# The Seventeen Best Short Stories of All-Time

as selected by Storey Clayton in June 2008

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#### Introduction to the Seventeen Stories

It's actually been a couple of years since Matt "Fish" McFeeley and David "Gris" Gray and I were sitting around and came up with the idea to share our ten favorite short stories with each other. Gris made his list relatively quickly and printed out a packet for Fish, which I believe he still has to this day. And I dallied on making my own list, only becoming re-inspired recently upon reading a new story and thinking to myself: That has to make the top ten! (And so it did, at #10.) Fish joked that it would be pointless to reprint Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" ten times. (This story narrowly missed inclusion with this compilation.)

In any case, as you can see, I found it difficult to restrict myself to ten stories. After all, seventeen is my favorite number. And at a certain point, the exercise's point is equal parts to rank a top ten (which this expanded compilation does achieve) and to showcase the most memorable and profound stories experienced in a lifetime of reading. And indeed, this latter may be the larger purpose behind the effort. Thus, the prime criterion in selection was to choose stories that had most deeply impacted me in both the course of reading them and especially in my days to follow. This not only makes it easy to compile these stories (they can easily be recalled), but often the test of time is the best judge of a good short story.

The best short stories are ghosts. They follow one around, haunting and affecting one's mindset for years to come. They're waiting for you around street corners, behind people you meet, over your bed when you go to sleep. These stories have all played that role in my life (with the exception of the new one, whose haunting season has only just begun). No doubt I will be chided for the extremely healthy portion of Ray Bradbury stories, but there's a reason he's my favorite author. Six of the reasons are herein included.

Please note that all these stories are copyrighted by their respective authors or estates. This is a much more efficient way of compiling them and presenting them to everyone than copying on actual paper, though you should print on your own if you prefer to curl up and read instead of staring at the screen. But please don't spread this URL around too far so that I get in trouble with the copyright police. I have the deepest respect for these authors and don't want to steal from them. But until I'm an author that people are expecting to compile short stories for republication and public consumption, this'll have to do.

-Storey Clayton Berkeley, California 15 June 2008

There were ninety-seven New York advertising men in the hotel, and, the way they were monopolizing the long-distance lines, the girl in 507 had to wait from noon till almost two-thirty to get her call through. She used the time, though. She read an article in a women's pocket-size magazine, called "Sex Is Fun—or Hell." She washed her comb and brush. She took the spot out of the skirt of her beige suit. She moved the button on her Saks blouse. She tweezed out two freshly surfaced hairs in her mole. When the operator finally rang her room, she was sitting on the window seat and had almost finished putting lacquer on the nails of her left hand.

She was a girl who for a ringing phone dropped

exactly nothing. She looked as if her phone had been ringing continually ever since she had reached puberty.

With her little lacquer brush, while the phone was ringing, she went over the nail of her little finger, accentuating the line of the moon. She then replaced the cap on the bottle of lacquer and, standing up, passed her left—the wet—hand back and forth through the air. With her dry hand, she picked up a congested ashtray from the window seat and carried it with her over to the night table, on which the phone stood. She sat down on one of the made-up twin beds and—it was the fifth or sixth ring—picked up the phone.

"Hello," she said, keeping the fingers of her left hand outstretched and away from her white silk dressing gown, which was all that she was wearing, except mules — her rings were in the bathroom.

"I have your call to New York now, Mrs. Glass," the operator said.

"Thank you," said the girl, and made room on the night table for the ashtray.

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# A Perfect Day for Bananafish

A woman's voice came through. "Muriel? Is that you?"

The girl turned the receiver slightly away from her ear. "Yes, Mother. How are you?" she said.

"I've been worried to death about you. Why haven't you phoned? Are you all right?"

"I tried to get you last night and the night before. The phone here's been —"

"Are you all right, Muriel?"

The girl increased the angle between the receiver and her ear. "I'm fine. I'm hot. This is the hottest day they've had in Florida in —"

"Why haven't you called me? I've been worried to —"

"Mother, darling, don't yell at me. I can hear you beautifully," said the girl. "I called you twice last night. Once just after—"

"I told your father you'd probably call last night. But, no, he had to—Are you all right Muriel? Tell me the truth."

"I'm fine. Stop asking me that, please."

"When did you get there?"

"I don't know. Wednesday morning, early."
"Who drove?"

"He did," said the girl. "And don't get excited. He drove very nicely. I was amazed."

"He drove? Muriel, you gave me your word of —"

"Mother," the girl interrupted, "I just told you. He drove very nicely. Under fifty the whole way, as a matter of fact."

"Did he try any of that funny business with the trees?"

"I said he drove very nicely, Mother. Now, please. I asked him to stay close to the white line, and all, and he knew what I meant, and he did. He was even trying not to look at the trees — you could tell. Did Daddy get the car fixed, incidentally?"

"Not yet. They want four hundred dollars, just to —"

"Mother, Seymour *told* Daddy that he'd pay for it. There's no reason for —"

"Well, we'll see. How did he behave — in the car and all?"

"All right," said the girl.

"Did he keep calling you that awful —"

"No. He has something new now."

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#### A Perfect Day for Bananafish

"What?"

"Oh, what's the difference, Mother?"

"Muriel, I want to know. Your father - "

"All right, all right. He calls me Miss Spiritual Tramp of 1948," the girl said, and giggled.

"It isn't funny, Muriel. It isn't funny at all. It's horrible. It's sad, actually. When I think how—"

"Mother," the girl interrupted, "listen to me. You remember that book he sent me from Germany? You know — those German poems. What'd I do with it? I've been racking my —"

"You have it."

"Are you sure?" said the girl.

"Certainly. That is, I have it. It's in Freddy's room. You left it here and I didn't have room for it in the — Why? Does he want it?"

"No. Only, he asked me about it, when we were driving down. He wanted to know if I'd read it."

"It was in German!"

"Yes, dear. That doesn't make any difference," said the girl, crossing her legs. "He said that the poems happen to be written by the *only great* 

poet of the century. He said I should've bought a translation or something. Or learned the language, if you please."

"Awful. Awful. It's sad, actually, is what it is. Your father said last night —"

"Just a second, Mother," the girl said. She went over to the window seat for her cigarettes, lit one, and returned to her seat on the bed. "Mother?" she said, exhaling smoke.

"Muriel. Now, listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"Your father talked to Dr. Sivetski."

"Oh?" said the girl.

"He told him everything. At least, he said he did — you know your father. The trees. That business with the window. Those horrible things he said to Granny about her plans for passing away. What he did with all those lovely pictures from Bermuda — everything."

"Well?" said the girl.

"Well. In the first place, he said it was a perfect crime the Army released him from the hospital — my word of honor. He very definitely told your father there's a chance — a very great chance, he

said — that Seymour may completely lose control of himself. My word of honor."

"There's a psychiatrist here at the hotel," said the girl.

"Who? What's his name?"

"I don't know. Rieser or something. He's supposed to be very good."

"Never heard of him."

"Well, he's supposed to be very good, anyway."

"Muriel, don't be fresh, please. We're very worried about you. Your father wanted to wire you last night to come home, as a matter of f—"

"I'm not coming home right now, Mother. So relax."

"Muriel. My word of honor. Dr. Sivetski said Seymour may completely lose contr—"

"I just got here, Mother. This is the first vacation I've had in years, and I'm not going to just pack everything and come home," said the girl. "I couldn't travel now anyway. I'm so sunburned I can hardly move."

"You're badly sunburned? Didn't you use that jar of Bronze I put in your bag? I put it right —"

"I used it. I'm burned anyway."

"That's terrible. Where are you burned?"

"All over, dear, all over."

"That's terrible."

"I'll live."

"Tell me, did you talk to this psychiatrist?" "Well, sort of," said the girl.

"What'd he say? Where was Seymour when you talked to him?"

"In the Ocean Room, playing the piano. He's played the piano both nights we've been here."

"Well, what'd he say?"

"Oh, nothing much. He spoke to me first. I was sitting next to him at Bingo last night, and he asked me if that wasn't my husband playing the piano in the other room. I said yes, it was, and he asked me if Seymour's been sick or something. So I said —"

"Why'd he ask that?"

"I don't know, Mother. I guess because he's so pale and all," said the girl. "Anyway, after Bingo he and his wife asked me if I wouldn't like to join them for a drink. So I did. His wife was horrible. You remember that awful dinner dress we saw in Bonwit's window? The one you said you'd have to have a tiny, tiny —"

"The green?"

"She had it on. And all hips. She kept asking me if Seymour's related to that Suzanne Glass that has that place on Madison Avenue—the millinery."

"What'd he say, though? The doctor."

"Oh. Well, nothing much, really. I mean we were in the bar and all. It was terribly noisy."

"Yes, but did — did you tell him what he tried to do with Granny's chair?"

"No, Mother. I didn't go into details very much," said the girl. "I'll probably get a chance to talk to him again. He's in the bar all day long."

"Did he say he thought there was a chance he might get — you know — funny or anything? Do something to you!"

"Not exactly," said the girl. "He had to have more facts, Mother. They have to know about your childhood — all that stuff. I told you, we could hardly talk, it was so noisy in there."

"Well. How's your blue coat?"

"All right. I had some of the padding taken out."

"How are the clothes this year?"

"Terrible. But out of this world. You see sequins — everything," said the girl.

"How's your room?"

"All right. Just all right, though. We couldn't get the room we had before the war," said the girl. "The people are awful this year. You should see what sits next to us in the dining room. At the next table. They look as if they drove down in a truck."

"Well, it's that way all over. How's your ballerina?"

"It's too long. I told you it was too long."

"Muriel, I'm only going to ask you once more — are you really all right?"

"Yes, Mother," said the girl. "For the ninetieth time."

"And you don't want to come home?"

"No, Mother."

"Your father said last night that he'd be more than willing to pay for it if you'd go away some-

#### A Perfect Day for Bananafish

place by yourself and think things over. You could take a lovely cruise. We both thought—"

"No, thanks," said the girl, and uncrossed her legs. "Mother, this call is costing a for—"

"When I think of how you waited for that boy all through the war — I mean when you think of all those crazy little wives who —"

"Mother," said the girl, "we'd better hang up. Seymour may come in any minute."

"Where is he?"

"On the beach."

"On the beach? By himself? Does he behave himself on the beach?"

"Mother," said the girl, "you talk about him as though he were a raving maniac —"

"I said nothing of the kind, Muriel."

"Well, you sound that way. I mean all he does is lie there. He won't take his bathrobe off."

"He won't take his bathrobe off? Why not?"

"I don't know. I guess because he's so pale."

"My goodness, he needs the sun. Can't you make him?"

"You know Seymour," said the girl, and crossed

her legs again. "He says he doesn't want a lot of fools looking at his tattoo."

"He doesn't have any tattoo! Did he get one in the Army?"

