a firing squad . . .

I lit up. *Here's to lung cancer.*

It tasted just as good as I remembered; though there was a faint stale undertaste, like a mouthful of old cigarette butts. The third lungful hit me oddly. My eyes unfocused and everything went very calm. My heart pulsed loudly in my throat.

"How does it taste?"

"Strange. I'm buzzed," I said.

Buzzed! I hadn't even heard the word in fifteen years. In high school we'd smoked to get that buzz, that quasi-drunkenness produced by capillaries constricting in the brain. The buzz had stopped coming after the first few times, but we'd kept smoking, most of us . . .

I put it out. The waitress was picking up our sundaes.

Hot and cold, sweet and bitter; there is no taste quite like that of a hot fudge sundae. To die without tasting it again would have been a crying shame. But with Leslie it was a *thing*, a symbol of all rich living. Watching her eat was more fun than eating myself.

Besides . . . I'd killed the cigarette to taste the ice cream. Now, instead of savoring the ice cream, I was anticipating Irish coffee.

Too little time.

Leslie's dish was empty. She stage-whispered, "Aahh!" and patted herself over the navel.

A customer at one of the small tables began to go mad.

I'd noticed him coming in. A lean scholarly type wearing sideburns and steel-rimmed glasses, he had been continually twisting around to look out at the moon. Like others at other tables, he seemed high on a rare and lovely natural phenomenon.

Then he got it. I saw his face changing, showing suspicion, then disbelief, then horror, horror and helplessness.

"Let's go," I told Leslie. I dropped quarters on the counter and stood up.

"Don't you want to finish yours?"

"Nope. We've got things to do. How about some Irish coffee?"

"And a Pink Lady for me? Oh, look!" She turned full around.

The scholar was climbing up on a table. He balanced, spread wide his arms and bellowed, "Look out your windows!"

"You get down from there!" a waitress demanded, jerking emphatically at his pants leg.

"The world is coming to an end! Far away on the other side of the sea, death and hellfire—"

But we were out the door, laughing as we ran. Leslie panted, "We may have—escaped a religious—riot in there!"

I thought of the ten I'd left under my plate. Now it would please nobody. Inside, a prophet was shouting his message of doom to all who would hear. The gray-haired woman with the glowing eyes would find the money and think: They knew it too.

BUILDINGS BLOCKED THE moon from the Red Barn's parking lot. The street lights and the indirect moon glare were pretty much the same color. The night only seemed a bit brighter than usual.

I didn't understand why Leslie stopped suddenly in the driveway. But I followed her gaze, straight up to where a star burned very brightly just south of the zenith.

"Pretty," I said.

She gave me a very odd look.

There were no windows in the Red Barn. Dim artificial lighting, far dimmer than the queer cold light outside, showed on dark wood and quietly cheerful customers. Nobody seemed aware that tonight was different from other nights.

The sparse Tuesday night crowd was gathered mostly around the piano bar. A customer had the mike. He was singing some half-familiar song in a wavering weak voice, while the black pianist grinned and played a schmaltzy background.

I ordered two Irish coffees and a Pink Lady. At Leslie's questioning look I only smiled mysteriously.

How ordinary the Red Barn felt. How relaxed; how happy. We held hands across the table, and I smiled and was afraid to speak. If I broke the spell, if I said the wrong thing . . .

The drinks arrived. I raised an Irish coffee glass by the stem. Sugar, Irish whiskey, and strong black coffee, with thick whipped cream floating on top. It coursed through me like a magical potion of strength, dark and hot and powerful.

The waitress waved back my money. "See that man in the turtleneck, there at the end of the piano bar? He's buying," she said with relish. "He came in two hours ago and handed the bartender a hundred-dollar bill."

So that was where all the happiness was coming from. Free drinks! I looked over, wondering what the guy was celebrating.

A thick-necked, wide-shouldered man in a turtleneck and sports coat, he sat hunched over into himself, with a wide bar glass clutched tight in one hand. The pianist offered him the mike, and he waved it by, the gesture giving me a good look at his face. A square, strong face, now drunk and miserable and scared. He was ready to cry from fear.

So I knew what he was celebrating.

Leslie made a face. "They didn't make the Pink Lady right."

There's one bar in the world that makes a Pink Lady the way Leslie likes it, and it isn't in Los Angeles. I passed her the other Irish coffee, grinning an I-told-you-so grin. Forcing it. The other man's fear was contagious. She smiled back, lifted her glass and said, "To the blue moonlight."

I lifted my glass to her, and drank. But it wasn't the toast I would have chosen. The man in the turtleneck slid down from his stool. He moved carefully toward the door, his course slow and straight as an ocean liner cruising into dock. He pulled the door wide, and turned around, holding it open, so that the weird blue-white light streamed past his broad black silhouette.

*Bastard.* He was waiting for someone to figure it out, to shout out the truth to the rest. *Fire and doom—*

"Shut the door!" someone bellowed.

"Time to go," I said softly.

"What's the hurry?"

The hurry? He might *speak!* But I couldn't say that . . .

Leslie put her hand over mine. "I know. I *know*. But we can't run away from it, can we?"

A fist closed hard on my heart. She'd known, and I hadn't noticed?

The door closed, leaving the Red Barn in reddish dusk. The man who had been buying drinks was gone.

"Oh, God. When did you figure it out?"

"Before you came over," she said. "But when I tried to check it out, it didn't work."

"Check it out?"

"I went out on the balcony and turned the telescope on Jupiter. Mars is below the horizon these nights. If the sun's gone nova, all the planets ought to be lit up like the moon, right?"

"Right. Damn." I should have thought of that myself. But Leslie was the stargazer. I knew some astrophysics, but I couldn't have found Jupiter to save my life.

"But Jupiter wasn't any brighter than usual. So then I didn't know *what* to think."

"But then—" I felt hope dawning fiery hot. Then I remembered. "That star, just overhead. The one you stared at."

"Jupiter."

"All lit up like a fucking neon sign. Well, that tears it."

"Keep your voice down."

I *had* been keeping my voice down. But for a wild moment I wanted to stand up on a table and scream! *Fire and doom—*What right had they to be ignorant?

Leslie's hand closed tight on mine. The urge passed. It left me shuddering. "Let's get out of here. Let 'em think there's going to be a dawn."

"There is." Leslie laughed a bitter, barking laugh like nothing I'd ever heard from her. She walked out while I was reaching for my wallet—and remembering that there was no need.

Poor Leslie. Finding Jupiter its normal self must have looked like a reprieve—until the white spark flared to shining glory an hour and a half late. An hour and a half, for sunlight to reach Earth by the way of Jupiter.

When I reached the door Leslie was half-running down Westwood toward Santa Monica. I cursed and ran to catch up, wondering if she'd suddenly gone crazy.

Then I noticed the shadows ahead of us. All along the other side of Santa Monica Boulevard: moon shadows, in horizontal patterns of dark and blue-white bands.

I caught her at the corner.

The moon was setting.

A setting moon always looks tremendous. Tonight it glared at us through the gap of sky beneath the freeway, terribly bright, casting an incredible complexity of lines and shadows. Even the unlighted crescent glowed pearly bright with earthshine.

Which told me all I wanted to know about what was happening on the lighted side of Earth.

And on the moon? The men of Apollo 19 must have died in the first few minutes of nova sunlight. Trapped out on a lunar plain, hiding perhaps behind a melting boulder . . . Or were they on the night side? I couldn't remember. Hell, they could outlive us all. I felt a stab of envy and hatred.

And pride. We'd put them there. We reached the moon before the nova came. A little longer, we'd have reached the stars.

The disc changed oddly as it set. A dome, a flying saucer, a lens, a line . . .

Gone.

Gone. Well, that was that. Now we could forget it; now we could walk around outside without being constantly reminded that something was *wrong*. Moonset had taken all the queer shadows out of the city.

But the clouds had an odd glow to them. As clouds glow after sunset, tonight the clouds shone livid white at their western edges. And they streamed too quickly across the sky. As if they tried to run . . .

When I turned to Leslie, there were big tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, damn." I took her arm. "Now stop it. Stop it."

"I can't. You know I can't stop crying once I get started."

"This wasn't what I had in mind. I thought we'd do things we've been putting off, things we like. It's our last chance. Is this the way you want to die, crying on a street corner?"

"I don't want to die at all!"

"Tough shit!"

"Thanks a lot." Her face was all red and twisted. Leslie was crying as a baby cries, without regard for dignity or appearance. I felt awful. I felt guilty, and I *knew* the nova wasn't my fault, and it made me angry.

"I don't want to die either!" I snarled at her. "You show me a way out and I'll take it. Where would we go? The South Pole? It'd just take longer. The moon must be molten all across its day side. Mars? When this is over Mars will be part of the sun, like the Earth. Alpha Centauri? The acceleration we'd need, we'd be spread across a wall like peanut butter and jelly—"

"Oh, shut up."

"Right."

"Hawaii. Stan, we could get to the airport in twenty minutes. We'd get two hours extra, going west! Two hours more before sunrise!"

She had something there. Two hours was worth any price! But I'd worked this out before, staring at the moon from my balcony. "No. We'd die sooner. Listen, love, we saw the moon go bright about midnight. That means California was at the back of the Earth when the sun went nova."

"Yes, that's right."

"Then we must be farthest from the shock wave."

She blinked. "I don't understand."

"Look at it this way. First the sun explodes. That heats the air and the oceans, all in a flash, all across the day side. The steam and superheated air expand *fast*. A flaming shock wave comes roaring over into the night side. It's closing on us right now. Like a noose. But it'll reach Hawaii first. Hawaii is two hours closer to the sunset line."

"Then we won't see the dawn. We won't live even that long."

"No."

"You explain things so well," she said bitterly. "A flaming shock wave. So graphic."

"Sorry. I've been thinking about it too much. Wondering what it will be like."

"Well, stop it." She came to me and put her face in my shoulder. She cried quietly. I held her with one arm and used the other to rub her neck, and I watched the streaming clouds, and I didn't think about what it would be like.

Didn't think about the ring of fire closing on us.

It was the wrong picture anyway.

I thought of how the oceans must have boiled on the day side, so that the shock wave had been mostly steam to start with. I thought of the millions of square miles

of ocean it had to cross. It would be cooler and wetter when it reached us. And the Earth's rotation would spin it like the whirlpool in a bathtub.

Two counterrotating hurricanes of live steam, one north, one south. That was how it would come. We were lucky. California would be near the eye of the northern one.

A hurricane wind of live steam. It would pick a man up and cook him in the air, strip the steamed flesh from him and cast him aside. It was going to hurt like hell.

We would never see the sunrise. In a way that was a pity. It would be spectacular. Thick parallel streamers of cloud were drifting across the stars, too fast, their bellies white by city light. Jupiter dimmed, then went out. Could it be starting already? Heat lightning jumped—

"Aurora," I said.

"What?"

"There's a shock wave from the sun, too. There should be an aurora like nothing anybody's ever seen before."

Leslie laughed suddenly, jarringly. "It seems so strange, standing on a street corner talking like this! Stan, are we dreaming it?"

"We could pretend—"

"No. Most of the human race must be dead already."

"Yah."

"And there's nowhere to go."

"Damn it, you figured that out long ago, all by yourself. Why bring it up now?"

"You could have let me sleep," she said bitterly. "I was dropping off to sleep when you whispered in my ear."

I didn't answer. It was true.

"'Hot fudge sundae,'" she quoted. Then, "It wasn't a bad idea, actually. Breaking my diet."

I started to giggle.

"Stop that."

"We could go back to your place now. Or my place. To sleep."

"I suppose. But we couldn't sleep, could we? No, don't say it. We take sleeping pills, and five hours from now we wake up screaming. I'd rather stay awake. At least we'll know what's happening."

But if we took all the pills . . . but I didn't say it. I said, "Then how about a picnic?"

"Where?"

"The beach, maybe. Who cares? We can decide later."

#### IV

ALL THE MARKETS were closed. But the liquor store next to the Red Barn was one I'd been using for years. They sold us foie gras, crackers, a couple of bottles of chilled

champagne, six kinds of cheese and a hell of a lot of nuts—I took one of everything—more crackers, a bag of ice, frozen rumaki hors d'oeuvres, a fifth of an ancient brandy that cost twenty-five bucks, a matching fifth of Cherry Heering for Leslie, six-packs of beer and Bitter Orange . . .

By the time we had piled all that into a dimky store cart, it was raining. Big fat drops spattered in flurries across the acre of plate glass that fronted the store. Wind howled around the corners.

The salesman was in a fey mood, bursting with energy. He'd been watching the moon all night. "And now this!" he exclaimed as he packed our loot into bags. He was a small, muscular old man with thick arms and shoulders. "It never rains like this in California. It comes down straight and heavy, when it comes at all. Takes days to build up."

"I know." I wrote him a check, feeling guilty about it. He'd known me long enough to trust me. But the check was good. There were funds to cover it. Before opening hours the check would be ash, and all the banks in the world would be bubbling in the heat of the sun. But that was hardly my fault.

He piled our bags in the cart, set himself at the door. "Now when the rain lets up, we'll run these out. Ready?" I got ready to open the door. The rain came like someone had thrown a bucket of water at the window. In a moment it had stopped, though water still streamed down the glass. "Now!" cried the salesman, and I threw the door open and we were off. We reached the car laughing like maniacs. The wind howled around us, sweeping up spray and hurling it at us.

"We picked a good break. You know what this weather reminds me of? Kansas," said the salesman. "During a tornado."

Then suddenly the sky was full of gravel! We yelped and ducked, and the car rang to a million tiny concussions, and I got the car door unlocked and pulled Leslie and the salesman in after me. We rubbed our bruised heads and looked out at white gravel bouncing everywhere.