"No, Mother. No, dear," said the girl, and stood up. "Listen, I'll call you tomorrow, maybe."

"Muriel. Now, listen to me."

"Yes, Mother," said the girl, putting her weight on her right leg.

"Call me the *instant* he does, or *says*, anything at all funny — you know what I mean. Do you hear me?"

"Mother, I'm not afraid of Seymour."

"Muriel, I want you to promise me."

"All right, I promise. Goodbye, Mother," said the girl. "My love to Daddy." She hung up.

"See more glass," said Sybil Carpenter, who was staying at the hotel with her mother. "Did you see more glass?"

"Pussycat, stop saying that. It's driving Mommy absolutely crazy. Hold still, please."

Mrs. Carpenter was putting sun-tan oil on Sybil's shoulders, spreading it down over the delicate,

winglike blades of her back. Sybil was sitting insecurely on a huge, inflated beach ball, facing the ocean. She was wearing a canary-yellow two-piece bathing suit, one piece of which she would not actually be needing for another nine or ten years.

"It was really just an ordinary silk handkerchief — you could see when you got up close," said the woman in the beach chair beside Mrs. Carpenter's. "I wish I knew how she tied it. It was really darling."

"It sounds darling," Mrs. Carpenter agreed. "Sybil, hold still, pussy."

"Did you see more glass?" said Sybil.

Mrs. Carpenter sighed. "All right," she said. She replaced the cap on the sun-tan oil bottle. "Now run and play, pussy. Mommy's going up to the hotel and have a Martini with Mrs. Hubbel. I'll bring you the olive."

Set loose, Sybil immediately ran down to the flat part of the beach and began to walk in the direction of Fisherman's Pavilion. Stopping only to sink a foot in a soggy, collapsed castle, she was soon out of the area reserved for guests of the hotel.

She walked for about a quarter of a mile and then suddenly broke into an oblique run up the soft part of the beach. She stopped short when she reached the place where a young man was lying on his back.

"Are you going in the water, see more glass?" she said.

The young man started, his right hand going to the lapels of his terry-cloth robe. He turned over on his stomach, letting a sausaged towel fall away from his eyes, and squinted up at Sybil.

"Hey. Hello, Sybil."

"Are you going in the water?"

"I was waiting for you," said the young man. "What's new?"

"What?" said Sybil.

"What's new? What's on the program?"

"My daddy's coming tomorrow on a nairiplane," Sybil said, kicking sand.

"Not in my face, baby," the young man said, putting his hand on Sybil's ankle. "Well, it's about time he got here, your daddy. I've been expecting him hourly. Hourly."

"Where's the lady?" Sybil said.

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"The lady?" The young man brushed some sand out of his thin hair. "That's hard to say, Sybil. She may be in any one of a thousand places. At the hairdresser's. Having her hair dyed mink. Or making dolls for poor children, in her room." Lying prone now, he made two fists, set one on top of the other, and rested his chin on the top one. "Ask me something else, Sybil," he said. "That's a fine bathing suit you have on. If there's one thing I like, it's a blue bathing suit."

Sybil stared at him, then looked down at her protruding stomach. "This is a yellow," she said. "This is a yellow."

"It is? Come a little closer."

Sybil took a step forward.

"You're absolutely right. What a fool I am."

"Are you going in the water?" Sybil said.

"I'm seriously considering it. I'm giving it plenty of thought, Sybil, you'll be glad to know."

Sybil prodded the rubber float that the young man sometimes used as a head-rest. "It needs air," she said.

"You're right. It needs more air than I'm will-

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ing to admit." He took away his fists and let his chin rest on the sand. "Sybil," he said, "you're looking fine. It's good to see you. Tell me about yourself." He reached in front of him and took both of Sybil's ankles in his hands. "I'm Capricorn," he said. "What are you?"

"Sharon Lipschutz said you let her sit on the piano seat with you," Sybil said.

"Sharon Lipschutz said that?" Sybil nodded vigorously.

He let go of her ankles, drew in his hands, and laid the side of his face on his right forearm. "Well," he said, "you know how those things happen, Sybil. I was sitting there, playing. And you were nowhere in sight. And Sharon Lipschutz came over and sat down next to me. I couldn't push her off, could I?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no. No. I couldn't do that," said the young man. "I'll tell you what I did do, though."

"What?"

"I pretended she was you."

Sybil immediately stooped and began to dig in the sand. "Let's go in the water," she said.

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"All right," said the young man. "I think I can work it in."

"Next time, push her off," Sybil said.

"Push who off?"

"Sharon Lipschutz."

"Ah, Sharon Lipschutz," said the young man. "How that name comes up. Mixing memory and desire." He suddenly got to his feet. He looked at the ocean. "Sybil," he said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll see if we can catch a bananafish."

"A what?"

"A bananafish," he said, and undid the belt of his robe. He took off the robe. His shoulders were white and narrow, and his trunks were royal blue. He folded the robe, first lengthwise, then in thirds. He unrolled the towel he had used over his eyes, spread it out on the sand, and then laid the folded robe on top of it. He bent over, picked up the float, and secured it under his right arm. Then, with his left hand, he took Sybil's hand.

The two started to walk down to the ocean. "I imagine you've seen quite a few bananafish in your day," the young man said.

Sybil shook her head.

"You haven't? Where do you *live*, anyway?" "I don't know," said Sybil.

"Sure you know. You must know. Sharon Lipschutz knows where she lives and she's only three and a half."

Sybil stopped walking and yanked her hand away from him. She picked up an ordinary beach shell and looked at it with elaborate interest. She threw it down. "Whirly Wood, Connecticut," she said, and resumed walking, stomach foremost.

"Whirly Wood, Connecticut," said the young man. "Is that anywhere near Whirly Wood, Connecticut, by any chance?"

Sybil looked at him. "That's where I live," she said impatiently. "I live in Whirly Wood, Connecticut." She ran a few steps ahead of him, caught up her left foot in her left hand, and hopped two or three times.

"You have no idea how clear that makes everything," the young man said.

Sybil released her foot. "Did you read 'Little Black Sambo'?" she said.

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#### A Perfect Day for Bananafish

"It's very funny you ask me that," he said. "It so happens I just finished reading it last night." He reached down and took back Sybil's hand. "What did you think of it?" he asked her.

"Did the tigers run all around that tree?"

"I thought they'd never stop. I never saw so many tigers."

"There were only six," Sybil said.

"Only six!" said the young man. "Do you call that only?"

"Do you like wax?" Sybil asked.

"Do I like what?" asked the young man.

"Wax."

"Very much. Don't you?"

Sybil nodded. "Do you like olives?" she asked.

"Olives — yes. Olives and wax. I never go anyplace without 'em."

"Yes. Yes, I do," said the young man. "What I like particularly about her is that she never does anything mean to little dogs in the lobby of the hotel. That little toy bull that belongs to that lady from Canada, for instance. You probably won't believe this, but some little girls like to

poke that little dog with balloon sticks. Sharon doesn't. She's never mean or unkind. That's why I like her so much."

Sybil was silent.

"I like to chew candles," she said finally.

"Who doesn't?" said the young man, getting his feet wet. "Wow! It's cold." He dropped the rubber float on its back. "No, wait just a second, Sybil. Wait'll we get out a little bit."

They waded out till the water was up to Sybil's waist. Then the young man picked her up and laid her down on her stomach on the float.

"Don't you ever wear a bathing cap or anything?" he asked.

"Don't let go," Sybil ordered. "You hold me, now."

"Miss Carpenter. Please. I know my business," the young man said. "You just keep your eyes open for any bananafish. This is a *perfect* day for bananafish."

"I don't see any," Sybil said.

"That's understandable. Their habits are very peculiar. Very peculiar." He kept pushing the float. The water was not quite up to his chest.

#### A Perfect Day for Bananafish

"They lead a very tragic life," he said. "You know what they do, Sybil?"

She shook her head.

"Well, they swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim in. But once they get in, they behave like pigs. Why, I've known some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as many as seventy-eight bananas." He edged the float and its passenger a foot closer to the horizon. "Naturally, after that they're so fat they can't get out of the hole again. Can't fit through the door."

"Not too far out," Sybil said, "What happens to them?"

"What happens to who?"

"The bananafish."

"Oh, you mean after they eat so many bananas they can't get out of the banana hole?"

"Yes," said Sybil.

"Well, I hate to tell you, Sybil. They die."

"Why?" asked Sybil.

"Well, they get banana fever. It's a terrible disease."

"Here comes a wave," Sybil said nervously.

"We'll ignore it. We'll snub it," said the young man. "Two snobs." He took Sybil's ankles in his hands and pressed down and forward. The float nosed over the top of the wave. The water soaked Sybil's blond hair, but her scream was full of pleasure.

With her hand, when the float was level again, she wiped away a flat, wet band of hair from her eyes, and reported, "I just saw one."

"Saw what, my love?"

"A bananafish."

"My God, no!" said the young man. "Did he have any bananas in his mouth?"

"Yes," said Sybil. "Six."

The young man suddenly picked up one of Sybil's wet feet, which were drooping over the end of the float, and kissed the arch.

"Heyl" said the owner of the foot, turning around.

"Hey, yourself! We're going in now. You had enough?"

"Nol"

"Sorry," he said, and pushed the float toward

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## A Perfect Day for Bananafish

shore until Sybil got off it. He carried it the rest of the way.

"Goodbye," said Sybil, and ran without regret in the direction of the hotel.

The young man put on his robe, closed the lapels tight, and jammed his towel into his pocket. He picked up the slimy wet, cumbersome float and put it under his arm. He plodded alone through the soft, hot sand toward the hotel.

On the sub-main floor of the hotel, which the management directed bathers to use, a woman with zinc salve on her nose got into the elevator with the young man.

"I see you're looking at my feet," he said to her when the car was in motion.

"I beg your pardon?" said the woman.

"I said I see you're looking at my feet."

"I beg your pardon. I happened to be looking at the floor," said the woman, and faced the doors of the car.

"If you want to look at my feet, say so," said the young man. "But don't be a God-damned sneak about it."

"Let me out here, please," the woman said quickly to the girl operating the car.

The car doors opened and the woman got out without looking back.

"I have two normal feet and I can't see the slightest God-damned reason why anybody should stare at them," said the young man. "Five, please." He took his room key out of his robe pocket.

He got off at the fifth floor, walked down the hall, and let himself into 507. The room smelled of new calfskin luggage and nail-lacquer remover.

He glanced at the girl lying asleep on one of the twin beds. Then he went over to one of the pieces of luggage, opened it, and from under a pile of shorts and undershirts he took out an Ortgies calibre 7.65 automatic. He released the magazine, looked at it, then reinserted it. He cocked the piece. Then he went over and sat down on the unoccupied twin bed, looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple.

# February 2002: THE LOCUSTS

THE ROCKETS set the bony meadows afire, turned rock to lava, turned wood to charcoal, transmitted water to steam made sand and silica into green glass which lay like shattered mirrors reflecting the invasion, all about. The rockets came like drums, beating in the night. The rockets came like locusts. swarming and settling in blooms of rosy smoke. And from the rockets ran men with hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye, to bludgeon away all the strangeness, their mouths fringed with nails so they resembled steel-toothed carnivores, spitting them into their swift hands as they hammered up frame cottages and scuttled over roofs with shingles to blot out the eerie stars, and fit green shades to pull against the night. And when the carpenters had hurried on, the women came in with flowerpots and chintz and pans and set up a kitchen clamor to cover the silence that Mars made waiting outside the door and the shaded window.

In six months a dozen small towns had been laid down upon the naked planet, filled with sizzling neon tubes and yellow electric bulbs. In all, some ninety thousand people came to Mars, and more, on Earth, were packing their grips....

# August 2002: NIGHT MEETING

Before going up into the blue hills, Tomás Gomez stopped for gasoline at the lonely station.

"Kind of alone out here, aren't you, Pop?" said Tomás.
The old man wiped off the windshield of the small truck.
"Not bad."

"How do you like Mars, Pop?"

"Fine. Always something new. I made up my mind when I came here last year I wouldn't expect nothing, nor ask nothing.

nor be surprised at nothing. We've got to forget Earth and how things were. We've got to look at what we're in here, and how different it is. I get a hell of a lot of fun out of just the weather here. It's Martian weather. Hot as hell daytimes, cold as hell nights. I get a big kick out of the different flowers and different rain. I came to Mars to retire and I wanted to retire in a place where everything is different. An old man needs to have things different. Young people don't want to talk to him, other old people bore hell out of him. So I thought the best thing for me is a place so different that all you got to do is open your eyes and you're entertained. I got this gas station. If business picks up too much, I'll move on back to some other old highway that's not so busy, where I can earn just enough to live on and still have time to feel the different things here."

"You got the right idea, Pop," said Tomás, his brown hands idly on the wheel. He was feeling good. He had been working in one of the new colonies for ten days straight and now he

had two days off and was on his way to a party.

"I'm not surprised at anything any more," said the old man. "I'm just looking. I'm just experiencing. If you can't take Mars for what she is, you might as well go back to Earth. Everything's crazy up here, the soil, the air, the canals, the natives (I never saw any yet, but I hear they're around), the clocks. Even my clock acts funny. Even time is crazy up here. Sometimes I feel I'm here all by myself, no one else on the whole damn planet. I'd take bets on it. Sometimes I feel about eight years old, my body squeezed up and everything else tall. Jesus, it's just the place for an old man. Keeps me alert and keeps me happy. You know what Mars is? It's like a thing I got for Christmas seventy years ago-don't know if you ever had one -they called them kaleidoscopes, bits of crystal and cloth and beads and pretty junk. You held it up to the sunlight and looked in through at it, and it took your breath away. All the patterns! Well, that's Mars. Enjoy it. Don't ask it to be nothing else but what it is. Jesus, you know that highway right there, built by the Martians, is over sixteen centuries old and still in good condition? That's one dollar and fifty cents, thanks and good night."

Tomás drove off down the ancient highway, laughing quietly.

It was a long road going into darkness and hills and he held to the wheel, now and again reaching into his lunch bucket and taking out a piece of candy. He had been driving steadily for an hour, with no other car on the road, no light, just the road going under, the hum, the roar, and Mars out there, so quiet. Mars was always quiet, but quieter tonight than any other. The deserts and empty seas swung by him, and the mountains against the stars.

There was a smell of Time in the air tonight. He smiled and turned the fancy in his mind. There was a thought. What did Time smell like? Like dust and clocks and people. And if you wondered what Time sounded like it sounded like water running in a dark cave and voices crying and dirt dropping down upon hollow box lids, and rain. And, going further, what did Time look like? Time looked like snow dropping silently into a black room or it looked like a silent film in an ancient theater, one hundred billion faces falling like those New Year balloons, down and down into nothing. That was how Time smelled and looked and sounded. And tonight-Tomás shoved a hand into the wind outside the truck-tonight you could almost touch Time.

He drove the truck between hills of Time. His neck prickled

and he sat up, watching ahead.

He pulled into a little dead Martian town, stopped the engine, and let the silence come in around him. He sat, not breathing, looking out at the white buildings in the moonlight. Uninhabited for centuries. Perfect, faultless, in ruins, yes, but perfect, nevertheless.

He started the engine and drove on another mile or more before stopping again, climbing out, carrying his lunch bucket, and walking to a little promontory where he could look back at that dusty city. He opened his thermos and poured himself a cup of coffee. A night bird flew by. He felt very good, very much at peace.

Perhaps five minutes later there was a sound. Off in the hills, where the ancient highway curved, there was a motion, a dim light, and then a murmur.

Tomás turned slowly with the coffee cup in his hand.

And out of the hills came a strange thing.

It was a machine like a jade-green insect, a praying mantis, delicately rushing through the cold air, indistinct, countless

preen diamonds winking over its body, and red jewels that elittered with multifaceted eyes. Its six legs fell upon the ancient highway with the sounds of a sparse rain which dwindled away, and from the back of the machine a Martian with melted gold for eyes looked down at Tomás as if he were looking into a well.

Tomás raised his hand and thought Hello! automatically but did not move his lips, for this was a Martian. But Tomás had swum in blue rivers on Earth, with strangers passing on the road, and eaten in strange houses with strange people, and his weapon had always been his smile. He did not carry a gun. And he did not feel the need of one now, even with the little fear that gathered about his heart at this moment.

The Martian's hands were empty too. For a moment they

looked across the cool air at each other.

It was Tomás who moved first.

"Hello!" he called.

"Hello!" called the Martian in his own language.

They did not understand each other. "Did you say hello?" they both asked.

"What did you say?" they said, each in a different tongue. They scowled.

"Who are you?" said Tomás in English.

"What are you doing here?" In Martian; the stranger's lips moved.

"Where are you going?" they said, and looked bewildered.

"I'm Tomás Gomez."

"I'm Muhe Ca."

Neither understood, but they tapped their chests with the words and then it became clear.

And then the Martian laughed. "Wait!" Tomás felt his head touched, but no hand had touched him. "There!" said the Martian in English. "That is better!"

"You learned my language, so quick!"

"Nothing at all!"

They looked, embarrassed with a new silence, at the steaming coffee he had in one hand.

"Something different?" said the Martian, eying him and the coffee, referring to them both, perhaps.

"May I offer you a drink?" said Tomás.

"Please."

The Martian slid down from his machine.

A second cup was produced and filled, steaming. Tomás held it out.

Their hands met and-like mist-fell through each other. "Jesus Christ!" cried Tomás, and dropped the cup.

"Name of the gods!" said the Martian in his own tongue. "Did you see what happened?" they both whispered.

They were very cold and terrified.

The Martian bent to touch the cup but could not touch it.

"Jesus!" said Tomás.

"Indeed." The Martian tried again and again to get hold of the cup, but could not. He stood up and thought for a moment, then took a knife from his belt. "Hey!" cried Tomás "You misunderstand, catch!" said the Martian, and tossed it. Tomás cupped his hands. The knife fell through his flesh, It hit the ground. Tomás bent to pick it up but could not touch it, and he recoiled, shivering.

Now he looked at the Martian against the sky.

"The stars!" he said.

"The stars!" said the Martian, looking, in turn, at Tomás.

The stars were white and sharp beyond the flesh of the Martian, and they were sewn into his flesh like scintillas swallowed into the thin, phosphorescent membrane of a gelatinous sea fish. You could see stars flickering like violet eyes in the Martian's stomach and chest, and through his wrists, like jewelry.

"I can see through you!" said Tomás.

"And I through you!" said the Martian, stepping back.

Tomás felt of his own body and, feeling the warmth, was reassured. I am real, he thought.

The Martian touched his own nose and lips. "I have flesh," he said, half aloud. "I am alive."

Tomás stared at the stranger. "And if I am real, then you must be dead."

"No, you!"

"A ghost!"

"A phantom!"

They pointed at each other, with starlight burning in their limbs like daggers and icicles and fireflies, and then fell to judging their limbs again, each finding himself intact, hot, excited, stunned, awed, and the other, ah yes, that other over

there, unreal, a ghostly prism flashing the accumulated light of distant worlds.

I'm drunk, thought Tomás. I won't tell anyone of this tomorrow, no, no.

They stood there on the ancient highway, neither of them moving.

"Where are you from?" asked the Martian at last.

"Earth."

"What is that?"

"There." Tomás nodded to the sky.

"When?"

"We landed over a year ago, remember?" "No."

"And all of you were dead, all but a few. You're rare, don't you know that?"

"That's not true."

"Yes, dead. I saw the bodies. Black, in the rooms, in the houses, dead. Thousands of them." "That's ridiculous. We're alive!"

"Mister, you're invaded, only you don't know it. You must

have escaped."

"I haven't escaped; there was nothing to escape. What do you mean? I'm on my way to a festival now at the canal, near the Eniall Mountains. I was there last night. Don't you see the city there?" The Martian pointed.

Tomás looked and saw the ruins. "Why, that city's been dead thousands of years."

The Martian laughed. "Dead. I slept there yesterday!"

"And I was in it a week ago and the week before that, and I just drove through it now, and it's a heap. See the broken

"Broken? Why, I see them perfectly. The moonlight helps. And the pillars are upright."

"There's dust in the streets," said Tomás.

"The streets are clean!"

"The canals are empty right there."

"The canals are full of lavender wine!"

"It's dead."

"It's alive!" protested the Martian, laughing more now. 'Oh, you're quite wrong. See all the carnival lights? There are beautiful boats as slim as women, beautiful women as slim

as boats, women the color of sand, women with fire flowers in their hands. I can see them, small, running in the streets there. That's where I'm going now, to the festival; we'll float on the waters all night long; we'll sing, we'll drink, we'll make

love. Can't you see it?"

"Mister, that city is dead as a dried lizard. Ask any of our party. Me, I'm on my way to Green City tonight; that's the new colony we just raised over near Illinois Highway. You're mixed up. We brought in a million board feet of Oregon lumber and a couple dozen tons of good steel nails and hammered together two of the nicest little villages you ever saw Tonight we're warming one of them. A couple rockets are coming in from Earth, bringing our wives and girl friends. There'll be barn dances and whisky-

The Martian was now disquieted. "You say it is over that

way?"

"There are the rockets." Tomás walked him to the edge of the hill and pointed down. "See?"

"No."

"Damn it, there they are! Those long silver things."

"No."

Now Tomás laughed. "You're blind!"

"I see very well. You are the one who does not see."

"But you see the new town, don't you?"

"I see nothing but an ocean, and water at low tide."

"Mister, that water's been evaporated for forty centuries."