The salesman picked a small white pebble out of his collar. He put it in Leslie's hand, and she gave a startled squeak and handed it to me, and it was cold.

"Hail," said the salesman. "Now I really don't get it."

Neither did I. I could only think that it had something to do with the nova. But what? How?

"I've got to get back," said the salesman. The hail had expended itself in one brief flurry. He braced himself, then went out of the car like a marine taking a hill. We never saw him again.

The clouds were churning up there, forming and disappearing, sliding past each other faster than I'd ever seen clouds move, their bellies glowing by city light.

"It must be the nova," Leslie said shivering.

"But how? If the shock wave were here already, we'd be *dead*—or at least deaf. Hail?"

"Who cares? Stan, we don't have *time!*"

I shook myself. "All right. What would you like to do most, right now?"

"Watch a baseball game."

"It's two in the morning," I pointed out.

"That lets out a lot of things, doesn't it?"

"Right. We've hopped our last bar. We've seen our last play, and our last clean movie. What's left?"

"Looking in jewelry store windows."

"Seriously? Your last night on Earth?"

She considered, then answered. "Yes."

By damn, she meant it. I couldn't think of anything duller. "Westwood or Beverly Hills?"

"Both."

"Now, *look*—"

"Beverly Hills, then."

WE DROVE THROUGH another spatter of rain and hail—a capsule tempest. We parked half a block from the Tiffany salesroom.

The sidewalk was one continuous puddle. Secondhand rain dripped on us from various levels of the buildings overhead. Leslie said, "This is great. There must be half a dozen jewelry stores in walking distance."

"I was thinking of driving."

"No no no, you don't have the proper attitude. One must window-shop on foot. It's in the rules."

"But the rain!"

"You won't die of pneumonia. You won't have time," she said, too grimly.

Tiffany's had a small branch office in Beverly Hills, but they didn't put expensive things in the windows at night. There were a few fascinating toys, that was all.

We turned up Rodeo Drive—and struck it rich. Tibor showed an infinite selection of rings, ornate and modern, large and small, in all kinds of precious and semiprecious stones. Across the street, Van Cleef & Arpels showed brooches, men's wristwatches of elegant design, bracelets with tiny watches in them, and one window that was all diamonds.

"Oh, lovely," Leslie breathed, caught by the flashing diamonds. "What they must look like in daylight! . . . Wups—"

"No, that's a good thought. Imagine them at dawn, flaming with nova light, while the windows shatter to let the raw daylight in. Want one? The necklace?"



"Oh, may I? Hey, hey, I was kidding! Put that down, you idiot, there must be alarms in the glass."

"Look, nobody's going to be wearing any of that stuff between now and morning. Why shouldn't we get some good out of it?"

"We'd be caught!"

"Well, you *said* you wanted to window-shop . . ."

"I don't want to spend my last hour in a cell. If you'd brought the car we'd have some chance—"

"Of getting away. Right. I *wanted* to bring the car—" But at that point we both cracked up entirely, and had to stagger away holding onto each other for balance.

There were a good half-dozen jewelry stores on Rodeo. But there was more. Toys, books, shirts and ties in odd and advanced styling. In Francis Ori, a huge plastic cube full of new pennies. A couple of damn strange clocks farther on. There was an extra kick in window-shopping, knowing that we could break a window and take anything we wanted badly enough.

We walked hand in hand, swinging our arms. The sidewalks were ours alone; all others had fled the mad weather. The clouds still churned overhead.

"I wish I'd known it was coming," Leslie said suddenly. "I spent the whole day fixing a mistake in a program. Now we'll never run it."

"What would you have done with the time? A baseball game?"

"Maybe. No. The standings don't matter now." She frowned at dresses in a store window. "What would you have done?"

"Gone to the Blue Sphere for cocktails," I said promptly. "It's a topless place. I used to go there all the time. I hear they've gone full nude now."

"I've never been to one of those. How late are they open?"

"Forget it. It's almost two-thirty."

Leslie mused, looking at giant stuffed animals in a toy store window. "Isn't there someone you would have murdered, if you'd had the time?"

"Now, you *know* my agent lives in New York."

"Why him?"

"My child, why would any writer want to murder his agent? For the manuscripts he loses under other manuscripts. For his ill-gotten ten percent, and the remaining ninety percent that he sends me grudgingly and late. For—"

Suddenly the wind roared and rose up against us. Leslie pointed, and we ran for a deep doorway that turned out to be Gucci's. We huddled against the glass.

The wind was suddenly choked with hail the size of marbles. Glass broke somewhere, and alarms lifted thin, frail voices into the wind. There was more than hail in the wind! There were rocks!

I caught the smell and taste of sea water.

We clung together in the expensively wasted space in front of Gucci's. I coined

a short-lived phrase and screamed, "Nova weather! How the blazes did it—" But I couldn't hear myself, and Leslie didn't even know I was shouting.

Nova weather. How did it get here so fast? Coming over the pole, the nova shock wave would have to travel about four thousand miles—at least a five-hour trip.

No. The shock wave would travel in the stratosphere, where the speed of sound was higher, then propagate down. Three hours was plenty of time. Still, I thought, it should not have come as a rising wind. On the other side of the world, the exploding sun was tearing our atmosphere away and hurling it at the stars. The shock should have come as a single vast thunderclap.

For an instant the wind gentled, and I ran down the sidewalk pulling Leslie after me. We found another doorway as the wind picked up again. I thought I heard a siren coming to answer the alarm.

At the next break we splashed across Wilshire and reached the car. We sat there panting, waiting for the heater to warm up. My shoes felt squishy. The wet clothes stuck to my skin.

Leslie shouted, "How much longer?"

"I don't know! We ought to have *some* time."

"We'll have to spend our picnic indoors!"

"Your place or mine? Yours," I decided, and pulled away from the curb.

## V

WILSHIRE BOULEVARD WAS flooded to the hubcaps in spots. The spurts of hail and sleet had become a steady, pounding rain. Fog lay flat and waist-deep ahead of us, broke swirling over our hood, churned in a wake behind us. Weird weather.

Nova weather. The shock wave of scalding superheated steam hadn't happened. Instead, a mere hot wind roaring through the stratosphere, the turbulence eddying down to form strange storms at ground level.

We parked illegally on the upper parking level. My one glimpse of the lower level showed it to be flooded. I opened the trunk and lifted two heavy paper bags.

"We must have been crazy," Leslie said, shaking her head. "We'll never use all this."

"Let's take it up anyway."

She laughed at me. "But why?"

"Just a whim. Will you help me carry it?"

We took double armfuls up to the fourteenth floor. That still left a couple of bags in the trunk. "Never mind them," Leslie said. "We've got the rumaki and the bottles and the nuts. What more do we need?"

"The cheeses. The crackers. The foie gras."

"Forget 'em."

"No."

100  
You're out of your mind," she explained to me, slowly so that I would understand. "You could be steamed dead on the way down. We might not have more than a few minutes left, and you want food for a week! *Why?*"  
"I'd rather not say."

"Go then!" She slammed the door with terrible force.

The elevator was an ordeal. I kept wondering if Leslie was right. The shrilling of the wind was muffled, here at the core of the building. Perhaps it was about to rip electrical cables somewhere, leave me stranded in a darkened box. But I made it down. The upper level was knee-deep in water.

My second surprise was that it was lukewarm, like old bathwater, unpleasant to wade through. Steam curled on the surface, then blew away on a wind that howled through the concrete echo chamber like the screaming of the damned.

Going up was another ordeal. If what I was thinking was wish fulfillment, if a roaring wind of live steam caught me now . . . I'd feel like such an idiot . . . But the doors opened, and the lights hadn't even flickered.

Leslie wouldn't let me in.

"Go away!" she shouted through the locked door. "Go eat your cheese and crackers somewhere else!"

"You got another date?"

That was a mistake. I got no answer at all.

I could almost see her viewpoint. The extra trip for the extra bags was no big thing to fight about; but why did it have to be? How long was our love affair going to last, anyway? An hour, with luck. Why back down on a perfectly good argument, to preserve so ephemeral a thing?

"I wasn't going to bring this up," I shouted, hoping she could hear me through the door. The wind must be three times as loud on the other side. "We may need food for a week! And a place to hide!"

Silence. I began to wonder if I could kick the door down. Would I be better off waiting in the hall? Eventually she'd have to—

The door opened. Leslie was pale. "That was cruel," she said quietly.

"I can't promise anything. I wanted to wait, but you forced it. I've been wondering if the sun really has exploded."

"That's cruel. I was just getting used to the idea." She turned her face to the doorjamb. Tired, she was tired. I'd kept her up too late . . .

"Listen to me. It was all wrong," I said. "There should have been an aurora borealis to light up the night sky from pole to pole. A shock wave of particles exploding out of the sun, traveling at an inch short of the speed of light, would rip into the atmosphere like—why, we'd have seen blue fire over every building!"

"Then, the storm came too slow," I screamed, to be heard above the thunder. "A nova would rip away the sky over half the planet. The shock wave would move around

the night side with a sound to break all the glass in the world, all at once! And crack concrete and marble—and, Leslie love, it just hasn't happened. So I started wondering."

She said it in a mumble. "Then what is it?"

"A flare. The worst—"

She shouted it at me like an accusation. "A flare! A solar flare! You think the sun could light up like that—"

"Easy, now—"

"—could turn the moon and planets into so many torches, then fade out as if nothing had happened! Oh, you idiot—"

"May I come in?"

She looked surprised. She stepped aside, and I bent and picked up the bags and walked in.

The glass doors rattled as if giants were trying to beat their way in. Rain had squeezed through cracks to make dark puddles on the rug.

I set the bags on the kitchen counter. I found bread in the refrigerator, dropped two slices in the toaster. While they were toasting I opened the foie gras.

"My telescope's gone," she said. Sure enough, it was. The tripod was all by itself on the balcony, on its side.

I untwisted the wire on a champagne bottle. The toast popped up, and Leslie found a knife and spread both slices with foie gras. I held the bottle near her ear, figuring to trip conditioned reflexes.

She did smile fleetingly as the cork popped. She said, "We should set up our picnic grounds here. Behind the counter. Sooner or later the wind is going to break those doors and shower glass all over everything."

That was a good thought. I slid around the partition, swept all the pillows off the floor and the couch and came back with them. We set up a nest for ourselves.

It was kind of cosy. The kitchen counter was three and a half feet high, just over our heads, and the kitchen alcove itself was just wide enough to swing our elbows comfortably. Now the floor was all pillows. Leslie poured the champagne into brandy snifters, all the way to the lip.

I searched for a toast, but there were just too many possibilities, all depressing. We drank without toasting. And then carefully set the snifters down and slid forward into each other's arms. We could sit that way, face to face, leaning sideways against each other.

"We're going to die," she said.

"Maybe not."

"Get used to the idea. I have," she said. "Look at you, you're all nervous now. Afraid of dying. Hasn't it been a lovely night?"

"Unique. I wish I'd known in time to take you to dinner."

number came in a string of six explosions. Like bombs in an air raid. "Me too," she said when we could hear again.

"I wish I'd known this afternoon."

"Pecan pralines!"

"Farmer's Market. Double-roasted peanuts. Who would *you* have murdered, if you'd had the time?"

"There was a girl in my sorority—"

—and she was guilty of sibling rivalry, so Leslie claimed. I named an editor who kept changing his mind. Leslie named one of my old girl friends, I named her only old boy friend that I knew about, and it got to be kind of fun before we ran out. My brother Mike had forgotten my birthday once. The fiend.

The lights flickered, then came on again.

Too casually, Leslie asked, "Do you really think the sun might go back to normal?" "It better *be* back to normal. Otherwise we're dead anyway. I wish we could see Jupiter."

"Dammit, answer me! Do you think it was a flare?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Yellow dwarf stars don't go nova."

"What if ours did?"

"The astronomers know a lot about novas," I said. "More than you'd guess. They can see them coming months ahead. Sol is a gee-nought yellow dwarf. They don't go nova at all. They have to wander off the main sequence first, and that takes millions of years."

She pounded a fist softly on my back. We were cheek to cheek; I couldn't see her face. "I don't want to believe it. I don't dare. Stan, nothing like this has ever happened before. How can you know?"

"Something did."

"What? I don't believe it. We'd remember."

"Do you remember the first moon landing? Aldrin and Armstrong?"

"Of course. We watched it at Earl's Lunar Landing Party."

"They landed on the biggest, flattest place they could find on the moon. They sent back several hours of jumpy home movies, took a lot of very clear pictures, left corrugated footprints all over the place. And they came home with a bunch of rocks."

"Remember? People said it was a long way to go for rocks. But the first thing anyone noticed about those rocks was that they were half-melted."

"Sometime in the past—oh, say, the past hundred thousand years, there's no way of marking it closer than that—the sun flared up. It didn't stay hot enough long enough to leave any marks on the Earth. But the moon doesn't have an atmosphere to protect it. All the rocks melted on one side."

The air was warm and damp. I took off my coat, which was heavy with rainwater. I fished the cigarettes and matches out, lit a cigarette and exhaled past Leslie's ear.

"We'd remember. It *couldn't* have been this bad."

"I'm not so sure. Suppose it happened over the Pacific? It wouldn't do *that* much damage. Or over the American continents. It would have sterilized some plants and animals and burned down a lot of forests, and who'd know? The sun went back to normal, that time. It might again. The sun is a four percent variable star. Maybe it gets a touch more variable than that, every so often."

Something shattered in the bedroom. A window? A wet wind touched us, and the shriek of the storm was louder.

"Then we could live through this," Leslie said hesitantly.

"I believe you've put your finger on the crux of the matter. Skáll!" I found my champagne and drank deep. It was past three in the morning, with a hurricane beating at our doors.