"Ah, now, now, that is enough."

"It's true, I tell you."

The Martian grew very serious. "Tell me again. You do not see the city the way I describe it? The pillars very white, the boats very slender, the festival lights—oh, I see them clearly! And listen! I can hear them singing. It's no space away at all."

Tomás listened and shook his head. "No."

"And I, on the other hand," said the Martian, "cannot see what you describe. Well."

Again they were cold. An ice was in their flesh.

"Can it be . . . ?"

"What?"

"You say 'from the sky'?"

"Earth."

"Earth, a name, nothing," said the Martian. "But . . . as I came up the pass an hour ago . . ." He touched the back of bis neck. "I felt . . ."

"Cold?" "Yes."

"And now?"

"Cold again. Oddly. There was a thing to the light, to the hills, the road," said the Martian. "I felt the strangeness, the road, the light, and for a moment I felt as if I were the last man alive on this world. . . ."

"So did I!" said Tomás, and it was like talking to an old and dear friend, confiding, growing warm with the topic.

The Martian closed his eyes and opened them again. "This can only mean one thing. It has to do with Time. Yes. You are a figment of the Past!"

"No, you are from the Past," said the Earth Man, having

had time to think of it now.

"You are so certain. How can you prove who is from the Past, who from the Future? What year is it?"

"Two thousand and one!"

"What does that mean to me?"

Tomás considered and shrugged. "Nothing."

"It is as if I told you that it is the year 4462853 s.E.C. It is nothing and more than nothing! Where is the clock to show us how the stars stand?"

"But the ruins prove it! They prove that I am the Future, I

am alive, you are dead!"

"Everything in me denies this. My heart beats, my stomach hungers, my mouth thirsts. No, no, not dead, not alive, either of us. More alive than anything else. Caught between is more like it. Two strangers passing in the night, that is it. Two strangers passing. Ruins, you say?"

"Yes. You're afraid?"

"Who wants to see the Future, who ever does? A man can face the Past, but to think—the pillars crumbled, you say? And the sea empty, and the canals dry, and the maidens dead, and the flowers withered?" The Martian was silent, but then he looked on ahead. "But there they are. I see them. Isn't that enough for me? They wait for me now, no matter what you say."

And for Tomás the rockets, far away, waiting for him, and the town and the women from Earth. "We can never agree," he said.

"Let us agree to disagree," said the Martian. "What does it matter who is Past or Future, if we are both alive, for what follows will follow, tomorrow or in ten thousand years. How do you know that those temples are not the temples of your own civilization one hundred centuries from now, tumbled and broken? You do not know. Then don't ask. But the night is very short. There go the festival fires in the sky, and the birds."

Tomás put out his hand. The Martian did likewise in imitation.

Their hands did not touch; they melted through each other. "Will we meet again?"

"Who knows? Perhaps some other night."
"I'd like to go with you to that festival."

"And I wish I might come to your new town, to see this ship you speak of, to see these men, to hear all that has happened."

"Good-by," said Tomás.

"Good night."

The Martian rode his green metal vehicle quietly away into the hills, The Earth Man turned his truck and drove it silently in the opposite direction.

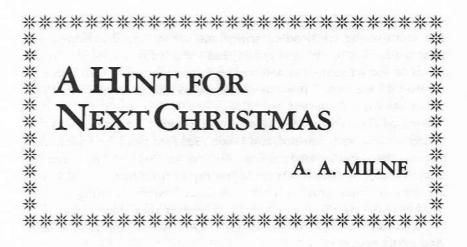
"Good lord, what a dream that was," sighed Tomás, his hands on the wheel, thinking of the rockets, the women, the

raw whisky, the Virginia reels, the party.

How strange a vision was that, thought the Martian, rushing on, thinking of the festival, the canals, the boats, the women

with golden eyes, and the songs.

The night was dark. The moons had gone down. Starlight twinkled on the empty highway where now there was not a sound, no car, no person, nothing. And it remained that way all the rest of the cool dark night.



bviously there should be a standard value for a certain type of Christmas present. One may give what one will to one's family or particular friends; that is all right. But in a Christmas house-party there is a pleasant interchange of parcels, of which the string and the brown paper and the kindly thought are the really important ingredients, and the gift inside is nothing more than an excuse for those things. It is embarrassing for you if Jones has apologized for his brown paper with a hundred cigars and you have only excused yourself with twenty-five cigarettes; perhaps still more embarrassing if it is you who have lost so heavily on the exchange. An understanding that the contents were to be worth five shillings exactly would avoid this embarrassment.

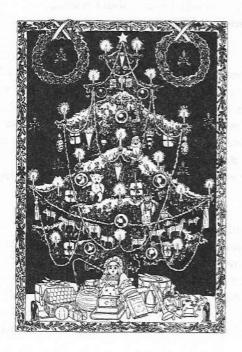
And now I am reminded of the ingenuity of a friend of mine, William by name, who arrived at a large country house for Christmas without any present in his bag. He had expected neither to give nor to receive anything but to his horror he discovered on the 24th that everybody was preparing a Christmas present for him, and that it was taken for granted that he would require a little privacy and brown paper on Christmas Eve for the purpose of addressing his own offerings to others. He had wild thoughts of telegraphing to London for something to be sent down, and spoke to other members of the house-party in order to discover what sort of presents would be suitable.

"What are you giving our host?" he asked one of them.

"Mary and I are giving him a book," said John, referring to his wife. William then approached the youngest son of the house, and discovered that he and his next brother Dick were sharing in this, that, and the other. When he had heard this, William retired to his room and thought profoundly.

He was the first down to breakfast on Christmas morning. All the places at the table were piled high with presents. He looked at John's place. The top parcel said, "To John and Mary from Charles." William took out his fountain-pen and added a couple of words to the inscription. It then read, "To John and Mary from Charles and William," and in William's opinion looked just as effective as before. He moved on to the next place. "To Angela from Father," said the top parcel. "And William," wrote William. At his hostess' place he hesitated for a moment. The first present there was for "Darling Mother, from her loving children." It did not seem that an "and William" was quite suitable. But his hostess was not to be deprived of William's kindly thought; twenty seconds later the handkerchiefs "from John and Mary and William" expressed all the nice things he was feeling for her. He passed on to the next place . . .

It is of course impossible to thank every donor of a joint gift; one simply thanks the first person whose eyes one happens to catch. Sometimes William's eye was caught, sometimes not. But he was spared all embarrassment; and I can recommend his solution of the problem with perfect confidence to those who may be in a similar predicament next Christmas.



# 2. The Gioconda Smile



"Miss Spence will be down directly, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hutton, without turning around. Janet Spence's parlormaid was so ugly, ugly on purpose, it always seemed to him, malignantly, criminally ugly, that he could not bear to look at her more than was necessary. The door closed. Left to himself, Mr. Hutton got up and began to wander round the room, looking with meditative eyes at the familiar objects it contained.

Photographs of Greek statuary, photographs of the Roman Forum, colored prints of Italian masterpieces, all very safe and well known. Poor, dear Janet, with a prig—what an intellectual snob! Her real taste was illustrated in that water color by the pavement artist, the one she had paid half a crown for (and thirty-five shillings for the frame). How often he had heard her tell the story, how often expatiated on the beauties of that skillful imitation of an oleograph! "A real Artist in the streets," and you could hear the capital A in Artist as she spoke the words. She made you feel that part of his glory had entered into Janet Spence when she tendered him that half-crown for the copy of the oleograph. She was implying a compliment to her own taste and penetration. A genuine Old Master for half a crown. Poor, dear Janet!

Mr. Hutton came to a pause in front of a small oblong mirror. Stooping a little to get a full view of his face, he passed a white, well-manicured finger over his mustache. It was as curly, as freshly auburn as it had been twenty years ago. His hair still retained its color, and there was no sign of baldness yet—only a certain elevation of the brow. "Shakespearean," thought Mr. Hutton, with a smile, as he surveyed the smooth and polished expanse of his

Others abide our question, thou art free. . . . Footsteps in the sea . . . Majesty . . . Shakespeare, thou shouldst be living at this hour. No, that was Milton, wasn't it? Milton, the Lady of Christ's. There was no lady about him. He was what the women would call a manly man. That was why they liked him—for the curly auburn mustache and the discreet redolence of tobacco.

forehead.

Mr. Hutton smiled again; he enjoyed making fun of himself. Lady of Christ's? No, no. He was the Christ of Ladies. Very pretty, very pretty. The Christ of Ladies. Mr. Hutton wished there were somebody he could tell the joke to. Poor, dear Janet wouldn't appreciate it, alas!

He straightened himself up, parted his hair, and resumed his peregrination. Damn the Roman Forum; he

hated those dreary photographs.

Suddenly he became aware that Janet Spence was in the room, standing near the door. Mr. Hutton started, as though he had been taken in some felonious act. To make these silent and spectral appearances was one of Janet Spence's peculiar talents. Perhaps she had been there all the time, and seen him looking at himself in the mirror. Impossible! But, still, it was disquieting.

"Oh, you gave me such a surprise," said Mr. Hutton, recovering his smile and advancing with outstretched hand

to meet her.

Miss Spence was smiling too: her Gioconda smile, he had once called it in a moment of half-ironical flattery. Miss Spence had taken the compliment seriously, and always tried to live up to the Leonardo standard. She smiled on in silence while Mr. Hutton shook hands;

that was part of the Gioconda business.

"I hope you're well," said Mr. Hutton. "You look it." What a queer face she had! That small mouth pursed forward by the Gioconda expression into a little snout with a round hole in the middle, as though for whistling, was like a penholder seen from the front. Above the mouth a well-shaped nose, finely aquiline. Eyes large, lustrous, and dark, with the largeness, luster, and darkness that seem to invite sties and an occasional bloodshot suffusion. They were fine eyes, but unchangingly grave. The penholder might do its Gioconda trick, but the eyes never altered in their earnestness. Above them, a pair of boldly arched, heavily penciled black eyebrows lent a surprising air of power, as of a Roman matron, to the upper portion of the face. Her hair was dark and equally Roman; Agrippina from the brows upward.

"I thought I'd just look in on my way home," Mr. Hutton went on. "Ah, it's good to be back here—" he indicated with a wave of his hand the flowers in the vases, the sunshine and greenery beyond the windows—"it's good to be back in the country after a stuffy day of

business in town."

Miss Spence, who had sat down, pointed to a chair at her side.

"No, really, I can't sit down." Mr. Hutton protested. "I must get back to see how poor Emily is. She was rather

seedy this morning." He sat down, nevertheless. "It's these wretched liver chills. She's always getting them. Women—" He broke off and coughed, so as to hide the fact that he had uttered. He was about to say that women with weak digestions ought not to marry; but the remark was too cruel, and he didn't really believe it. Janet Spence, moreover, was a believer in the eternal flames and spiritual attachments. "She hopes to be well enough," he added, "to see you at luncheon tomorrow. Can you come? Do?" He smiled persuasively. "It's my invitation too, you know."

She dropped her eyes, and Mr. Hutton almost thought that he detected a certain reddening of the cheek. It

was a tribute; he stroked his mustache.

"I should like to come if you think Emily's really well

enough to have a visitor."

"Of course. You'll do her good. You'll do us both good. In married life three is often better company than two."

"Oh, you're cynical."

Mr. Hutton always had a desire to say "Bow-wow-wow" whenever that last word was spoken. It irritated him more than any other word in the language. But instead of barking he made haste to protest.

"No, no. I'm only speaking a melancholy truth. Reality doesn't always come up to the ideal, you know. But that doesn't make me believe any the less in the ideal. Indeed, I believe in it passionately: the ideal of a matrimony between two people in perfect accord. I think it's realizable. I'm sure it is."

He paused significantly and looked at her with an arch expression. A virgin of thirty-six, but still unwithered; she had her charms. And there was something really rather enigmatic about her. Miss Spence made no reply, but continued to smile. There were times when Mr. Hutton got rather bored with the Gioconda. He stood up.

"I must really be going now. Farewell, mysterious Gioconda." The smile grew intenser, focused itself, as it were, in a narrower snout. Mr. Hutton made a Cinquecento gesture, and kissed her extended hand. It was the first time he had done such a thing; the action seemed not to be resented. "I look forward to tomorrow."

"Do you?"

For answer Mr. Hutton once more kissed her hand, then turned to go. Miss Spence accompanied him to the porch.

"Where's your car?" she asked.
"I left it at the gate of the drive."

"I'll come and see you off."

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

"No, no." Mr. Hutton was playful, but determined. "You must do no such thing. I simply forbid you."

"But I should like to come," Miss Spence protested,

throwing a rapid Gioconda at him.

Mr. Hutton held up his hand. "No," he repeated, and then, with a gesture that was almost the blowing of a kiss, he started to run down the drive, lightly, on his toes, with long, bounding strides like a boy's. He was proud of that run; it was quite marvelously youthful. Still, he was glad the drive was no longer. At the last bend, before passing out of sight of the house, he halted and turned round. Miss Spence was still standing on the steps, smiling her smile. He waved his hand, and this time quite definitely and overtly wafted a kiss in her direction. Then, breaking once more into his magnificent canter, he rounded the last dark promontory of trees. Once out of sight of the house he let his high paces decline to a trot, and finally to a walk. He took out his handkerchief and began wiping his neck inside his collar. What fools, what fools! Had there ever been such an ass as poor, dear Janet Spence? Never, unless it was himself. Decidedly he was the more malignant fool, since he, at least, was aware of his folly and still persisted in it. Why did he persist? Ah, the problem that was himself, the problem that was other people . . .

He had reached the gate. A large, prosperous-looking

motor was standing at the side of the road.

"Home, M'Nab." The chauffeur touched his cap. "And stop at the crossroads on the way, as usual," Mr. Hutton added, as he opened the door of the car. "Well?" he said, speaking into the obscurity that lurked within.

"Oh, Teddy Bear, what an age you've been!" It was a fresh and childish voice that spoke the words. There was the faintest hint of Cockney impurity about the vowel

sounds.

Mr. Hutton bent his large form and darted into the car with the agility of an animal regaining his burrow.

"Have I?" he said, as he shut the door. The machine began to move. "You must have missed me a lot if you found the time so long." He sat back in the low seat; a cherishing warmth enveloped him.

"Teddy Bear . . ." and with a sigh of contentment a charming little head declined onto Mr. Hutton's shoulder. Ravished, he looked down sideways at the round, babyish face.

"Do you know, Doris, you look like the pictures of Louise de Kerouaille." He passed his fingers through a mass of curly hair.

"Who's Louise de Kera-whatever-it-is?" Doris spoke from remote distances.

"She was, alas! Fuit. We shall all be 'was' one of these

days. Meanwhile . . ."

Mr. Hutton covered the babyish face with kisses. The car rushed smoothly along. M'Nab's back through the front window was stonily impassive, the back of a statue,

"Your hands," Doris whispered. "Oh, you mustn't touch

me. They give me electric shocks."

Mr. Hutton adored her for the virgin imbecility of the words. How late in one's existence one makes the dis-

covery of one's body!

"The electricity isn't in me, it's in you." He kissed her again, whispering her name several times: Doris, Doris, Doris. The scientific appellation of the sea mouse, he was thinking as he kissed the throat she offered him, white and extended like the throat of a victim awaiting the sacrificial knife. The sea mouse was a sausage with iridescent fur: very peculiar. Or was Doris the sea cucumber, which turns itself inside out in moments of alarm? He would really have to go to Naples again, just to see the aquarium. These sea creatures were fabulous, unbelievably fantastic.

"Oh, Teddy Bear!" (More zoology; but he was only a land animal. His poor little jokes!) "Teddy Bear, I'm

so happy."

"So am I," said Mr. Hutton. Was it true?

"But I wish I knew if it were right. Tell me, Teddy Bear, is it right or wrong?"

"Ah, my dear, that's just what I've been wondering

for the last thirty years."

"Be serious, Teddy Bear. I want to know if this is right; if it's right that I should be here with you and that we should love one another, and that it should give me electric shocks when you touch me."

"Right? Well, it's certainly good that you should have electric shocks rather than sexual repressions. Read Freud;

repressions are the devil."

"Oh, you don't help me. Why aren't you ever serious? If only you knew how miserable I am sometimes, thinking, it's not right. Perhaps, you know, there is a hell, and all that. I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think I ought to stop loving you."

"But could you?" asked Mr. Hutton, confident in the

powers of his seduction and his mustache.

"No, Teddy Bear, you know I couldn't. But I could run away, I could hide from you. I could lock myself up and force myself not to come to you."

"Silly little thing!" He tightened his embrace.

"Oh, dear. I hope it isn't wrong. And there are

times when I don't care if it is."

Mr. Hutton was touched. He had a certain protective affection for this little creature. He laid his cheek against her hair and so, interlaced, they sat in silence, while the car, swaying and pitching a little as it hastened along, seemed to draw in the white road and the dusty hedges toward it devouringly.

"Good-by, good-by."

The car moved on, gathered speed, vanished round a curve, and Doris was left standing by the signpost at the crossroads, still dizzy and weak with the languor born of those kisses and the electrical touch of those gentle hands. She had to take a deep breath, to draw herself up deliberately, before she was strong enough to start her homeward walk. She had half a mile in which to invent the necessary lies.

Alone, Mr. Hutton suddenly found himself the prey of

an appalling boredom.

Mrc Hutton was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, playing patience. In spite of the warmth of the July evening a wood fire was burning on the hearth. A black Pomeranian, extenuated by the heat and the fatigues of digestion, slept before the blaze.

"Phew! Isn't it rather hot in here?" Mr. Hutton asked

as he entered the room.

"You know I have to keep warm, dear." The voice seemed breaking on the verge of tears. "I get so shivery."

"I hope you're better this evening."

"Not much, I'm afraid."

The conversation stagnated. Mr. Hutton stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He looked down at the Pomeranian lying at his feet, and with the toe of his right boot he rolled the little dog over and rubbed its white-flecked chest and belly. The creature lay in an inert ecstasy. Mrs. Hutton continued to play patience. Arrived at an impasse, she altered the position of one card, took back another, and went on playing. Her patiences always came out.

"Dr. Libbard thinks I ought to go to Llandrindod Wells

this summer."

"Well, go, my dear, go, most certainly."

Mr. Hutton was thinking of the events of the afternoon: how they had driven, Doris and he, up to the hanging wood, had left the car to wait for them under the shade of the trees, and walked together out into the windless sunshine of the chalk down.

"I'm to drink the waters for my liver, and he thinks I ought to have massage and electric treatment, too." Hat in hand, Doris had stalked four blue butterflies that were dancing together round a scabious flower with a motion that was like the flickering of blue fire. The blue fire burst and scattered into whirling sparks; she had given chase, laughing and shouting like a child.

"I'm sure it will do you good, my dear."

"I was wondering if you'd come with me, dear."
"But you know I'm going to Scotland at the end of the month."

Mrs. Hutton looked up at him entreatingly. "It's the journey," she said. "The thought of it is such a nightmare. I don't know if I can manage it. And you know I can't sleep in hotels. And then there's the luggage and all the worries.

I can't go alone."

"But you won't be alone. You'll have your maid with you." He spoke impatiently. The sick woman was usurping the place of the healthy one. He was being dragged back from the memory of the sunlit down and the quick, laughing girl, back to this unhealthy, overheated room and its complaining occupant.

"I don't think I shall be able to go."

"But you must, my dear, if the doctor tells you to. And, besides, a change will do you good."

"I don't think so."

"But Libbard thinks so, and he knows what he's talking about."

"No, I can't face it. I'm too weak. I can't go alone." Mrs. Hutton pulled a handkerchief out of her black-silk bag and put it to her eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear, you must make the effort."

"I had rather be left in peace to die here." She was crying in earnest now.

"O Lord! Now do be reasonable. Listen now, please." Mrs. Hutton only sobbed more violently. "Oh, what is one to do?" He shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

Mr. Hutton was aware that he had not behaved with proper patience; but he could not help it. Very early in his manhood he had discovered that not only did he not feel sympathy for the poor, the weak, the diseased, and deformed; he actually hated them. Once, as an undergraduate, he spent three days at a mission in the East End. He had returned, filled with a profound and ineradicable disgust. Instead of pitying, he loathed the unfortunate. It was not, he knew, a very comely emotion, and he had been ashamed of it at first. In the end he had decided that it was temperamental, inevitable, and had felt no further qualms. Emily had been healthy and beautiful when he married her. He had loved her then. But now—was it his fault that she was like this?

Mr. Hutton dined alone. Food and drink left him more benevolent than he had been before dinner. To make amends for his show of exasperation he went up to his wife's room and offered to read to her. She was touched, gratefully accepted the offer, and Mr. Hutton who was particularly proud of his accent, suggested a little light reading in French.

"French? I am so fond of French." Mrs. Hutton spoke of the language of Racine as though it were a dish of

green peas.

Mr. Hutton ran down to the library and returned with a yellow volume. He began reading. The effort of pronouncing perfectly absorbed his whole attention. But how good his accent was! The fact of its goodness seemed to improve the quality of the novel he was reading.

At the end of fifteen pages an unmistakable sound aroused him. He looked up; Mrs. Hutton had gone to sleep. He sat still for a little while, looking with a dispassionate curiosity at the sleeping face. Once it had been beautiful; once, long ago, the sight of it, the recollection of it, had moved him with an emotion profounder, perhaps, than any he had felt before or since. Now it was lined and cadaverous. The skin was stretched tightly over the cheekbones, across the bridge of the sharp, birdlike nose. The closed eyes were set in profound bonerimmed sockets. The lamplight striking on the face from the side emphasized with light and shade its cavities and projections. It was the face of a dead Christ by Morales.