"Then shouldn't we be doing something about it?"

"We are."

"Something like trying to get up into the hills! Stan, there're going to be floods!" "You bet your ass there are, but they won't rise this high. Fourteen stories. Listen, I've thought this through. We're in a building that was designed to be earthquake-proof. You told me so yourself. It'd take more than a hurricane to knock it over."

"As for heading for the hills, what hills? We won't get far tonight, not with the streets flooded already. Suppose we could get up into the Santa Monica Mountains; then what? Mudslides, that's what. That area won't stand up to what's coming. The flare must have boiled away enough water to make another ocean. It's going to rain for forty days and forty nights! Love, this is the safest place we could have reached tonight."

"Suppose the polar caps melt?"

"Yeah . . . well, we're pretty high, even for that. Hey, maybe that last flare was what started Noah's flood. Maybe it's happening again. Sure as hell, there's not a place on Earth that isn't the middle of a hurricane. Those two great counterrotating hurricanes, by now they must have broken up into hundreds of little storms—"

The glass doors exploded inward. We ducked, and the wind howled about us and dropped rain and glass on us.

"At least we've got food!" I shouted. "If the floods maroon us here, we can last it out!"

"But if the power goes, we can't cook it! And the refrigerator—"

"We'll cook everything we can. Hardboil all the eggs—"

The wind rose about us. I stopped trying to talk.

Warm rain sprayed us horizontally and left us soaked. Try to cook in a hurricane?

I'd been stupid; I'd waited too long. The wind would tip boiling water on us if we tried it. Or hot grease—

Leslie screamed, "We'll have to use the oven!"

Of course. The oven couldn't possibly fall on us.

We set it for 400° and put the eggs in, in a pot of water. We took all the meat out of the meat drawer and shoved it in on a broiling pan. Two artichokes in another pot. The other vegetables we could eat raw.

What else? I tried to think.

Water. If the electricity went, probably the water and telephone lines would too. I turned on the faucet over the sink and started filling things: pots with lids, Leslie's thirty-cup percolator that she used for parties, her wash bucket. She clearly thought I was crazy, but I didn't trust the rain as a water source; I couldn't control it.

The sound. Already we'd stopped trying to shout through it. Forty days and nights of this and we'd be stone-deaf. Cotton? Too late to reach the bathroom. Paper towels! I tore and wadded and made four plugs for our ears.

Sanitary facilities? Another reason for picking Leslie's place over mine. When the plumbing stopped, there was always the balcony.

And if the flood rose higher than the fourteenth floor, there was the roof. Twenty stories up. If it went higher than that, there would be damn few people left when it was over.

And if it was a nova?

I held Leslie a bit more closely, and lit another cigarette one-handed. All the wasted planning, if it was a nova. But I'd have been doing it anyway. You don't stop planning just because there's no hope.

And when the hurricane turned to live steam, there was always the balcony. At a dead run, and over the railing, in preference to being boiled alive.

But now was not the time to mention it.

Anyway, she'd probably thought of it herself.

THE LIGHTS WENT out about four. I turned off the oven, in case the power should come back. Give it an hour to cool down, then I'd put all the food in Baggies.

Leslie was asleep, sitting up in my arms. How could she sleep, not knowing? I piled pillows behind her and let her back ease.

For some time I lay on my back, smoking, watching the lightning make shadows on the ceiling. We had eaten all the foie gras and drunk one bottle of champagne. I thought of opening the brandy, but decided against it, with regret.

A long time passed. I'm not sure what I thought about. I didn't sleep, but certainly my mind was in idle. It only gradually came to me that the ceiling, between lightning flashes, had turned gray.

I rolled over, gingerly, soggily. Everything was wet.

My watch said it was nine-thirty.

I crawled around the partition into the living room. I'd been ignoring the storm sounds for so long that it took a faceful of warm whipping rain to remind me. There was a hurricane going on. But charcoal-gray light was filtering through the black clouds.

So. I was right to have saved the brandy. Flood, storms, intense radiation, fires lit by the flare—if the toll of destruction was as high as I expected, then money was about to become worthless. We would need trade goods.

I was hungry. I ate two eggs and some bacon—still warm—and started putting the rest of the food away. We had food for a week, maybe . . . but hardly a balanced diet. Maybe we could trade with other apartments. This was a big building. There must be empty apartments, too, that we could raid for canned soup and the like. And refugees from the lower floors to be taken care of, if the waters rose high enough . . .

Damn! I missed the nova. Life had been simplicity itself last night. Now . . . Did we have medicines? Were there doctors in the building? There would be dysentery and other plagues. And hunger. There was a supermarket near here; could we find a scuba rig in the building?

But I'd get some sleep first. Later we could start exploring the building. The day had become a lighter charcoal gray. Things could be worse, far worse. I thought of the radiation that must have sleeted over the far side of the world, and wondered if our children would colonize Europe, or Asia, or Africa.

## The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas

The term *visionary* is applicable to very few writers, but Ursula K. Le Guin's intellectually provocative fiction has earned her the accolade in general literary circles as well as the fields of fantasy and science fiction. Though she has taken a variety of approaches to a wide range of ideas, the cornerstone of her distinguished body of fiction is her series of "Hainish" novels, set on different planets in a pangalactic empire. The alien cultures on these planets share a common origin, but have developed differently from one another over time, in ways both striking and subtle. Le Guin juxtaposes alien and earthly viewpoints in these stories with an eye toward showing the plurality of possible perspectives on the themes they address. Her Hugo and Nebula Award-winning novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* is set on one planet whose androgynous humanoids can unpredictably shift sexual identities during mating season, a process that undermines all preconceptions of identity based on gender differences. In the other Hainish novels (which include *Rocannon's World*, *Planet of Exile*, *City of Illusions*, *The Word for World Is Forest*, and *The Telling*), Le Guin has used contrasting civilizations to measure the impact of a variety of science fictional devices, including telepathy, instantaneous communication, and space travel. Le Guin's other major story cycle is the Earthsea saga, which includes *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*, *Tehanu*: *The Last Book of Earthsea*, and *Tales from Earthsea*. These novels, which break the boundaries between adult and young adult fiction, present a coming-of-age story featuring Ged, an apprentice magician who grows to maturity and faces many challenges as both man and mage over the course of the saga. Le Guin has been praised for her understanding of the importance of rituals and myths that shape individuals and societies, and for the meticulous detail with which she brings her alien cultures to life. She has written other novels, including *The Lathes of Heaven*, *The Dispossessed*, *Malafrena*, and *Always Coming Home*. Her short fiction has been collected in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*; *Orsinian Tales*; *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight*; and *Four Ways to Forgiveness*. Le Guin has also written many celebrated essays on the craft of fantasy and science fiction, some of which have been gathered in *The Language of the Night and Dancing at the Edge of the World*.

WITH A CLAMOR of bells that set the swallows soaring, the Festival of Summer came to the city Omelas, bright-towered by the sea. The rigging of the boats in harbor sparkled with flags. In the streets between houses with red roofs and painted walls, between old moss-grown gardens and under avenues of trees, past great parks and public buildings, processions moved. Some were decorous: old people in long stiff robes of mauve and gray, grave master workmen, quiet, merry women carrying their babies and chatting as they walked. In other streets the music beat faster, a shimmering of gong and tambourine, and the people went dancing, the procession was a dance. Children dodged in and out, their high calls rising like the swallows' crossing flights over the music and the singing. All the processions wound towards the north side of the city, where on the great water-meadow called the Green Fields boys and girls, naked in the bright air, with mud-stained feet and ankles and long, lithe arms, exercised their restive horses before the race. The horses wore no gear at all but a halter without bit. Their manes were braided with streamers of silver, gold, and green. They flared their nostrils and pranced and boasted to one another; they were vastly excited, the horse being the only animal who has adopted our ceremonies as his own. Far off to the north and west the mountains stood up half encircling Omelas on her bay. The air of morning was so clear that the snow still crowning the Eighteen Peaks burned with white-gold fire across the miles of sunlit air, under the dark blue of the sky. There was just enough wind to make the banners that marked the race course snap and flutter now and then. In the silence of the broad green meadows one could hear the music winding through the city streets, farther and nearer and ever approaching, a cheerful faint sweetness of the air that from time to time trembled and gathered together and broke out into the great joyous clanging of the bells.

Joyous! How is one to tell about joy! How describe the citizens of Omelas?

They were not simple folk, you see, though they were happy. But we do not say the words of cheer much any more. All smiles have become archaic. Given a description such as this one tends to make certain assumptions. Given a description such as this one tends to look next for the King, mounted on a splendid stallion and surrounded by his noble knights, or perhaps in a golden litter borne by great-muscled slaves. They were not barbarians. I do not know the rules and laws of their society, but I suspect that they were singularly few. As they did without monarchy and slavery, so they also got on without the stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police, and the bomb. Yet I repeat that these were not simple folk, not dulcet shepherds, noble savages, bland utopians. They were not less complex than us. The trouble is that we have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain. If you can't lick 'em, join 'em. If it hurts, repeat it. But to praise



despair is to condemn delight, to embrace violence is to lose hold of everything else. We have almost lost hold; we can no longer describe a happy man, nor make any celebration of joy. How can I tell you about the people of Omelas? They were not naïve and happy children—though their children were, in fact, happy. They were mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched. O miracle! But I wish I could describe it better. I wish I could convince you. Omelas sounds in my words like a city in a fairy tale, long ago and far away, once upon a time. Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids, assuming it will rise to the occasion, for certainty I cannot suit you all. For instance, how about technology? I think that there would be no cars or helicopters in and above the streets; this follows from the fact that the people of Omelas are happy people. Happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive. In the middle category, however—that of the unnecessary but undestructive, that of comfort, luxury, exuberance, etc.—they could perfectly well have central heating, subway trains, washing machines, and all kinds of marvelous devices not yet invented here, floating light-sources, fuelless power, a cure for the common cold. Or they could have none of that: it doesn't matter. As you like it. I incline to think that people from towns up and down the coast have been coming in to Omelas during the last days before the festival on very fast little trains and double-decked trams, and that the train station of Omelas is actually the handsomest building in town, though plainer than the magnificent Farmers' Market. But even granted trains, I fear that Omelas so far strikes some of you as goody-goody. Smiles, bells, parades, horses, bleh. If so, please add an orgy. If an orgy would help, don't hesitate. Let us not, however, have temples from which issue beautiful nude priests and priestesses already half in ecstasy and ready to copulate with any man or woman, lover or stranger, who desires union with the deep godhead of the blood, although that was my first idea. But really it would be better not to have any temples in Omelas—at least, not manned temples. Religion yes, clergy no. Surely the beautiful nudes can just wander about, offering themselves like divine soufflés to the hunger of the needy and the rapture of the flesh. Let them join the processions. Let tambourines be struck above the copulations, and the glory of desire be proclaimed upon the gongs, and (a not unimportant point) let the offspring of these delightful rituals be beloved and looked after by all. One thing I know there is none of in Omelas is guilt. But what else should there be? I thought at first there were no drugs, but that is puritanical. For those who like it, the faint insistent sweetness of *drooz* may perfume the ways of the city, *drooz* which first brings a great lightness and brilliance to the mind and limbs, and then after some hours a dreamy languor, and wonderful visions at last of the very arcana and inmost secrets of the Universe, as well as exciting the pleasure of sex beyond all belief; and it is not habit-forming. For more modest tastes I think there ought to be beer. What else, what else belongs in the joyous city? The sense of victory,

surely, the celebration of courage. But as we did without clergy, let us do without soldiers. The joy built upon successful slaughter is not the right kind of joy; it will not do; it is fearful and it is trivial. A boundless and generous contentment, a unanimous triumph felt not against some outer enemy but in communion with the finest and fairest in the souls of all men everywhere and the splendor of the world's summer: this is what swells the hearts of the people of Omelas, and the victory they celebrate is that of life. I really don't think many of them need to take *drooz*.

Most of the processions have reached the Green Fields by now. A marvelous smell of cooking goes forth from the red and blue tents of the provisioners. The faces of small children are amiably sticky; in the benign gray beard of a man a couple of crumbs of rich pastry are entangled. The youths and girls have mounted their horses and are beginning to group around the starting line of the course. An old woman, small, fat, and laughing, is passing out flowers from a basket, and tall young men wear her flowers in their shining hair. A child of nine or ten sits at the edge of the crowd, alone, playing on a wooden flute. People pause to listen, and they smile, but they do not speak to him, for he never ceases playing and never sees them, his dark eyes wholly rapt in the sweet, thin magic of the tune.

He finishes, and slowly lowers his hands holding the wooden flute.

As if that little private silence were the signal, all at once a trumpet sounds from the pavilion near the starting line: imperious, melancholy, piercing. The horses rear on their slender legs, and some of them neigh in answer. Sober-faced, the young riders stroke the horses' necks and soothe them, whispering, "Quiet, quiet, there my beauty, my hope. . . ." They begin to form in rank along the starting line. The crowds along the racecourse are like a field of grass and flowers in the wind. The Festival of Summer has begun.

Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing.

In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. A little light seeps in dustily between cracks in the boards, secondhand from a cobwebbed window somewhere across the cellar. In one corner of the little room a couple of mops, with stiff, clotted, foul-smelling heads, stand near a rusty bucket. The floor is dirt, a little damp to the touch, as cellar dirt usually is. The room is about three paces long and two wide: a mere broom closet or disused tool room. In the room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect. It picks its nose and occasionally fumbles vaguely with its toes or genitals, as it sits hunched in the corner farthest from the bucket and the two mops. It is afraid of the mops. It finds them horrible. It shuts its eyes, but it knows the mops are still standing there;

and the door is locked; and nobody will come. The door is always locked; and nobody ever comes, except that sometimes—the child has no understanding of time or interval—sometimes the door rattles terribly and opens, and a person, or several people, are there. One of them may come in and kick the child to make it stand up. The others never come close, but peer in at it with frightened, disgusted eyes. The food bowl and the water jug are hastily filled, the door is locked, the eyes disappear. The people at the door never say anything, but the child, who has not always lived in the tool room, and can remember sunlight and its mother's voice, sometimes speaks. "I will be good," it says. "Please let me out. I will be good!" They never answer. The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, "Eh-haa, eh-haa," and it speaks less and less often. It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes; it lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day. It is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually.