Le squelette était invisible Au temps heureux de l'art païen.

He shivered a little, and tiptoed out of the room.

On the following day Mrs. Hutton came down to luncheon. She had had some unpleasant palpitations during the night, but she was feeling better now. Besides, she wanted to do honor to her guest. Miss Spence listened to her complaints about Llandrindod Wells, and was loud in sympathy, lavish with advice. Whatever she said was always said with intensity. She leaned forward, aimed, so to speak, like a gun, and fired her words. Bang! the charge in her soul was ignited, the words whizzed forth at the narrow barrel of her mouth. She was a machine gun riddling her hostess with sympathy. Mr. Hutton had undergone similar bombardments, mostly of a literary or philosophic character, bombardments of Maeterlinck, of Mrs. Besant, of Bergson, of William James. Today the missiles were medical. She talked about insomnia, she

expatiated on the virtues of harmless drugs and beneficent specialists. Under the bombardment Mrs. Hutton

opened out, like a flower in the sun.

Mr. Hutton looked on in silence. The spectacle of Janet Spence evoked in him an unfailing curiosity. He was not romantic enough to imagine that every face masked an interior physiognomy of beauty or strangeness, that every woman's small talk was like a vapor hanging over mysterious gulfs. His wife, for example, and Doris; they were nothing more than what they seemed to be. But with Janet Spence it was somehow different. Here one could be sure that there was some kind of a queer face behind the Gioconda smile and the Roman eyebrows. The only question was. What exactly was there? Mr. Hutton could never quite make out.

"But perhaps you won't have to go to Llandrindod after all," Miss Spence was saying. "If you get well

quickly Dr. Libbard will let you off."

"I only hope so. Indeed, I do really feel rather better

today."

Mr. Hutton felt ashamed. How much was it his own lack of sympathy that prevented her from feeling well every day? But he comforted himself by reflecting that it was only a case of feeling, not of being better. Sympathy does not mend a diseased liver or a weak heart.

"My dear, I wouldn't eat those red currants if I were you," he said, suddenly solicitous. "You know that Lib-

bard has banned everything with skins and pips."

"But I am so fond of them," Mrs. Hutton protested,

"and I feel so well today."

"Don't be a tyrant," said Miss Spence, looking first at him and then at his wife. "Let the poor invalid have what she fancies; it will do her good." She laid her hand on Mrs. Hutton's arm and patted it affectionately two or three times.

"Thank you, my dear." Mrs. Hutton helped herself to

the stewed currants.

"Well, don't blame me if they make you ill again."

"Do I ever blame you, dear?"

"You have nothing to blame me for," Mr. Hutton

answered playfully. "I am the perfect husband."

They sat in the garden after luncheon. From the island of shade under the old cypress tree they looked out across a flat expanse of lawn, in which the parterres of flowers shone with a metallic brilliance.

Mr. Hutton took a deep breath of the warm and

fragrant air. "It's good to be alive," he said.

"Just to be alive," his wife echoed, stretching one pale, knot-jointed hand into the sunlight.

A maid brought the coffee; the silver pots and the little blue cups were set on a folding table near the group of chairs.

"Oh, my medicine!" exclaimed Mrs. Hutton. "Run in and fetch it, Clara, will you? The white bottle on the

sideboard."

"I'll go," said Mr. Hutton. "I've got to go and fetch a

cigar in any case."

He ran in toward the house. On the threshold he turned round for an instant. The maid was walking back across the lawn. His wife was sitting up in her deck chair, engaged in opening her white parasol. Miss Spence was bending over the table, pouring out the coffee. He passed into the cool obscurity of the house.

"Do you like sugar in your coffee?" Miss Spence in-

quired.

"Yes, please. Give me rather a lot. I'll drink it after

my medicine to take the taste away."

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair, lowering the sunshade over her eyes so as to shut out from her vision the burning sky.

Behind her, Miss Spence was making a delicate clinking

among the coffee cups.

"I've given you three large spoonfuls. That ought to take the taste away. And here comes the medicine."

Mr. Hutton had reappeared, carrying a wineglass, half

full of a pale liquid.

"It smells delicious," he said, as he handed it to his wife.

"That's only the flavoring." She drank it off at a gulp, shuddered, and made a grimace. "Ugh, it's so nasty. Give me my coffee."

Miss Spence gave her the cup; she sipped at it. "You've made it like syrup. But it's very nice, after that atrocious

medicine."

At half-past three Mrs. Hutton complained that she did not feel as well as she had done, and went indoors to lie down. Her husband would have said something about the red currants, but checked himself; the triumph of an "I told you so" was too cheaply won. Instead, he was sympathetic and gave her his arm to the house.

"A rest will do you good," he said. "By the way, I shan't

be back till after dinner."

"But why? Where are you going?"

"I promised to go to Johnson's this evening. We have to discuss the war memorial, you know."

"Oh, I wish you weren't going." Mrs. Hutton was almost in tears. "Can't you stay? I don't like being alone in the house."

"But, my dear, I promised, weeks ago." It was a

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bother having to lie like this. "And now I must get back and look after Miss Spence."

He kissed her on the forehead and went out again into the garden. Miss Spence received him aimed and intense.

"Your wife is dreadfully ill," she fired off at him.

"I thought she cheered up so much when you came."
"That was purely nervous, purely nervous. I was watching her closely. With a heart in that condition and her digestion wrecked—yes, wrecked—anything might happen."

"Libbard doesn't take so gloomy a view of poor Emily's health." Mr. Hutton held open the gate that led from the garden into the drive; Miss Spence's car was standing

by the front door.

"Libbard is only a country doctor. You ought to see a specialist."

He could not refrain from laughing. "You have a ma-

cabre passion for specialists."

Miss Spence held up her hand in protest. "I am serious. I think poor Emily is in a very bad state. Anything might happen—at any moment."

He handed her into the car and shut the door. The chauffeur started the engine and climbed into his place,

ready to drive off.

"Shall I tell him to start?" He had no desire to continue

the conversation.

Miss Spence leaned forward and shot a Gioconda in his direction. "Remember, I expect you to come and see me again soon."

Mechanically he grinned, made a polite noise, and, as the car moved forward, waved his hand. He was happy to

be alone.

A few minutes afterward Mr. Hutton himself drove away. Doris was waiting at the crossroads. They dined together twenty miles from home, at a roadside hotel. It was one of those bad, expensive meals which are only cooked in country hotels frequented by motorists. It revolted Mr. Hutton, but Doris enjoyed it. She always enjoyed things. Mr. Hutton ordered a not very good brand of champagne. He was wishing he had spent the evening in his library.

When they started homeward Doris was a little tipsy and extremely affectionate. It was very dark inside the car, but looking forward, past the motionlesss form of M'Nab, they could see a bright and a narrow universe of forms and colors scooped out of the night by the electric head lamps.

It was after eleven when Mr. Hutton reached home.

Dr. Libbard met him in the hall. He was a small man with delicate hands and well-formed features that were almost feminine. His brown eyes were large and melancholy. He used to waste a great deal of time sitting at the bedside of his patients, looking sadness through those eyes and talking in a sad, low voice about nothing in particular. His person exhaled a pleasing odor, decidedly antiseptic but at the same time suave and discreetly delicious.

"Libbard?" said Mr. Hutton in surprise. "You here? Is

my wife ill?"

"We tried to fetch you earlier," the soft, melancholy voice replied. "It was thought you were at Mr. Johnson's but they had no news of you there."

"No, I was detained. I had a breakdown," Mr. Hutton answered irritably. It was tiresome to be caught out in a

lie.

"Your wife wanted to see you urgently."

"Well, I can go now." Mr. Hutton moved towards the stairs.

Dr. Libbard laid a hand on his arm. "I am afraid it's too late."

"Too late?" He began fumbling with his watch; it wouldn't come out of his pocket.

"Mrs. Hutton passed away half an hour ago."

The voice remained even in its softness, the melancholy of the eyes did not deepen. Dr. Libbard spoke of death as he would speak of a local cricket match. All things were equally vain and equally deplorable.

Mr. Hutton found himself thinking of Janet Spence's words. At any moment, at any moment. She had been

extraordinarily right.

"What happened?" he asked. "What was the cause?" Dr. Libbard explained. It was heart failure brought on by a violent attack of nausea, caused in its turn by the eating of something of an irritant nature. Red currants? Mr. Hutton suggested. Very likely. It had been too much for the heart. There was chronic valvular disease: something had collapsed under the strain. It was all over; she could not have suffered much.

"It's a pity they should have chosen the day of the Eton and Harrow match for the funeral," old General Grego was saying as he stood up, his top hat in his hand, under the shadow of the lich gate, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

Mr. Hutton overheard the remark and with difficulty restrained a desire to inflict grievous bodily pain on the General. He would have liked to hit the old brute in the

middle of his big red face. Monstrous great mulberry, spotted with meal! Was there no respect for the dead? Did nobody care? In theory he didn't much care; let the dead bury their dead. But here, at the graveside, he had found himself actually sobbing. Poor Emily, they had been pretty happy once. Now she was lying at the bottom of a seven-foot hole. And here was Grego complaining that he couldn't go to the Eton and Harrow match.

Mr. Hutton looked round at the groups of black figures that were drifting slowly out of the churchyard toward the fleet of cabs and motors assembled in the road outside. Against the brilliant background of the July grass and flowers and foliage, they had a horribly alien and unnatural appearance. It pleased him to think that all

these people would soon be dead too.

That evening Mr. Hutton sat up late in his library reading the life of Milton. There was no particular reason why he should have chosen Milton; it was the book that first came to hand, that was all. It was after midnight when he had finished. He got up from his armchair, unbolted the French windows, and stepped out onto the little paved terrace. The night was quiet and clear. Mr. Hutton looked at the stars and at the holes between them, dropped his eyes to the dim lawns and hueless flowers of the garden, and let them wander over the farther landscape, black and gray under the moon.

He began to think with a kind of confused violence. There were the stars, there was Milton. A man can be somehow the peer of stars and night. Greatness, nobility. But is there seriously a difference between the noble and the ignoble? Milton, the stars, death, and himself, himself. The soul, the body; the higher and the lower nature. Perhaps there was something in it, after all. Milton had a god on his side and righteousness. What had he? Nothing, nothing whatever. There were only Doris's little breasts. What was the point of it all? Milton, the stars, death, and Emily in her grave, Doris and himself

-always himself . . .

Oh, he was a futile and disgusting being. Everything convinced him of it. It was a solemn moment. He spoke aloud: "I will, I will." The sound of his own voice in the darkness was appalling; it seemed to him that he had sworn that infernal oath which binds even the gods: "I will, I will." There had been New Year's Days and solemn anniversaries in the past, when he had felt the same contritions and recorded similar resolutions. They had all thinned away, these resolutions, like smoke, into nothingness. But this was a greater moment and he had pronounced a more fearful oath. In the future it was to

be different. Yes, he would live by reason, he would be industrious, he would curb his appetites, he would devote his life to some good purpose. It was resolved and it would be so.

In practice he saw himself spending his mornings in agricultural pursuits, riding round with the bailiff, seeing that his land was farmed in the best modern way, silos and artificial manures and continuous cropping, and all that. The remainder of the day should be devoted to serious study. There was that book he had been intending to write for so long: The Effect of Diseases on Civilization.

Mr. Hutton went to bed humble and contrite, but with a sense that grace had entered into him. He slept for seven and a half hours, and woke to find the sun brilliantly shining. The emotions of the evening before had been transformed by a good night's rest into his customary cheerfulness. It was not until a good many seconds after his return to conscious life that he remembered his resolution, his Stygian oath. Milton and death seemed somehow different in the sunlight. As for the stars, they were not there. But the resolutions were good; even in the daytime he could see that. He had his horse saddled after breakfast, and rode round the farm with the bailiff. After luncheon he read Thucydides on the plague at Athens. In the evening he made a few notes on malaria in Southern Italy. While he was undressing he remembered that there was a good anecdote in Skelton's jestbook about the Sweating Sickness. He would have made a note of it if only he could have found a pencil.

On the sixth morning of his new life Mr. Hutton found among his correspondence an envelope addressed in that peculiarly vulgar handwriting which he knew to be Doris's. He opened it, and began to read. She didn't know what to say, words were so inadequate. His wife dying like that, and so suddenly—it was too terrible. Mr. Hutton sighed, but his interest revived somewhat as he read on:

Death is so frightening, I never think of it when I can help it. But when something like this happens, or when I am feeling ill or depressed, then I can't help remembering it is there so close, and I think about all the wicked things I have done and about you and me, and I wonder what will happen, and I am so frightened. I am so lonely, Teddy Bear, and so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I can't get rid of the idea of dying, I am so wretched and helpless without you. I didn't mean to write to you; I meant to wait till you

were out of mourning and could come and see me again, but I was so lonely and miserable, Teddy Bear, I had to write. I couldn't help it. Forgive me, I want you so much; I have nobody in the world but you. You are so good and gentle and understanding; there is nobody like you. I shall never forget how good and kind you have been to me, and you are so clever and know so much, I can't understand how you ever came to pay any attention to me, I am so dull and stupid, much less like me and love me, because you do love me a little, don't you, Teddy Bear?

Mr. Hutton was touched with shame and remorse. To be thanked like this, worshiped for having seduced the girl, it was too much. It had just been a piece of imbecile wantonness. Imbecile, idiotic: there was no other way to describe it. For, when all was said, he had derived very little pleasure from it. Taking all things together, he had probably been more bored than amused. Once upon a time he had believed himself to be a hedonist. But to be a hedonist implies a certain process of reasoning, a deliberate choice of known pleasures, a rejection of known pains. This had been done without reason, against it. For he knew beforehand-so well, so well-that there was no interest or pleasure to be derived from these wretched affairs. And yet each time the vague itch came upon him he succumbed, involving himself once more in the old stupidity. There had been Maggie, his wife's maid, and Edith, the girl on the farm, and Mrs. Pringle, and the waitress in London, and others—there seemed to be dozens of them. It had all been so stale and boring. He knew it would be; he always knew. And yet, and yet . . . Experience doesn't teach.

Poor little Doris! He would write to her kindly, comfortingly, but he wouldn't see her again. A servant came to tell him that his horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and rode off. That morning the old bailiff was more irritating than usual.

Five days later Doris and Mr. Hutton were sitting together on the pier at Southend; Doris, in white muslin with pink garnishings, radiated happiness; Mr. Hutton, legs outstretched and chair tilted, had pushed the panama back from his forehead and was trying to feel like a tripper. That night, when Doris was asleep, breathing and warm by his side, he recaptured, in this moment of darkness and physical fatigue, the rather cosmic emotion which had possessed him that evening, not a fortnight ago, when he had made his great resolution. And so his solemn oath had already gone the way of so many other resolutions.

Unreason had triumphed; at the first itch of desire he had

given way. He was hopeless, hopeless.

For a long time he lay with closed eyes, ruminating his humiliation. The girl stirred in her sleep. Mr. Hutton turned over and looked in her direction. Enough faint light crept in between the half-drawn curtains to show her bare arm and shoulder, her neck, and the dark tangle of hair on the pillow. She was beautiful, desirable. Why did he lie there moaning over his sins? What did it matter? If he were hopeless, then so be it; he would make the best of his hopelessness. A glorious sense of irresponsibility suddenly filled him. He was free, magnificently free. In a kind of exaltation he drew the girl toward him. She woke, bewildered, almost frightened under his rough kisses.

The storm of his desire subsided into a kind of serene merriment. The whole atmosphere seemed to be quivering with enormous silent laughter.

"Could anyone love you as much as I do, Teddy Bear?"
The question came faintly from distant worlds of love.

"I think I know somebody who does," Mr. Hutton replied. The submarine laughter was swelling, rising, ready to break the surface of silence and resound.

"Who? Tell me. What do you mean?" The voice had come very close; charged with suspicion, anguish, indigna-

tion, it belonged to this immediate world.

"Ah!"
"Who?"

"You'll never guess." Mr. Hutton kept up the joke until it began to grow tedious, and then pronounced the name: "Janet Spence."

Doris was incredulous. "Miss Spence of the Manor? That old woman?" It was too ridiculous. Mr. Hutton laughed

too.

"But it's quite true," he said. "She adores me." Oh, the vast joke! He would go and see her as soon as he returned, see and conquer. "I believe she wants to marry me," he added.

"But you wouldn't . . . you don't intend . . ."

The air was fairly crepitating with humor. Mr. Hutton laughed aloud. "I intend to marry you," he said. It seemed to him the best joke he had ever made in his life.

When Mr. Hutton left Southend he was once more a married man. It was agreed that, for the time being, the fact should be kept secret. In the autumn they would go abroad together, and the world should be informed. Meanwhile he was to go back to his own house and Doris to hers.

The day after his return he walked over in the after-

noon to see Miss Spence. She received him with the old Gioconda.

"I was expecting you to come."

"I couldn't keep away," Mr. Hutton gallantly replied. They sat in the summerhouse. It was a pleasant placea little old stucco temple bowered among dense bushes of evergreen. Miss Spence had left her mark on it by hanging up over the seat a blue-and-white Della Robbia plaque.

"I am thinking of going to Italy this autumn," said Mr. Hutton. He felt like a ginger-beer bottle, ready to

pop with bubbling humorous excitement.

"Italy. . . ." Miss Spence closed her eyes ecstatically. "I feel drawn there too."

"Why not let yourself be drawn?"

"I don't know. 'One somehow hasn't the energy and initiative to set out alone."

"Alone. . . ." Ah, sound of guitars and throaty sing-

ing! "Yes, traveling alone isn't much fun."

Miss Spence lay back in her chair without speaking, Her eyes were still closed. Mr. Hutton stroked his mustache. The silence prolonged itself for what seemed a

very long time.

Pressed to stay to dinner, Mr. Hutton did not refuse. The fun had hardly started. The table was laid in the loggia. Through its arches they looked out onto the sloping garden, to the valley below and the farther hills. Light ebbed away; the heat and silence were oppressive, A huge cloud was mounting up the sky, and there were distant breathings of thunder. The thunder drew nearer, a wind began to blow, and the first drops of rain fell. The table was cleared. Miss Spence and Mr. Hutton sat on in the growing darkness.

Miss Spence broke a long silence by saying meditatively: "I think everyone has a right to a certain amount

of happiness, don't you?"

"Most certainly." But what was she leading up to? Nobody makes generalizations about life unless they mean to talk about themselves. Happiness: he looked back on his own life, and saw a cheerful, placid existence disturbed by no great griefs or discomforts or alarms. He had always had money and freedom; he had been able to do very much as he wanted. Yes, he supposed he had been happy, happier than most men. And now he was not merely happy; he had discovered in irresponsibility the secret of gaiety. He was about to say something about his happiness when Miss Spence went on speaking.

"People like you and me have a right to be happy some

time in our lives."

"Me?" said Mr. Hutton surprised.

"Poor Henry! Fate hasn't treated either of us very well."

"Oh, well, it might have treated me worse."

"You're being cheerful. That's brave of you. But don't think I can't see behind the mask."

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Miss Spence spoke louder and louder as the rain came down more and more heavily. Periodically the thunder cut across her utterances. She talked on, shouting against the noise.

"I have understood you so well and for so long." A flash revealed her, aimed and intent, leaning toward him. Her eyes were two profound and menacing

gun barrels. The darkness re-engulfed her.

"You were a lonely soul seeking a companion soul. I could sympathize with you in your solitude. Your marriage . . .

The thunder cut short the sentence. Miss Spence's

voice became audible once more with the words:

"... could offer no companionship to a man of

your stamp. You needed a soul mate.'

A soul mate—he! A soul mate! It was incredibly fantastic. "Georgette Leblanc, the ex-soul mate of Maurice Maeterlinck." He had seen that in the paper a few days ago. So it was thus that Janet Spence had painted him in her imagination—as a soul-mater. And for Doris he was a picture of goodness and the cleverest man in the world. And actually, really, he was what? Who knows?

"My heart went out to you. I could understand; I was lonely, too." Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. "You were so patient." Another flash. She was still aimed, dangerously. "You never complained. But I could

guess, I could guess."

"How wonderful of you!" So he was an âme incomprise.

"Only a woman's intuition . . ."

The thunder crashed and rumbled, died away, and only the sound of the rain was left. The thunder was his laughter, magnified, externalized. Flash and crash, there it was again, right on top of them.

"Don't you feel that you have within you something that is akin to this storm?" He could imagine her leaning forward as she uttered the words. "Passion makes one

the equal of the elements."

What was his gambit now? Why, obviously, he should have said, "Yes," and ventured on some unequivocal gesture. But Mr. Hutton suddenly took fright. The ginger beer in him had gone flat. The woman was serious-terribly serious. He was appalled.

Passion? "No," he desperately answered. "I am with-

out passion."

But his remark was either unheard or unheeded, for Miss Spence went on with a growing exaltation, speaking so rapidly, however, and in such a burningly intimate whisper that Mr. Hutton found it very difficult to distinguish what she was saying. She was telling him, as far as he could make out, the story of her life. The lightning was less frequent now, and there were long intervals of darkness. But at each flash he saw her still aiming toward him, still yearning forward with a terrifying intensity. Darkness, the rain, and then flash! her face was there, close at hand. A pale mask, greenish white; the large eyes, the narrow barrel of the mouth, the heavy eyebrows. Agrippina, or wasn't it rather—yes, wasn't it rather George Robey?