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them have come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery.

This is usually explained to children when they are between eight and twelve, whenever they seem capable of understanding; and most of those who come to see the child are young people, though often enough an adult comes, or comes back, to see the child. No matter how well the matter has been explained to them, these young spectators are always shocked and sickened at the sight. They feel disgust, which they had thought themselves superior to. They feel anger, outrage, impotence, despite all the explanations. They would like to do something for the child. But there is nothing they can do. If the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place, if it were cleaned and fed and comforted, that would be a good thing, indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms. To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed.

The terms are strict and absolute; there may not even be a kind word spoken to the child.

Often the young people go home in tears, or in a tearless rage, when they have seen the child and faced this terrible paradox. They may brood over it for weeks or years. But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released,

it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too uncouth for it to respond to humane treatment. Indeed, after so long it would probably be wretched without walls about it to protect it, and darkness for its eyes, and its own excrement to sit in. Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it. Yet it is their tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and the acceptance of their helplessness, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives. There is no vapid, irresponsible happiness. They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children. They know that if the wretched ones were not there sniveling in the dark, the other one, the flute-player, could make no joyful music as the young riders line up in their beauty for the race in the sunlight of the first morning of summer.

Now do you believe in them? Are they not more credible? But there is one more thing to tell, and this is quite incredible.

At times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home. These people go out into the street, and walk down the street alone. They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates. They keep walking across the farmlands of Omelas. Each one goes alone, youth or girl, man or woman. Night falls; the traveler must pass down village streets, between the houses with yellow-lit windows, and on out into the darkness of the fields. Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.

# A THING OF BEAUTY

NORMAN SPINRAD

'There's a gentleman by the name of Mr Shiburo Ito to see you,' my intercom said. 'He is interested in the purchase of an historic artefact of some significance.'

While I waited for him to enter my private office, I had computer central display his specs on the screen discreetly built into the back of my desk. My Mr Ito was none other than Ito of Ito Freight Boosters of Osaka; there was no need to purchase a readout from Dun & Bradstreet's private banks. If Shiburo Ito of Ito Boosters wrote a cheque for anything short of the national debt, it could be relied upon not to bounce.

The slight, balding man who glided into my office wore a red silk kimono with a richly brocaded black obi, Mendocino needlepoint by the look of it. No doubt back in the miasmatic smog of Osaka, he bonged the peons with the latest skins from Saville Row. Everything about him was *just so*; he purchased confidently on that razor edge between class and ostentation that only the Japanese can handle with such grace, and then only when they have millions of hard yen to back them up. Mr Ito would be no sucker. He would want whatever he wanted for precise reasons all his own, and would not be budgeable from the centre of his desires. The typical heavyweight Japanese businessman, a prime example of the breed that's pushed us out of the centre of the international arena.

Mr Ito bowed almost imperceptibly as he handed me his card. I countered by merely bobbing my head in his direction and remaining seated. These face and posture games may seem ridiculous, but you can't do business with the Japanese without playing them. As he took a seat before me, Ito drew a black cylinder from the sleeve of his kimono and ceremoniously placed it on the desk before me.

'I have been given to understand that you are a connoisseur of Filmore posters of the early-to-mid-1960s periods, Mr Harris,' he said. 'The repute of your collection has penetrated even to the

environs of Osaka and Kyoto, where I make my habitation. Please permit me to make this minor addition. The thought that a contribution of mine may repose in such illustrious surroundings will afford me much pleasure and place me forever in your debt.'

My hands trembled as I unwrapped the poster. With his financial resources, Ito's polite little gift could be almost anything but disappointing. My daddy loved to brag about the old expense account days when American businessmen ran things, but you had to admit that the fringe benefits of business Japanese style had plenty to recommend them.

But when I got the gift open, it took a real effort not to lose points by whistling out loud. For what I was holding was nothing less than a mint example of the very first Grateful Dead poster in subtle black and grey, a super-rare item, not available for any amount of sheer purchasing power. I dared not enquire as to how Mr Ito had acquired it. We simply shared a long, silent moment contemplating the poster, its beauty and historicity transcending whatever questionable events might have transpired to bring us together in its presence.

How could I not like Mr Ito now? Who can say that the Japanese occupy their present international position by economic might alone?

'I hope I may be afforded the opportunity to please your sensibilities as you have pleased mine, Mr Ito,' I finally said. That was the way to phrase it; you didn't thank them for a gift like this, and you brought them around to business as obliquely as possible.

Ito suddenly became obviously embarrassed, even furtive. 'Forgive me my boldness, Mr Harris, but I have hopes that you may be able to assist me in resolving a domestic matter of some delicacy.'

'A domestic matter?'

'Just so. I realize that this is an embarrassing intrusion, but you are obviously a man of refinement and infinite discretion, so if you will forgive my forwardness...'

His composure seemed to totally evaporate, as if he was going to ask me to pimp for some disgusting perversion he had. I had the feeling that the power had suddenly taken a quantum jump in my direction, that a large financial opportunity was about to present itself.

'Please feel free, Mr Ito...'

Ito smiled nervously. 'My wife comes from a family of extreme artistic attainment,' he said. 'In fact, both her parents have attained the exalted status of National Cultural Treasurers, a distinction of which they never tire of reminding me. While I have achieved a large measure of financial success in the freight-booster enterprise, they regard me as *nikuturi*, a mere merchant, severely lacking in aesthetic refinement as compared to their own illustrious selves. You understand the situation, Mr Harris?'

I nodded as sympathetically as I could. These Japs certainly have a genius for making life difficult for themselves! Here was a major Japanese industrialist shrinking into low posture at the very thought of his sponging in-laws, whom he could probably buy and sell out of petty cash. At the same time, he was obviously out to cream the sons of bitches in some crazy way that would only make sense to a Japanese. Seems to me the Japanese are better at running the world than they are at running their lives.

'Mr Harris, I wish to acquire a major American artefact for the gardens of my Kyoto estate. Frankly, it must be of sufficient magnitude so as to remind the parents of my wife of my success in the material realm every time they should chance to gaze upon it, and I shall display it in a manner which will assure that they gaze upon it often. But of course, it must be of sufficient beauty and historicity so as to prove to them that my taste is no less elevated than their own. Thus shall I gain respect in their eyes and re-establish tranquillity in my household. I have been given to understand that you are a valued counsellor in such matters, and I am eager to inspect whatever such objects you may deem appropriate.'

So that was it! He wanted to buy something big enough to bong the minds of his artsy-fartsy relatives, but he really didn't trust his own taste; he wanted me to show him something he would want to see. And he was swimming like a goldfish in a sea of yen! I could hardly believe my good luck. How much could I take him for?

'Ah . . . what size artefact did you have in mind, Mr Ito?' I asked as casually as I could.

'I wish to acquire a major piece of American monumental architecture so that I may convert the gardens of my estate into a shrine to its beauty and historicity. Therefore, a piece of classical proportions is required. Of course, it must be worthy of enshrinement, otherwise an embarrassing loss of esteem will surely ensue.'

'Of course.'

This was not going to be just another Howard Johnson or gas station sale; even something like an old Hilton or the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame I unloaded last year was thinking too small. In his own way, Ito was telling me that price was no object, the sky was the limit. This was the dream of a lifetime! A sucker with a bottomless bank account placing himself trustingly in my tender hands!

'Should it please you, Mr Ito,' I said, 'we can inspect several possibilities here in New York immediately. My jumper is on the roof.'

'Most gracious of you to interrupt your most busy schedule on my behalf, Mr Harris. I would be delighted.'

I lifted the jumper off the roof, floated her to a thousand feet, then took a Mach 1.5 jump south over the decayed concrete jungles at the tip of Manhattan. The curve brought us back to float about a mile north of Bedloe's Island. I took her down to three hundred and brought her in toward the Statue of Liberty at a slow drift, losing altitude imperceptibly as we crept up on the Headless Lady, so that by the time we were just offshore, we were right down on the deck. It was a nice touch to make the goods look more impressive—manipulating the perspectives so that the huge, green, headless statue, with its patina of firebomb soot, seemed to rise up out of the bay like a ruined colossus as we floated toward it.

Mr Ito betrayed no sign of emotion. He stared straight ahead out the bubble without so much as a word or a flicker of gesture.

'As you are no doubt aware, this is the famous Statue of Liberty,' I said. 'Like most such artefacts, it is available to any buyer who will display it with proper dignity. Of course, I would have no trouble convincing the Bureau of National Antiquities that your intentions are exemplary in this regard.'

I set the autopilot to circle the island at fifty yards offshore so that Ito could get a fully rounded view, and see how well the statue would look from any angle, how eminently suitable it was for enshrinement. But he still sat there with less expression on his face than the average C-grade servitor.

'You can see that nothing has been touched since the Insurrectionists blew the statue's head off,' I said, trying to drum up his interest with a pitch. 'Thus, the statue has picked up yet another level of historical significance to enhance its already formidable

venerability. Originally a gift from France, it has historical significance as an emblem of kinship between the American and French Revolutions. Situated as it is in the mouth of New York harbour, it became a symbol of America itself to generations of immigrants. And the damage the Insurrectionists did only serves as a reminder of how lucky we were to come through that mess as lightly as we did. Also, it adds a certain melancholy atmosphere, don't you think? Emotion, intrinsic beauty, and historicity combined in one elegant piece of monumental statuary. And the asking price is a good deal less than you might suppose.'

Mr Ito seemed embarrassed when he finally spoke. 'I trust you will forgive my saying so, Mr Harris, since the emotion is engendered by the highest regard for the noble past of your great nation, but I find this particular artefact somewhat depressing.'

'How so, Mr Ito?'

The jumper completed a circle of the Statue of Liberty and began another as Mr Ito lowered his eyes and stared at the oily waters of the bay as he answered.

'The symbolism of this broken statue is quite saddening, representing as it does a decline from your nation's past greatness. For me to enshrine such an artefact in Kyoto would be an ignoble act, an insult to the memory of your nation's greatness. It would be a statement of overweening pride.'

Can you beat that? *He* was offended because he felt that displaying the statue in Japan would be insulting the United States, and therefore I was implying he was *nikulturali* by offering it to him. When all that the damned thing was to any American was one more piece of old junk left over from the glorious days that the Japanese, who were nuts for such rubbish, might be persuaded to pay through the nose for the dubious privilege of carting away. These Japs could drive you crazy—who else could you offend by suggesting they do something that they thought would offend you but you thought was just fine in the first place?

'I hope I haven't offended you, Mr Ito,' I blurted out. I could have bitten my tongue off the moment I said it, because it was exactly the wrong thing to say. I *had* offended him, and it was only a further offence to put him in a position where politeness demanded that he deny it.

'I'm sure that could not have been further from your intention,

Mr Harris,' Ito said with convincing sincerity. 'A pang of sadness at the perishability of greatness, nothing more. In fact as such, the experience might be said to be healthful to the soul. But making such an artefact a permanent part of one's surroundings would be more than I could bear.'

Were these his true feelings or just smooth Japanese politeness? Who could tell what these people really felt? Sometimes I think they don't even know what they feel themselves. But at any rate, I had to show him something that would change his mood, and fast. Hm-m-m...

'Tell me, Mr Ito, are you fond of baseball?'

His eyes lit up like satellite beacons and the heavy mood evaporated in the warm, almost childish, glow of his sudden smile. 'Ah yes!' he said. 'I retain a box at Osaka Stadium, though I must confess I secretly retain a partiality for the Giants. How strange it is that this profound game has so declined in the country of its origin.'

'Perhaps. But that very fact has placed something on the market which I'm sure you'll find most congenial. Shall we go?'

'By all means,' Mr Ito said. 'I find our present environs somewhat overbearing.'

I floated the jumper to five hundred feet and programmed a Mach 2.5 jump curve to the north that quickly put the great hunk of mouldering, dirty copper far behind. It's amazing how much sickening emotion the Japanese are able to attach to almost any piece of old junk. *Our* old junk at that, as if Japan didn't have enough useless old clutter of its own. But I certainly shouldn't complain about it; it makes me a pretty good living. Everyone knows the old saying about a fool and his money.

The jumper's trajectory put us at float over the confluence of the Harlem and East Rivers at a thousand feet. Without dropping any lower, I whipped the jumper north-east over the Bronx at three hundred miles per hour. This area had been covered by tenements before the Insurrection, and had been thoroughly razed by fire-bombs, high explosives, and napalm. No one had ever found an economic reason for clearing away the miles of rubble, and now the scarred earth and ruined buildings were covered with tall grass, poison sumac, tangled scrub growth, and scattered thickets of trees which might merge to form a forest in another generation or two. Because of the crazy, jagged, overgrown topography, this land



was utterly useless, and no one lived here except some pathetic remnants of old hippie tribes that kept to themselves and weren't worth hunting down. Their occasional huts and patchwork tents were the only signs of human habitation in the area. This was *really* depressing territory, and I wanted to get Mr Ito over it high and fast.

Fortunately, we didn't have far to go, and in a couple of minutes, I had the jumper floating at five hundred feet over our objective, the only really intact structure in the area. Mr Ito's stone face lit up with such boyish pleasure that I knew I had it made; I had figured right when I figured he couldn't resist something like this. 'Soi' he cried in delight. 'Yankee Stadium!'

The ancient ballpark had come through the Insurrection with nothing worse than some atmospheric blacking and cratering of its concrete exterior walls. Everything around it had been pretty well demolished except for a short section of old elevated subway line which still stood beside it, a soft rusty-red skeleton covered with vines and moss. The surrounding ruins were thoroughly overgrown, huge piles of rubble, truncated buildings, rusted-out tanks, forming tangled man-made jungled foothills around the high point of the stadium, which itself had creepers and vines growing all over it, partially blending it into the wild, overgrown landscape around it.

The Bureau of National Antiquities had circled the stadium with a high, electrified, barbed-wire fence to keep out the hippies who roamed the badlands. A lone guard armed with a Japanese-made slicer patrolled the fence in endless circles at fifteen feet on a one-man skimmer. I brought the jumper down to fifty feet and orbited the stadium five times, giving the enthralled Ito a good, long, contemplative look at how lovely it would look as the centrepiece of his gardens instead of hidden away in these crummy ruins. The guard waved to us each time our paths crossed—it must be a lonely, boring job out here with nothing but old junk and crazy wandering hippies for company.

'May we go inside?' Ito said in absolutely reverent tones. Man, was he hooked! He glowed like a little kid about to inherit a candy store.

'Certainly, Mr Ito.' I said, taking the jumper out of its circling pattern and floating it gently up over the lip of the old ballpark, putting it on hover at roof-level over what had once been short

centre field. Very slowly, I brought the jumper down towards the tangle of tall grass, shrubbery, and occasional stunted trees that covered what had once been the playing field.

It was like descending into some immense, ruined, roofless cathedra. As we dropped, the cavernous tripledecked grandstands—rotten wooden seats rich with moss and fungi, great overhanging rafters concealing flocks of chattering birds in their deep glowering shadows—rose to encircle the jumper in a weird, lost grandeur.

By the time we touched down, Ito seemed to be floating in his seat with rapture. 'So beautiful!' he sighed. 'Such a sense of history and venerability. Ah, Mr Harris, what noble deeds were done in this Yankee Stadium in bygone days! May we set foot on this historic playing field?'

'Of course, Mr Ito.' It was beautiful. I didn't have to say a word; he was doing a better job of selling the mouldy, useless heap of junk to himself than I ever could.

We got out of the jumper and tramped around through the tangled vegetation while scruffy pigeons wheeled overhead and the immensity of the empty stadium gave the place an illusion of mystical significance, as if it were some Greek ruin or Stonehenge, instead of just a ruined old baseball park. The grandstands seemed choked with ghosts; the echoes of great events that never were, filled the deeply shadowed cavernous spaces.

Mr Ito, it turned out, knew more about Yankee Stadium than I did, or ever wanted to. He led me around at a measured, reverent pace, boring my ass off with a kind of historical grand tour.

'Here Al Gionfriddo made his famous World Series catch of a potential home run by the great Dimaggio,' he said, as we reached the high, crumbling black wall that ran around the bleachers. Faded numerals said '405'. We followed this curving, overgrown wall around to the 467 sign in left centre field. Here there were three stone markers jutting up out of the old playing field like so many tombstones, and five copper plaques on the wall behind them, so green with decay as to be illegible. They really must've taken this stuff seriously in the old days, as seriously as the Japanese take it now.

'Memorials to the great heroes of the New York Yankees,' Ito said. 'The legendary Ruth, Gehrig, Dimaggio, Mantle... Over this

very spot, Mickey Mantle drove a ball into the bleachers, a feat which had been regarded as impossible for nearly half a century. Ah...

And so on. Ito tramped all through the underbrush of the playing field and seemed to have a piece of trivia of vast historical significance to himself for almost every square foot of Yankee Stadium. At this spot, Babe Ruth had achieved his sixtieth home run; here Roger Maris had finally surpassed that feat, over there Mantle had almost driven a ball over the high roof of the venerable stadium. It was staggering how much of this trivia he knew, and how much importance it all had in his eyes. The tour seemed to go on forever. I would've gone crazy with boredom if it wasn't so wonderfully obvious how thoroughly sold he was on the place. While Ito conducted his love-affair with Yankee Stadium, I passed the time by counting yen in my head. I figured I could probably get ten million out of him, which meant that my commission would be a cool million. Thinking about that much money about to drop into my hands was enough to keep me smiling for the two hours that Ito babbled on about home runs, no-hitters, and triple-plays.

It was late afternoon by the time he had finally saturated himself and allowed me to lead him back to the jumper. I felt it was time to talk business, while he was still under the spell of the stadium, and his resistance was at low ebb.

'It pleases me greatly to observe the depths of your feeling for this beautiful and venerable stadium, Mr Ito,' I said. 'I stand ready to facilitate the speedy transfer of title at your convenience.'

Ito started as if suddenly roused from some pleasant dream. He cast his eyes downward, and bowed almost imperceptibly.

'Alas,' he said sadly, 'while it would please me beyond all reason to enshrine the noble Yankee Stadium upon my grounds, such a self-indulgence would only exacerbate my domestic difficulties. The parents of my wife ignorantly consider the noble sport of baseball an imported American barbarity. My wife unfortunately shares in this opinion and frequently berates me for my enthusiasm for the game. Should I purchase the Yankee Stadium, I would become a laughing stock in my own household, and my life would become quite unbearable.'

Can you beat that? The arrogant little son of a bitch wasted two hours of my time dragging around this stupid heap of junk babbling all that garbage and driving me half crazy, and he knew he wasn't

going to buy it all the time! I felt like knocking his low-posture teeth down his unworthy throat. But I thought of all those yen I still had a fighting chance at and made the proper response: a rueful little smile of sympathy, a shared sigh of wistful regret, a murmured, 'Alas'.

'However,' Ito added brightly, 'the memory of this visit is something I shall treasure always. I am deeply in your debt for granting me this experience, Mr Harris. For this alone, the trip from Kyoto has been made more than worthwhile.'

Now that really made my day.

I was in real trouble, I was very close to blowing the biggest deal I've ever had a shot at. I'd shown Ito the two best items in my territory, and if he didn't find what he wanted in the north-east, there were plenty of first-rank pieces still left in the rest of the country—top stuff like the St Louis Gateway Arch, the Disneyland Matterhorn, the Salt Lake City Mormon Tabernacle—and plenty of other brokers to collect that big fat commission.

I figured I had only one more good try before Ito started thinking of looking elsewhere: the United Nations building complex. The UN had fallen into a complicated legal limbo. The UN had retained title to the buildings when they moved their headquarters out of New York, but when the UN folded, New York State, New York City, and the Federal Government had all laid claim to them, along with the UN's foreign creditors. The Bureau of National Antiquities didn't have clear title, but they did administer the estate for the Federal Government. If I could palm the damned thing off on Ito, the Bureau of National Junk would be only too happy to take his cheque and let everyone else try to pry the money out of them. And once he moved it to Kyoto, the Japanese Government would not be about to let anyone repossess something that one of their heavyweight citizens had shelled out hard yen for.

So I jumped her at Mach 1.7 to a hover at three hundred feet over the greasy waters of the East River due east of the UN complex at 42nd Street. At this time of day and from this angle, the UN buildings presented what I hoped was a romantic Japanese-style vista. The Secretariat was a giant glass tombstone dramatically silhouetted by the late afternoon sun as it loomed massively before us out of the perpetual grey haze hanging over Manhattan; beside it, the low sweeping curve of the General Assembly gave the group-

ing a balanced calligraphic outline. The total effect seemed similar to that of one of those ancient Japanese Torii gates rising out of the foggy sunset, only done on a far grander scale.

The Insurrection had left the UN untouched—the rebels had had some crazy attachment for it—and from the river, you couldn't see much of the grubby open air market that had been allowed to spring up in the plaza, or the honky-tonk bars along First Avenue. Fortunately, the Bureau of National Antiquities made a big point of keeping the buildings themselves in good shape, figuring that the Federal Government's claim would be weakened if anyone could yell that the Bureau was letting them fall apart.

I floated her slowly in off the river, keeping at the three-hundred-foot level, and started my pitch. 'Before you, Mr Ito, are the UN buildings, melancholy symbol of one of the noblest dreams of man, now unfortunately empty and abandoned, a monument to the tragedy of the UN's unfortunate demise.'

Flashes of sunlight, reflected off the river, then on to the hundreds of windows that formed the face of the Secretariat, scintillated intermittently across the glass monolith as I set the jumper to circling the building. When we came around to the western face, the great glass façade was a curtain of orange fire.

'The Secretariat could be set in your gardens so as to catch both the sunrise and sunset, Mr Ito,' I pointed out. 'It's considered one of the finest examples of Twentieth-Century Utilitarian in the world, and you'll note that it's in excellent repair.'

Ito said nothing. His eyes did not so much as flicker. Even the muscles of his face seemed unnaturally wooden. The jumper passed behind the Secretariat again, which eclipsed both the sun and its giant reflection; below us was the sweeping grey concrete roof of the General Assembly.

'And of course, the historic significance of the UN buildings is beyond measure, if somewhat tragic—'

Abruptly, Mr Ito interrupted, in a cold, clipped voice. 'Please forgive my crudity in interjecting a political opinion into this situation, Mr Harris, but I believe such frankness will save you much wasted time and effort and myself considerable discomfort.'

All at once, he was Shibusro Ito of Ito Freight Boosters of Osaka, a mover and shaper of the economy of the most powerful nation on Earth, and he was letting me know it. 'I fully respect your sentimental esteem for the late UN, but it is a sentiment I do not share. I

remind you that the UN was born as an alliance of the nations which humiliated Japan in a most unfortunate war, and expired as a shrill and contentious assembly of pauperized beggar-states united only in the dishonourable determination to extract international aims from more progressive, advanced, self-sustaining, and virtuous states, chief among them Japan. I must therefore regretfully point out that the sight of these buildings fills me with nothing but disgust, though they may have a certain intrinsic beauty as abstract objects.'

His face had become a shiny mask and he seemed a million miles away. He had come as close to outright anger as I had ever heard one of these heavyweight Japs get; he must be really steaming inside. Damn it, how was I supposed to know that the UN had all those awful political meanings for him? As far as I've ever heard, the UN hasn't meant anything to anyone for years, except an idealistic, sappy idea that got taken over by Third Worlders and went broke. Just my rotten luck to run into one of the few people in the world who were still fighting that one!

'You are no doubt fatigued, Mr Harris,' Ito said coldly. 'I shall trouble you no longer. It would be best to return to your office now. Should you have further objects to show me, we can arrange another appointment at some mutually convenient time.'

What could I say to that? I had offended him deeply, and besides I couldn't think of anything else to show him. I took the jumper to five hundred and headed downtown over the river at a slow hundred miles per hour, hoping against hope that I'd somehow think of something to salvage this blown million-yen deal with before we reached my office and I lost this giant goldfish forever.

As we headed downtown, Ito stared impassively out the bubble at the bleak ranks of high-rise apartment buildings that lined the Manhattan shore below us, not deigning to speak or take further notice of my miserable existence. The deep orange light streaming in through the bubble turned his round face into a rising sun, straight off the Japanese flag. It seemed appropriate. The crazy bastard was just like his country: a politically touchy, politely arrogant economic overlord, with infinitely refined aesthetic sensibilities inexplicably combined with a pack-rat lust for the silliest of our old junk. One minute Ito seemed so superior in every way, and the next he was a stupid, childish sucker. I've been doing business

with the Japanese for years, and I still don't really understand them. The best I can do is guess around the edges of whatever their inner reality actually is, and hope I hit what works. And this time out, with a million yen or more dangled in front of me, I had guessed wrong three times and now I was dragging my tail home with a dissatisfied customer whose very posture seemed designed to let me know that I was a crass, second-rate boob, and that he was one of the lords of creation!

'Mr Harris! Mr Harris! Over there! That magnificent structure!' Ito was suddenly almost shouting; his eyes were bright with excitement, and he was actually smiling.

He was pointing due south along the East River. The Manhattan bank was choked with the ugliest public housing projects imaginable, and the Brooklyn shore was worse: one of those huge, sprawling, so-called industrial parks, low windowless buildings, geodesic warehouses, wharves, a few freight-booster launching pads. Only one structure stood out, there was only one thing Ito could've meant: the structure linking the housing project on the Manhattan side with the industrial park on the Brooklyn shore.

Mr Ito was pointing at the Brooklyn Bridge.

'The . . . ah . . . bridge, Mr Ito?' I managed to say with a straight face. As far as I knew, the Brooklyn Bridge had only one claim to historicity: it was the butt of a series of jokes so ancient that they weren't funny anymore. The Brooklyn Bridge was what old comic con men traditionally sold to sucker tourists, greenhorns or hicks they used to call them, along with phoney uranium stocks and gold-painted bricks.

So I couldn't resist the line: 'You want to buy the Brooklyn Bridge, Mr Ito?' It was so beautiful; he had put me through such hassles, and had finally gotten so damned high and mighty with me, and now I was in effect calling him an idiot to his face and he didn't know it.

In fact, he nodded eagerly in answer like a straight man out of some old joke and said, 'I do believe so. Is it for sale?'

I slowed the jumper to forty, brought her down to a hundred feet, and swallowed my giggles as we approached the crumbling old monstrosity. Two massive and squat stone towers supported the rusty cables from which the bed of the bridge was suspended. The jumper had made the bridge useless years ago; no one had bothered to maintain it and no one had bothered to tear it down.

Where the big blocks of dark grey stone met the water, they were encrusted with putrid-looking green slime. Above the waterline, the towers were whitened with about a century's worth of guano.

It was hard to believe that Ito was serious. The bridge was a filthy, decayed, reeking old monstrosity. In short, it was just what Ito deserved to be sold.

'Why yes, Mr Ito,' I said, 'I think I might be able to sell you the Brooklyn Bridge.'

I put the jumper on hover about a hundred feet from one of the filthy old stone towers. Where the stones weren't caked with seagull guano, they were covered with about an inch of black soot. The roadbed was cracked and pitted and thickly paved with garbage, old shells, and more guano; the bridge must've been a seagull rookery for decades. I was mighty glad that the jumper was airtight; the stink must've been terrific.

'Excellent!' Mr Ito exclaimed. 'Quite lovely, is it not? I am determined to be the man to purchase the Brooklyn Bridge, Mr Harris.'

'I can think of no one more worthy of that honour than your esteemed self, Mr Ito,' I said with total sincerity.

About four months after the last section of the Brooklyn Bridge was boosted to Kyoto, I received two packages from Mr Shibusro Ito. One was a mailing envelope containing a mimicasette and a holo slide; the other was a heavy package about the size of a shoebox wrapped in blue rice paper.

Feeling a lot more mellow toward the memory of Ito these days, with a million of his yen in my bank account, I dropped the mini into my playback and was hardly surprised to hear his voice.

'Salutations, Mr Harris, and once again my profoundest thanks for expediting the transfer of the Brooklyn Bridge to my estate. It has now been permanently enshrined and affords us all much aesthetic enjoyment and has enhanced the tranquility of my household immeasurably. I am enclosing a holo of the shrine for your pleasure. I have also sent you a small token of my appreciation which I hope you will take in the spirit in which it is given. Sayonara.'

My curiosity aroused, I got right up and put the holo slide in my wall viewer. Before me was a heavily wooded mountain which rose into twin peaks of austere, dark-grey rock. A tall waterfall plunged gracefully down the long gorge between the two pinnacles to a

shallow lake at the foot of the mountain, where it smashed on to a table of flat rock, generating perpetual billows of soft mist which turned the landscape into something straight out of a Chinese painting. Spanning the gorge between the two peaks like a spiderweb directly over the great falls, its stone towers anchored to islands of rock on the very lip of the precipice, was the Brooklyn Bridge, its ponderous bulk rendered slim and graceful by the massive scale of the landscape. The stone had been cleaned and glistened with moisture, the cables and roadbed were overgrown with lush green ivy. The holo had been taken just as the sun was setting between the towers of the bridge, outlining it in rich orange fire, turning the rising mists coppery, and sparkling in brilliant sheets off the falling water.

It was very beautiful.

It was quite a while before I tore myself away from the scene, remembering Mr Ito's other package.

Beneath the blue paper wrapping was a single gold-painted brick. I gaped. I laughed. I looked again.

The object looked superficially like an old brick covered with gold paint. But it wasn't. It was a solid brick of soft, pure gold, a replica of the original item, in perfect detail.

I knew that Mr Ito was trying to tell me something, but I still can't quite make out what.

## THE SCREWFLY SOLUTION

RACCOONA SHELDON

The young man sitting at 2°N., 75°W. sent a casually venomous glance up at the nonfunctional shoofly *ventilador* and went on reading his letter. He was sweating heavily, stripped to his shorts in the hotbox of what passed for a hotel room in Cuyapán.

How do other wives do it? I stay busy-busy with the Ann Arbor grant review programmes and the seminar, saying brightly 'Oh yes, Alan is in Colombia setting up a biological pest control programme, isn't it wonderful?' But inside I imagine you being surrounded by 19-year-old raven-haired cooing beauties, every one panting with social dedication and filthy rich. And forty inches of bosom busting out of her delicate lingerie, I even figured it in centimetres, that's 101.6 centimetres of busting. Oh, darling, darling, do what you want only come home safe.

Alan grinned fondly, briefly imagining the only body he longed for. His girl, his magic Anne. Then he got up to open the window another cautious notch. A long pale mournful face looked in—a goat. The room opened on the goatpen, the stench was vile. Air, anyway. He picked up the letter.

Everything is just about as you left it, except that the Peedsville horror seems to be getting worse. They're calling it the Sons of Adam cult now. Why can't they do something, even if it is a religion? The Red Cross has set up a refugee camp in Ashton, Georgia. Imagine, refugees in the USA. I heard two little girls were carried out all slashed up. Oh, Alan.

Which reminds me, Barney came over with a wad of clippings he wants me to send you. I'm putting them in a separate envelope; I know what happens to very fat letters in foreign POs. He says, in case you don't get them, what do the following have in common? Peedsville, São Paulo, Phoenix, San Diego, Shanghai,



New Delhi, Tripoli, Brisbane, Johannesburg, and Lubbock, Texas. He says the hint is, remember where the Intertropical Convergence Zone is now. That makes no sense to me, maybe it will to your superior ecological brain. All I could see about the clippings was that they were fairly horrible accounts of murders or massacres of women. The worst was the New Delhi one, about 'rafts of female corpses' in the river. The funniest (!) was the Texas Army officer who shot his wife, three daughters and his aunt, because God told him to clean the place up.

Barney's such an old dear, he's coming over Sunday to help me take off the downspout and see what's blocking it. He's dancing on air right now, since you left his spruce bud-worm-moth anti-pheromone programme finally paid off. You know he tested over 2,000 compounds? Well, it seems that good old 2,097 really works. When I asked him what it does he just giggles, you know how shy he is with women. Anyway, it seems that a one-shot spray programme will save the forests, without harming a single other thing. Birds and people can eat it all day, he says.

Well sweetheart, that's all the news except Amy goes back to Chicago to school Sunday. The place will be a tomb, I'll miss her frightfully in spite of her being at the stage where I'm her worst enemy. The sullen sexy subteens, Angie says. Amy sends love to her Daddy. I send you my whole heart, all that words can't say.

Your Anne

Alan put the letter safely in his notefile and glanced over the rest of the thin packet of mail, refusing to let himself dream of home and Anne. Barney's 'fat envelope' wasn't there. He threw himself on the rumpbed, yanking off the lightcord a minute before the town generator went off for the night. In the darkness the list of places Barney had mentioned spread themselves around a misty globe that turned, troublingly, briefly in his mind. Something...

But then the memory of the hideously parasitized children he had worked with at the clinic that day took possession of his thoughts. He set himself to considering the data he must collect. *Look for the vulnerable link in the behavioural chain*—how often Barney—Dr Barnhard Braithwaite—had pounded it into his skull. Where was it, where? In the morning he would start work on bigger canefly cages...

At that moment, five thousand miles North, Anne was writing:

Oh, darling, darling, your first three letters are here, they all came together. I knew you were writing. Forget what I said about swarthy heiresses, that was all a joke. My darling I know, I know...us. Those dreadful cane-fly larvae, those poor little kids. If you weren't my husband I'd think you were a saint or something. (I do anyway.)

I have your letters pinned up all over the house, makes it a lot less lonely. No real news here except things feel kind of quiet and spooky. Barney and I got the downspout out, it was full of a big rotted hoard of squirrel-nuts. They must have been dropping them down the top, I'll put a wire over it. (Don't worry, I'll use a ladder this time.)

Barney's in an odd, grim mood. He's taking this Sons of Adam thing very seriously, it seems he's going to be on the investigation committee if that ever gets off the ground. The weird part is that nobody seems to be doing anything, as if it's just too big. Selina Peters has been printing some acid comments, like 'When one man kills his wife you call it murder, but when enough do it we call it a life-style. I think it's spreading, but nobody knows because the media have been asked to down-play it. Barney says it's being viewed as a form of contagious hysteria. He insisted I send you this ghastly interview, printed on thin paper. It's not going to be published, of course. The quietness is worse, though, it's like something terrible was going on just out of sight. After reading Barney's thing I called up Pauline in San Diego to make sure she was all right. She sounded funny, as if she wasn't saying everything... my own sister. Just after she said things were great she suddenly asked if she could come and stay here awhile next month. I said come right away, but she wants to sell her house first. I wish she'd hurry.

Oh, the diesel car is okay now, it just needed its filter changed. I had to go out to Springfield to get one but Eddie installed it for only \$2.50. He's going to bankrupt his garage.

In case you didn't guess, those places of Barney's are all about latitude 30° N. or S.—the horse latitudes. When I said not exactly, he said remember the equatorial convergence zone shifts in winter, and to add in Libya, Osaka, and a place I forget—wait, Alice Springs, Australia. What has this to do with anything, I asked. He said, 'Nothing—I hope.' I leave it to you, great brains like Barney can be weird.

Oh my dearest, here's all of me to all of you. Your letters make life possible. But don't feel you have to, I can tell how tired you must be. Just know we're together, always everywhere.

Your Anne  
Oh PS I had to open this to put Barney's thing in, it wasn't the secret police. Here it is. All love again. A.

In the goat-infested room where Alan read this, rain was drumming on the roof. He put the letter to his nose to catch the faint perfume once more, and folded it away. Then he pulled out the yellow flimsy Barney had sent and began to read, frowning.

PEDSVILLE CULTIVATORS OF ADAM SPECIAL. Statement by driver Sgt. Willard Mews, Globe Fork, Ark. We hit the roadblock about 80 miles west of Jacksonville. Major John Heinz of Ashton was expecting us, he gave us an escort of two riot vehicles headed by Capt. T. Parr. Major Heinz appeared shocked to see that the NIH medical team included two women doctors. He warned us in the strongest terms of the danger. So Dr Patsy Putnam (Urbana, Ill.), the psychologist, decided to stay behind at the Army cordon. But Dr Elaine Fay (Clinton, NJ) insisted on going with us, saying she was the epi-something (epidemiologist).

We drove behind one of the riot cars at 30 mph for about an hour without seeing anything unusual. There were two big signs saying 'SONS OF ADAM—LIBERATED ZONE.' We passed some small pecan packing plants and a citrus processing plant. The men there looked at us but did not do anything unusual. I didn't see any children or women of course. Just outside Peedsville we stopped at a big barrier made of oil drums in front of a large citrus warehouse. This area is old, sort of a shantytown and trailer park. The new part of town with the shopping centre and developments is about a mile further on. A warehouse worker with a shotgun came out and told us to wait for the Mayor. I don't think he saw Dr Elaine Fay then, she was sitting sort of bent down in back.

Mayor Blount drove up in a police cruiser and our chief, Dr Premack, explained our mission from the Surgeon General. Dr Premack was very careful not to make any remarks insulting to the Mayor's religion. Mayor Blount agreed to let the party go on into Peedsville to take samples of the soil and water and so on and talk to the doctor who lives there. The mayor was about 6'2", weight maybe 230 or 240, tanned, with greyish hair. He was smiling and chuckling in a friendly manner.

Then he looked inside the car and saw Dr Elaine Fay and he blew up. He started yelling we had to all get the hell back. But Dr Premack managed to talk to him and cool him down and finally the Mayor said Dr Fay should go into the warehouse office and stay there with the door closed. I had to stay

there too and see she didn't come out, and one of the Mayor's men would drive the party.

So the medical people and the Mayor and one of the riot vehicles went on into Peedsville and I took Dr Fay back into the warehouse office and sat down. It was real hot and stuffy. Dr Fay opened a window, but when I heard her trying to talk to an old man outside I told her she couldn't do that and closed the window. The old man went away. Then she wanted to talk to me but I told her I did not feel like conversing. I felt it was real wrong, her being there.

So then she started looking through the office files and reading papers there. I told her that was a bad idea, she shouldn't do that. She said the government expected her to investigate. She showed me a booklet or magazine they had there, it was called *Man Listens To God* by Reverend McIlhenny. They had a carton full in the office. I started reading it and Dr Fay said she wanted to wash her hands. So I took her back along a kind of enclosed hallway beside the conveyor to where the toilet was. There were no doors or windows so I went back. After awhile she called out that there was a cot back there, she was going to lie down. I figured that was all right because of the no windows, also I was glad to be rid of her company.

When I got to reading the book it was very intriguing. It was very deep thinking about how man is now on trial with God and if we fulfil our duty God will bless us with a real new life on Earth. The signs and portents show it. It wasn't like, you know, Sunday school stuff. It was deep.

After awhile I heard some music and saw the soldiers from the other riot car were across the street by the gas tanks, sitting in the shade of some trees and kidding with the workers from the plant. One of them was playing a guitar, not electric, just plain. It looked so peaceful.

Then Mayor Blount drove up alone in the cruiser and came in. When he saw I was reading the book he smiled at me sort of fatherly, but he looked tense. He asked me where Dr Fay was and I told him she was lying down in back. He said that was okay. Then he kind of sighed and went back down the hall, closing the door behind him. I sat and listened to the guitar man, trying to hear what he was singing. I felt really hungry, my lunch was in Dr Premack's car.

After awhile the door opened and Mayor Blount came back in. He looked terrible, his clothes were messed up and he had bloody scrape marks on his face. He didn't say anything, he just looked at me hard and fierce, like he might have been disoriented. I saw his zipper was open and there was blood on his clothing and also on his (private parts).

I didn't feel frightened, I felt something important had happened. I tried to get him to sit down. But he motioned me to follow him back down the hall, to where Dr Fay was. 'You must see,' he said. He went into the toilet and I went into a kind of little room there, where the cot was. The light was fairly good, reflected off the tin roof from where the walls stopped. I saw Dr

Fay lying on the cot in a peaceful appearance. She was lying straight, her clothing was to some extent different but her legs were together. I was glad to see that. Her blouse was pulled up and I saw there was a cut or incision on her abdomen. The blood was coming out there, or it had been coming out there, like a mouth. It wasn't moving at this time. Also her throat was cut open.

I returned to the office. Mayor Blount was sitting down, looking very tired. He had cleaned himself off. He said, 'I did it for you. Do you understand?'

He seemed like my father, I can't say it better than that. I realized he was under a terrible strain, he had taken a lot on himself for me. He went on to explain how Dr Fay was very dangerous, she was what they call a crypto-female (crypto?), the most dangerous kind. He had exposed her and purified the situation. He was very straightforward, I didn't feel confused at all, I knew he had done what was right.

We discussed the book, how man must purify himself and show God a clean world. He said some people raise the question of how can man reproduce without women but such people miss the point. The point is that as long as man depends on the old filthy animal way God won't help him. When man gets rid of his animal part which is woman, this is the signal God is awaiting. Then God will reveal the new true clean way, maybe angels will come bringing new souls, or maybe we will live forever, but it is not our place to speculate, only to obey. He said some men here had seen an Angel of the Lord. This was very deep, it seemed like it echoed inside me, I felt it was an inspiration.

Then the medical party drove up and I told Dr Premack that Dr Fay had been taken care of and sent away, and I got in the car to drive them out of the Liberated Zone. However four of the six soldiers from the roadblock refused to leave. Capt. Parr tried to argue them out of it but finally agreed they could stay to guard the oil-drum barrier.

I would have liked to stay too the place was so peaceful but they needed me to drive the car. If I had known there would be all this hassle I never would have done them the favour. I am not crazy and I have not done anything wrong and my lawyer will get me out. That is all I have to say.

In Cuyapán the hot afternoon rain had temporarily ceased. As Alan's fingers let go of Sgt. Willard Mews's wretched document he caught sight of pencil-scrawled words in the margin. Barney's spider hand. He squinted.

*Man's religion and metaphysics are the voices of his glands. Schönweiser, 1878.*

Who the devil Schönweiser was Alan didn't know, but he knew what Barney was conveying. This murderous crackpot religion of McWhosis was a symptom, not a cause. Barney believed something was physically affecting the Peedsville men, generating psychosis, and a local religious demagog had sprung up to 'explain' it.

Well, maybe. But cause or effect, Alan thought only of one thing: eight hundred miles from Peedsville to Ann Arbor. Anne should be safe. She *had* to be.

He threw himself on the lumpy cot, his mind going back exultantly to his work. At the cost of a million bites and cane-cuts he was pretty sure he'd found the weak link in the canefly cycle. The male mass-mating behaviour, the comparative scarcity of ovulant females. It would be the screwfly solution all over again with the sexes reversed. Concentrate the pheromone, release sterilized females. Luckily the breeding populations were comparatively isolated. In a couple of seasons they ought to have it. Have to let them go on spraying poison meanwhile, of course; damn pity, it was slaughtering everything and getting in the water, and the caneflies had evolved to immunity anyway. But in a couple of seasons, maybe three, they could drop the canefly populations below reproductive viability. No more tormented human bodies with those stinking larvae in the nasal passages and brain... He drifted off for a nap, grinning.

Up north, Anne was biting her lip in shame and pain.

Sweetheart, I shouldn't admit it but your wife is ~~scared~~ a bit jittery. Just female nerves or something, nothing to worry about. Everything is normal up here. It's so eerily normal, nothing in the papers, nothing anywhere except what I hear through Barney and Lillian. But Pauline's phone won't answer out in San Diego; the fifth day some strange man yelled at me and banged the phone down. Maybe she's sold her house—but why wouldn't she call?

Lillian's on some kind of Save-the-Women committee, like we were an endangered species, ha-ha—you know Lillian. It seems the Red Cross has started setting up camps. But she says, after the first rush, only a trickle are coming out of what they call 'the affected areas'. Not many children, either, even little boys. And they have some air-photos around Lubbock showing what

look like mass graves. Oh, Alan . . . so far it seems to be mostly spreading West, but something's happening in St Louis, they're cut off. So many places seem to have just vanished from the news, I had a nightmare that there isn't a woman left alive down there. And nobody's doing anything. They talked about spraying with tranquilizers for awhile and then that died out. What could it do? Somebody at the UN has proposed a convention on—you won't believe this—*femicide*. It sounds like a deodorant spray.

Excuse me honey, I seem to be a little hysterical, George Searles came back from Georgia talking about God's Will—Searles the lifelong atheist. Alan, something crazy is happening.

But there are no facts. Nothing. The Surgeon General issued a report on the bodies of the Rahway Rip-Breast Team—I guess I didn't tell you about that. Anyway, they could find no pathology. Milton Baines wrote a letter saying in the present state of the art we can't distinguish the brain of a saint from a psychopathic killer, so how could they expect to find what they don't know how to look for?

Well, enough of these jitters. It'll be all over by the time you get back, just history. Everything's fine here, I fixed the car's muffler again. And Amy's coming home for the vacations, *that'll* get my mind off faraway problems.

Oh, something amusing to end with—Angie told me what Barney's enzyme does to the spruce budworm. It seems it blocks the male from turning around after he connects with the female, so he mates with her head instead. Like clockwork with a cog missing. There're going to be some pretty puzzled female spruce-worms. Now why couldn't Barney tell me that? He really is such a sweet shy old dear. He's given me some stuff to put in, as usual. I didn't read it.

Now don't worry my darling everything's fine.  
I love you, I love you so.

Always, all ways your Anne

Two weeks later in Cuyapán when Barney's enclosures slid out of the envelope, Alan didn't read them either. He stuffed them into the pocket of his bush-jacket with a shaking hand and started bundling his notes together on the rickety table, with a scrawled note to Sister Dominique on top. *Anne, Anne my darling*. The hell with the canefly, the hell with everything except that tremor in his

fearless girl's firm handwriting. The hell with being five thousand miles away from his woman, his child, while some deadly madness raged. He crammed his meagre belongings into his duffel. If he hurried he could catch the bus through to Bogotá and maybe make the Miami flight.

In Miami he found the planes north jammed. He failed a quick standby; six hours to wait. Time to call Anne. When the call got through some difficulty he was unprepared for the rush of joy and relief that burst along the wires.

'Thank God—I can't believe it—Oh, Alan, my darling, are you really—I can't believe—'

He found he was repeating too, and all mixed up with the canefly data. They were both laughing hysterically when he finally hung up.

Six hours. He settled in a frayed plastic chair opposite *Aerolíneas Argentinas*, his mind half back at the clinic, half on the throngs moving by him. Something was oddly different here, he perceived presently. Where was the decorative fauna he usually enjoyed in Miami, the parade of young girls in crotch-tight pastel jeans? The flounces, boots, wild hats and hairdos and startling expanses of newly tanned skin, the brilliant fabrics barely confining the bob of breasts and buttocks? Not here—but wait; looking closely, he glimpsed two young faces hidden under unbecoming parkas, their bodies draped in bulky nondescript skirts. In fact, all down the long vista he could see the same thing: hooded ponchos, heaped-on clothes and baggy pants, dull colours. A new style? No, he thought not. It seemed to him their movements suggested furtiveness, timidity. And they moved in groups. He watched a lone girl struggle to catch up with others ahead of her, apparently strangers. They accepted her wordlessly.

They're frightened, he thought. Afraid of attracting notice. Even that grey-haired matron in a pantsuit resolutely leading a flock of kids was glancing around nervously.

And at the Argentine desk opposite he saw another odd thing: two lines had a big sign over them, *Mujeres*. Women. They were crowded with the shapeless forms and very quiet.

The men seemed to be behaving normally; hurrying, lounging, griping and joking in the lines as they kicked their luggage along. But Alan felt an undercurrent of tension, like an irritant in the air. Outside the line of storefronts behind him a few isolated men



seemed to be handing out tracts. An airport attendant spoke to the nearest man; he merely shrugged and moved a few doors down.

To distract himself Alan picked up a *Miami Herald* from the next seat. It was surprisingly thin. The international news occupied him for awhile; he had seen none for weeks. It too had a strange empty quality, even the bad news seemed to have dried up. The African war which had been going on seemed to be over, or went unreported. A trade summit meeting was haggling over grain and steel prices. He found himself at the obituary pages, columns of close-set type dominated by the photo of an unknown defunct ex-senator. Then his eye fell on two announcements at the bottom of the page. One was too flowery for quick comprehension, but the other stated in bold plain type:

THE FORSETTE FUNERAL HOME REGRETFULLY ANNOUNCES  
IT WILL NO LONGER ACCEPT FEMALE CADAVERS

Slowly he folded the paper, staring at it numbly. On the back was an item headed *Navigational Hazard Warning*, in the shipping news. Without really taking it in, he read:

*AP/Nassau:* The excursion liner *Carib Swallow* reached port under tow today after striking an obstruction in the Gulf Stream off Cape Hatteras. The obstruction was identified as part of a commercial trawler's seine floated by female corpses. This confirms reports from Florida and the Gulf of the use of such seines, some of them over a mile in length. Similar reports coming from the Pacific coast and as far away as Japan indicate a growing hazard to coastwise shipping.

Alan flung the thing into the trash receptacle and sat rubbing his forehead and eyes. Thank God he had followed his impulse to come home. He felt totally disoriented, as though he had landed by error on another planet. Four and a half hours more to wait . . . At length he recalled the stuff from Barney he had thrust in his pocket, and pulled it out and smoothed it.

The top item, however, seemed to be from Anne, or at least the Ann Arbor News. Dr Lillian Dash, together with several hundred other members of her organization, had been arrested for demonstrating without a permit in front of the White House. They seemed to have started a fire in an oil drum, which was considered particularly heinous. A number of women's groups had participated,

the total struck Alan as more like thousands than hundreds. Extraordinary security precautions were being taken, despite the fact that the President was out of town at the time.

The next item had to be Barney's, if Alan could recognize the old man's acerbic humour.

*UP/Vatican City 19 June.* Pope John IV today intimated that he does not plan to comment officially on the so-called Pauline Purification cults advocating the elimination of women as a means of justifying man to God. A spokesman emphasized that the Church takes no position on these cults but repudiates any doctrine involving a 'challenge' to or from God to reveal His further plans for man.

Cardinal Fazzoli, spokesman for the European Pauline movement, reaffirmed his view that the Scriptures define woman as merely a temporary companion and instrument of Man. Women, he states, are nowhere defined as human, but merely as a transitional expedient or state. 'The time of transition to full humanity is at hand', he concluded.

The next item appeared to be a thin-paper xerox from a recent issue of Science:

#### SUMMARY REPORT OF THE AD HOC EMERGENCY COMMITTEE ON FEMICIDE

The recent world-wide though localized outbreaks of femicide appear to represent a recurrence of similar outbreaks by some group or sect which are not uncommon in world history in times of psychic stress. In this case the root cause is undoubtedly the speed of social and technological change, augmented by population pressure, and the spread and scope are aggravated by instantaneous world communications, thus exposing more susceptible persons. It is not viewed as a medical or epidemiological problem; no physical pathology has been found. Rather it is more akin to the various manias which swept Europe in the 17th century, e.g. the Dancing Manias, and like them, should run its course and disappear. The chiliastic cults which have sprung up around the affected areas appear to be unrelated, having in common only the idea that a new means of human reproduction will be revealed as a result of the 'purifying' elimination of women.

We recommend that (1) inflammatory and sensational reporting be suspended; (2) refugee centres be set up and maintained for women escapes from the focal areas; (3) containment of affected areas by military cordon be continued and enforced; and (4) after a cooling-down period and the subsidence of the mania, qualified mental health teams and appropriate professional personnel go in to undertake rehabilitation.



SUMMARY OF THE MINORITY  
REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE

The nine members signing this report agree that there is no evidence for epidemiological contagion of femicide in the strict sense. However, the geographical relation of the focal areas of outbreak strongly suggest that they cannot be dismissed as purely psychosocial phenomena. The initial outbreaks have occurred around the globe near the 30th parallel, the area of principal atmospheric downflow of upper winds coming from the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone. An agent or condition in the upper equatorial atmosphere would thus be expected to reach ground level along the 30th parallel, with certain seasonal variations. One principal variation is that the downflow moves north over the East Asian continent during the late winter months, and these areas south of it (Arabia, Western India, parts of North Africa) have in fact been free of outbreaks until recently, when the downflow zone has moved south. A similar downflow occurs in the Southern Hemisphere, and outbreaks have been reported along the 30th parallel running through Pretoria and Alice Springs, Australia. (Information from Argentina is currently unavailable.)

This geographical correlation cannot be dismissed, and it is therefore urged that an intensified search for a physical cause be instituted. It is also correlated with wind conditions. A watch for similar outbreaks along the secondary down-welling zones at 60° north and south should be kept.

(signed for the minority)  
Barnhard Braithwaite

Alan grinned reminiscently at his old friend's name, which seemed to restore normalcy and stability to the world. It looked as if Barney was on to something, too, despite the prevalence of horses' asses. He frowned, puzzling it out.

Then his face slowly changed as he thought how it would be, going home to Anne. In a few short hours his arms would be around her, the tall, secretly beautiful body that had come to obsess him. Theirs had been a late-blooming love. They'd married, he supposed now, out of friendship, even out of friends' pressure. Everyone said they were made for each other, he big and chunky and blond, she willowy brunette; both shy, highly controlled, cerebral types. For the first few years the friendship had held, but sex hadn't been all that much. Conventional necessity. Politely reassuring each other, privately—he could say it now—disappointing.

But then, when Amy was a toddler, something had happened. A miraculous inner portal of sensuality had slowly opened to them, a

liberation into their own secret unsuspected heaven of fully physical bliss . . . Jesus, but it had been a wrench when the Columbia thing had come up. Only their absolute sureness of each other had made him take it. And now, to be about to have her again, trebly desirable from the spice of separation—feeling-seeing-hearing-smelling-grasping. He shifted in his seat to conceal his body's excitement, half mesmerized by fantasy.

And Amy would be there, too; he grinned at the memory of that prepubescent little body plastered against him. She was going to be a handful, all right. His manhood understood Amy a lot better than her mother did; no cerebral phase for Amy . . . But Anne, his exquisite shy one, with whom he'd found the way into the almost unendurable transports of the flesh . . . First the conventional greeting, he thought; the news, the unspoken, savoured, mounting excitement behind their eyes; the light touches; then the seeking of their own room, the falling clothes, the caresses, gentle at first—the flesh, the *nakedness*—the delicate teasing, the grasp, the first thrust—

—A terrible alarm-bell went off in his head. Exploded from his dream, he stared around, then finally down at his hands. *What was he doing with his open clasp-knife in his fist?*

Stunned, he felt for the last shreds of his fantasy, and realized that the tactile images had not been of caresses, but of a frail neck strangling in his fist, the thrust had been the Plunge of a blade seeking vitals. In his arms, legs, phantasms of striking and trampling, bones cracking. And Amy—

Oh God, Oh God—  
Not sex, bloodlust.

That was what he had been dreaming. The sex was there, but it was driving some engine of death.

Numbly he put the knife away, thinking only over and over, it's got me. It's got me. Whatever it is, it's got me. *I can't go home.*

After an unknown time he got up and made his way to the United counter to turn in his ticket. The line was long. As he waited, his mind cleared a little. What could he do, here in Miami? Wouldn't it be better to get back to Ann Arbor and turn himself in to Barney? Barney could help him, if anyone could. Yes, that was best. But first he had to warn Anne.

The connection took even longer this time. When Anne finally answered he found himself blurring unintelligibly, it took awhile to make her understand he wasn't talking about a plane delay.

'I tell you, I've caught it. Listen, Anne, for God's sake. If I should come to the house don't let me come near you. I mean it. I mean it. I'm going to the lab, but I might lose control and try to get to you. Is Barney there?'

'Yes, but darling—'

'Listen. Maybe he can fix me, maybe this'll wear off. But I'm not safe, Anne, Anne, I'd kill you, can you understand? Get a—get a weapon. I'll try not to come to the house. But if I do, don't let me get near you. Or Amy. It's a sickness, it's real. Treat me—treat me like a fucking wild animal. Anne, say you understand, say you'll do it.'

They were both crying when he hung up.

He went shaking back to sit and wait. After a time his head seemed to clear a little more. *Doctor, try to think.* The first thing he thought of was to take the loathesome knife and throw it down a trash-slot. As he did so he realized there was one more piece of Barney's material in his pocket. He uncrumpled it; it seemed to be a clipping from *Nature*.

At the top was Barney's scrawl:

'Only guy making sense. UK infected now, Oslo, Copenhagen out of communication. Damfools still won't listen. Stay put.'

#### COMMUNICATION FROM PROFESSOR IAN MACINTYRE, GLASGOW UNIV.

A potential difficulty for our species has always been implicit in the close linkage between the behavioural expression of aggression/predation and sexual reproduction in the male. This close linkage involves (a) many of the same neuromuscular pathways which are utilized both in predatory and sexual pursuit, grasping, mounting, etc., and (b) similar states of adrenergic arousal which are activated in both. The same linkage is seen in the males of many other species; in some, the expression of aggression and copulation alternate or even coexist, an all-too-familiar example being the common house cat. Males of many species bite, claw, bruise, tread or otherwise assault receptive females during the act of intercourse; indeed, in some species the male attack is necessary for female ovulation to occur.

In many if not all species it is the aggressive behaviour which appears first, and then changes to copulatory behaviour when the appropriate signal is presented (e.g. the three-tined stickleback and the European robin). Lacking the inhibiting signal, the male's fighting response continues and the female is attacked or driven off.

It seems therefore appropriate to speculate that the present crisis might be caused by some substance, perhaps at the viral or enzymatic level, which

affects a failure of the switching or triggering function in the higher primates. (Note: Zoo gorillas and chimpanzees have recently been observed to attack or destroy their mates; rhesus not.) Such a dysfunction could be expressed by the failure of mating behaviour to modify or supersede over the aggressive/predatory response, i.e. sexual stimulation would produce attack only, the stimulation discharging itself through the destruction of the stimulating object.

In this connection it might be noted that exactly this condition is a commonplace of male functional pathology, in those cases where murder occurs as a response to and apparent completion of, sexual desire.

It should be emphasized that the aggression/copulation linkage discussed here is specific to the male: the female response (e.g. lordotic reflex) being of a different nature.

Alan sat holding the crumpled sheet a long time; the dry, stilted Scottish phrases seemed to help clear his head, despite the sense of brooding tension all around him. Well, if pollution or whatever had produced some substance, it could presumably be countered, filtered, neutralized. Very very carefully, he let himself consider his life with Anne, his sexuality. Yes; much of their loveplay could be viewed as genitalized, sexually gentled savagery. Play-predation... He turned his mind quickly away. Some writer's phrase occurred to him: 'The panic element in all sex.' Who? Fritz Leiber? The violation of social distance, maybe; another threatening element. Whatever, it's our weak link, he thought. Our vulnerability... The dreadful feeling of *rightness* he had experienced when he found himself knife in hand, fantasizing violence, came back to him. As though it was the right, the only way. Was that what Barney's budworms felt when they mated with their females wrong-end-to?

At long length, he became aware of body need and sought a toilet. The place was empty, except for what he took to be a heap of clothes blocking the door of the far stall. Then he saw the red-brown pool in which it lay, and the bluish mounds of bare, thin, buttocks. He backed out, not breathing, and fled into the nearest crowd, knowing he was not the first to have done so.

Of course. Any sexual drive. Boys, men, too.

At the next washroom he watched to see men enter and leave normally before he ventured in.

Afterward he returned to sit, waiting, repeating over and over to himself: *Go to the lab. Don't go home. Go straight to the lab.* Three more hours; he sat numbly at 26°N. 81°W. breathing, breathing...

Dear diary. Big scene tonite, Daddy came home!! Only he acted so funny, he had the taxi wait and just held on to the doorway, he wouldn't touch me or let us come near him. (I mean funny weird, not funny Ha-ha.) He said, I have something to tell you, this is getting worse not better. I'm going to sleep in the lab but I want you to get out, Anne, Anne, I can't trust myself any more. First thing in the morning you both get on the plane for Martha's and stay there. So I thought he had to be joking, I mean with the dance next week and Aunt Martha lives in Whitehorse where there's nothing nothing nothing. So I was yelling and Mother was yelling and Daddy was groaning. Go now! And then he started crying. Crying!! So I realized, wow, this is serious, and I started to go over to him but Mother yanked me back and then I saw she had this big KNIFE!! And she shoved me in back of her and started crying too Oh Alan, Oh Alan, like she was insane. So I said, Daddy, I'll never leave you, it felt like the perfect thing to say. And it was thrilling, he looked at me real sad and deep like I was a grown-up while Mother was treating me like I was a mere infant as usual. But Mother ruined it raving Alan the child is mad, darling go. So he ran out the door yelling Be gone, Take the car. Get out before I come back.

Oh I forgot to say I was wearing what but my gooby green with my curlitie still on, wouldn't you know of all the shitty luck, how could I have known such a beautiful scene was ahead we never know life's cruel whimsy. And mother is dragging out suitcases yelling Pack your things hurry! So she's going I guess but I am not repeat not going to spend the fall sitting in Aunt Martha's grain silo and lose the dance and all my summer credits. And Daddy was trying to communicate with us, right? I think their relationship is obsolete. So when she goes upstairs I am splitting. I am going to go over to the lab and see Daddy.

Oh PS Diane tore my yellow jeans she promised me I could use her pink ones Ha-ha that'll be the day.

I ripped that page out of Amy's diary when I heard the squad car coming. I never opened her diary before but when I found she'd gone I looked . . . Oh, my darling little girl. She went to him, my little girl, my poor little fool child. Maybe if I'd taken time to explain, maybe—

Excuse me, Barney. The stuff is wearing off, the shots they gave me. I didn't feel anything. I mean, I knew somebody's daughter went to see her father and he killed her. And cut his throat. But it didn't mean anything.

Alan's note, they gave me that but then they took it away. Why

did they have to do that? His last handwriting, the last words he wrote before his hand picked up the, before he—

I remember it. *'Sudden and light as that, the bonds gave And we learned of finalities besides the grave. The bonds of our humanity have given, we are finished. I love—'*

I'm all right, Barney, really. Who wrote that, Robert Frost? *The bonds gave . . .* Oh, he said, tell Barney: *The terrible rightness. What does that mean?*

You can't answer that, Barney dear. I'm just writing this to stay sane, I'll put it in your hidey-hole. Thank you, thank you Barney dear. Even as blurry as I was, I knew it was you. All the time you were cutting off my hair and rubbing dirt on my face, I knew it was right because it was you. Barney I never thought of you as those horrible words you said. You were always Dear Barney.

By the time the stuff wore off I had done everything you said, the gas, the groceries. Now I'm here in your cabin. With those clothes you made me put on I guess I do look like a boy, the gas man called me 'Mister'.

I still can't really realize, I have to stop myself from rushing back. But you saved my life, I know that. The first trip in I got a paper, I saw where they bombed the Apostle Islands refuge. And it had about those three women stealing the Air Force plane and bombing Dallas, too. Of course they shot them down, over the Gulf. Isn't it strange how we do nothing? Just get killed by ones and twos. Or more, now they've started on the refugees. . . . Like hypnotized rabbits. We're a toothless race.

Do you know I never said 'we' meaning women before? 'We' was always me and Alan, and Amy of course. Being killed selectively encourages group identification. . . . You see how sane-headed I am.

But I still can't really realize.

My first trip in was for salt and kerosene. I went to that little Red Deer store and got my stuff from the old man in the back, as you told me—you see, I remembered! He called me 'Boy', but I think maybe he suspects. He knows I'm staying at your cabin.

Anyway, some men and boys came in the front. They were all so normal, laughing and kidding. I just couldn't believe, Barney. In fact I started to go out past them when I heard one of them say 'Heinz saw an angel'. An angel. So I stopped and listened. They said it was big and sparkly. Coming to see if man is carrying out God's will, one of them said. And he said, Moosenee is now a liberated zone,

and all up by Hudson Bay. I turned and got out the back, fast. The old man had heard them too. He said to me quietly, I'll miss the kids.

Hudson Bay, Barney, that means it's coming from the north too, doesn't it? That must be about 60°.

But I have to go back once again, to get some fishhooks. I can't live on bread. Last week I found a deer some poacher had killed, just the head and legs. I made a stew. It was a doe. Her eyes, I wonder if mine look like that now.

I went to get the fishhooks today. It was bad, I can't ever go back. There were some men in front again, but they were different. Mean and tense. No boys. And there was a new sign out in front, I couldn't see it; maybe it says Liberated Zone too.

The old man gave me the hooks quick and whispered to me, 'Boy, them woods'll be full of hunters next week.' I almost ran out.

About a mile down the road a blue pickup started to chase me. I guess he wasn't from around there, I ran the VW into a logging draw and he roared on by. After a long while I drove out and came on back, but I left the car about a mile from here and hiked in. It's surprising how hard it is to pile enough brush to hide a yellow VW.

Barney, I can't stay here. I'm eating perch raw so nobody will see my smoke, but those hunters will be coming through. I'm going to move my sleeping bag out to the swamp by that big rock, I don't think many people go there.

Since the last lines I moved out. It feels safer. Oh, Barney, how did this *happen*?

Fast, that's how. Six months ago I was Dr Anne Alstein. Now I'm a widow and bereaved mother, dirty and hungry, squatting in a swamp in mortal fear. Funny if I'm the last woman left alive on Earth. I guess the last one around here, anyway. Maybe some holed out in the Himalayas, or sneaking through the wreck of New York City. How can we last?  
We can't.

And I can't survive the winter here, Barney. It gets to 40° below. I'd have to have a fire, they'd see the smoke. Even if I worked my way south, the woods end in a couple hundred miles. I'd be potted like a duck. No. No use. Maybe somebody is trying something somewhere, but it won't reach here in time . . . and what do I have to live for?

No. I'll just make a good end, say up on that rock where I can see

the stars. After I go back and leave this for you. I'll wait to see the beautiful colour in the trees one last time.  
I know what I'll scratch for an epitaph.

HERE LIES THE SECOND MEANEST PRIMATE  
ON EARTH.

Good-bye, dearest dearest Barney.

I guess nobody will ever read this, unless I get the nerve and energy to take it to Barney's. Probably I won't. Leave it in a Baggie. I have one here; maybe Barney will come and look. I'm up on the big rock now. The moon is going to rise soon, I'll do it then. Mosquitoes, be patient. You'll have all you want.

The thing I have to write down is that I saw an angel too. This morning. It was big and sparkly, like the man said; like a Christmas tree without the tree. But I knew it was real because the frogs stopped croaking and two bluejays gave alarm calls. That's important; it was *really* there.

I watched it, sitting under my rock. It didn't move much. It sort of bent over and picked up something, leaves or twigs, I couldn't see. Then it did something with them around its middle, like putting them into an invisible sample-pocket.

Let me repeat—it was *there*. Barney, if you're reading this, THERE ARE THINGS HERE. And I think they've done whatever it is to us. Made us kill ourselves off.

Why? Well, it's a nice place, if it wasn't for people. How do you get rid of people? Bombs, death-rays—all very primitive. Leave a big mess. Destroy everything, craters, radioactivity, ruin the place.

This way there's no muss, no fuss. Just like what we did to the screwfly. Pinpoint the weak link, wait a bit while we do it for them. Only a few bones around; make good fertilizer.

Barney dear, goodbye. I saw it. It was there.

But it wasn't an angel.

I think I saw a *real-estate agent*.