He began devising absurd plans for escaping. He might suddenly jump up, pretending he had seen a burglar-Stop thief! stop thief!—and dash off into the night in pursuit. Or should he say that he felt faint, a heart attack, or that he had seen a ghost-Emily's ghost-in the garden? Absorbed in his childish plotting, he had ceased to pay any attention to Miss Spence's words. The spasmodic clutching of her hand recalled his thoughts.

"I honored you for that, Henry," she was saying.

Honored him for what?

"Marriage is a sacred tie, and your respect for it, even when the marriage was, as it was in your case, an unhappy one, made me respect you and admire you, andshall I dare say the word?—"

Oh, the burglar, the ghost in the garden? But it was

too late.

. . . yes, love you, Henry, all the more. But we're free now, Henry."

Free? There was a movement in the dark, and she was

kneeling on the floor by his chair.

"Oh, Henry, Henry, I have been unhappy too."

Her arms embraced him, and by the shaking of her body he could feel that she was sobbing. She might have

been a suppliant crying for mercy.

"You mustn't, Janet," he protested. Those tears were terrible, terrible. "Not now, not now! You must be calm; you must go to bed." He patted her shoulder, then got up, disengaging himself from her embrace. He left her still crouching on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting.

Groping his way into the hall, and without waiting to look for his hat, he went out of the house, taking infinite pains to close the front door noiselessly behind him. The clouds had blown over, and the moon was shining from a clear sky. There were puddles all along the road, and a noise of running water rose from the gutters and ditches.

Mr. Hutton splashed along, not caring if he got wet.

How heart-rendingly she had sobbed! With the emotions of pity and remorse that the recollection evoked in him there was a certain resentment: why couldn't she have played the game that he was playing, the heartless, amusing game? Yes, but he had known all the time that she wouldn't, she couldn't, play that game; he had known and persisted.

What had she said about passion and the elements? Something absurdly stale, but true, true. There she was, a cloud black-bosomed and charged with thunder, and he, like some absurd little Benjamin Franklin, had sent up a kite into the heart of the menace. Now he was complaining

that his toy had drawn the lightning.

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She was probably still kneeling by that chair in the

loggia, crying.

But why hadn't he been able to keep up the game? Why had his irresponsibility deserted him, leaving him suddenly sober in a cold world? There were no answers to any of his questions. One idea burned steady and luminous in his mind, the idea of flight. He must get away at once.

"What are you thinking about, Teddy Bear?"

"Nothing."

There was a silence. Mr. Hutton remained motionless, his elbows on the parapet of the terrace, his chin in his hands, looking down over Florence. He had taken a villa on one of the hilltops to the south of the city. From a little raised terrace at the end of the garden one looked down a long fertile valley on to the town and beyond it to the bleak mass of Monte Morello and, eastward of it, to the peopled hill of Fiesole, dotted with white houses. Everything was clear and luminous in the September sunshine.

"Are you worried about anything?"

"No, thank you."

"Tell me, Teddy Bear."

"But, my dear, there's nothing to tell." Mr. Hutton turned round, smiled, and patted the girl's hand. "I think you'd better go in and have your siesta. It's too hot for you here."

"Very well, Teddy Bear. Are you coming too?"

"When I've finished my cigar."

"All right. But do hurry up and finish it, Teddy Bear." Slowly, reluctantly, she descended the steps of the terrace and walked toward the house.

Mr. Hutton continued his contemplation of Florence. He had need to be alone. It was good sometimes to escape from Doris and the restless solicitude of her passion. He had never known the pains of loving hopelessly, but he was experiencing now the pains of being loved. These last weeks had been a period of growing discomfort. Doris was always with him, like an obsession, like a guilty conscience. Yes, it was good to be alone.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and opened it, not without reluctance. He hated letters; they always contained something unpleasant, nowadays, since his second marriage. This was from his sister. He began skimming through the insulting home-truths of which it was composed. The words "indecent haste," "social suicide," scarcely cold in her grave," "person of the lower classes," all occurred. They were inevitable now in any communication from a well-meaning and right-thinking relative. Impatient, he was about to tear the stupid letter to pieces when his eye fell on a sentence at the bottom of the third page. His heart beat with uncomfortable violence as he read it. It was too monstrous! Janet Spence was going about telling everyone that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry Doris. What damnable malice! Ordinarily a man of the suavest temper, Mr. Hutton found himself trembling with rage. He took the childish satisfaction of calling names—he cursed the woman.

Then suddenly he saw the ridiculous side of the situation. The notion that he should have murdered anyone in order to marry Doris! If they only knew how miserably bored he was. Poor, dear Janet! She had tried to be malicious;

she had only succeeded in being stupid.

A sound of footsteps aroused him; he looked round. In the garden below the little terrace the servant girl of the house was picking fruit. A Neapolitan, strayed somehow as far north as Florence, she was a specimen of the classical type a little debased. Her profile might have been taken from a Sicilian coin of a bad period. Her features, carved floridly in the grand tradition, expressed an almost perfect stupidity. Her mouth was the most beautiful thing about her; the calligraphic hand of nature had richly curved it into an expression of mulish bad temper. Under her hideous black clothes, Mr. Hutton divined a powerful body, firm and massive. He had looked at her before with a vague interest and curiosity. Today the curiosity defined and focused itself into a desire. An idyll of Theocritus. Here was the woman; he, alas, was not precisely like a goatherd on the volcanic hills. He called to her.

"Armida!"

The smile with which she answered him was so provocative attested so easy a virtue, that Mr. Hutton took fright. He was on the brink once more—on the brink. He must

draw back, oh! quickly, quickly, before it was too late. The girl continued to look up at him.

"Ha chiamato?" she asked at last.

Stupidity or reason? Oh, there was no choice now. It

was imbecility every time.

"Scendo," he called back to her. Twelve steps led from the garden to the terrace. Mr. Hutton counted them. Down, down, down, down. . . . He saw a vision of himself descending from one circle of the inferno to the next, from a darkness full of wind and hail to an abyss of stinking mud.

For a good many days the Hutton case had a place on the front page of every newspaper. There had been no more popular murder trial since George Smith had temporarily eclipsed the European War by drowning in a warm bath his seventh bride. The public imagination was stirred by this tale of a murder brought to light months after the date of the crime. Here, it was felt, was one of those incidents in human life, so notable because they are so rare, which do definitely justify the ways of God to man. A wicked man had been moved by an illicit passion to kill his wife. For months he had lived in sin and fancied security, only to be dashed at last more horribly into the pit he had prepared for himself. "Murder will out," and here was a case of it. The readers of the newspapers were in position to follow every movement of the hand of God. There had been vague, but persistent rumors in the neighborhood; the police had taken action at last. Then came the exhumation order, the postmortem examination, the inquest, the evidence of the experts, the verdict of the coroner's jury, the trial, the condemnation. For once Providence had done its duty, obviously, grossly didactically, as in a melodrama. The newspapers were right in making of the case the staple intellectual food of a whole season.

Mr. Hutton's first emotion when he was summoned from Italy to give evidence at the inquest was one of indignation. It was a monstrous; a scandalous thing, that the police should take such idle, malicious gossip seriously. When the inquest was over he would bring an action for malicious prosecution against the Chief Constable; he would sue the Spance woman for slander.

would sue the Spence woman for slander.

The inquest was opened; the astonishing evidence unrolled itself. The experts had examined the body, and had found traces of arsenic; they were of opinion that the late Mrs. Hutton had died of arsenic poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning . . . Emily had died of arsenic poisoning? After that, Mr. Hutton learned with surprise

that there was enough arsenicated insecticide in his green-

houses to poison an army.

It was now, quite suddenly, that he saw it: there was a case against him. Fascinated, he watched it growing, growing, like some monstrous tropical plant. It was enveloping him, surrounding him; he was lost in a tangled forest.

When was the poison administered? The experts agreed that it must have been swallowed eight or nine hours before death. About lunchtime? Yes, about lunchtime. Clara, the parlormaid, was called. Mrs. Hutton, she remembered, had asked her to go and fetch her medicine. Mr. Hutton had volunteered to go instead; he had gone alone. Miss Spence—ah, the memory of the storm, the white face, the horror of it all!—Miss Spence confirmed Clara's statement, and added that Mr. Hutton had come back with the medicine already poured out in a wineglsss, not in the bottle.

Mr. Hutton's indignation evaporated. He was dismayed, frightened. It was all too fantastic to be taken seriously, and yet this nightmare was a fact, it was actually happening.

M'Nab had seen them kissing, often. He had taken them for a drive on the day of Mrs. Hutton's death. He could see them reflected in the wind screen, sometimes

out of the tail of his eye.

The inquest was adjourned. That evening Doris went to bed with a headache. When he went to her room after

dinner, Mr. Hutton found her crying.

"What's the matter?" He sat down on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her hair. For a long time she did not answer, and he went on stroking her hair mechanically, almost unconsciously; sometimes, even, he bent down and kissed her bare shoulder. He had his own affairs, however, to think about. What had happened? How was it that the stupid gossip had actually come true? Emily had died of arsenic poisoning. It was absurd, impossible. The order of things had been broken, and he was at the mercy of an irresponsibility. What had happened, what was going to happen? He was interrupted in the midst of his thoughts.

"It's my fault, it's my fault!" Doris suddenly sobbed out.
"I shouldn't have loved you; I oughtn't to have let you

love me. Why was I ever born?"

Mr. Hutton didn't say anything, but looked down in silence at the abject figure of misery lying on the bed. "If they do anything to you I shall kill myself."

She sat up, held him for a moment at arm's length, and looked at him with a kind of violence, as though she were never to see him again.

"I love you, I love you, I love you." She drew him, inert and passive, toward her, clasped him, pressed herself against him. "I didn't know you loved me as much as that, Teddy Bear. But why did you do it, why did you do it?"

Mr. Hutton undid her clasping arms and got up. His face became very red. "You seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife," he said. "It's really too grotesque. What do you all take me for? A cinema hero?" He had begun to lose his temper. All the exasperation, all the fear and bewilderment of the day, was transformed into a violent anger against her. "It's all such damned stupidity. Haven't you any conception of a civilized man's mentality? Do I look the sort of man who'd go about slaughtering people? I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love with you that I could commit any folly. When will you women understand that one isn't insanely in love? All one asks for is a quiet life, which you won't allow one to have. I don't know what the devil ever induced me to marry you. It was all a damned stupid, practical joke. And now you go about saying I'm a murderer. I won't stand it."

Mr. Hutton stamped toward the door. He had said horrible things, he knew, odious things that he ought speedily to unsay. But he wouldn't. He closed the door

behind him.

"Teddy Bear!" He turned the handle; the latch clicked into place. "Teddy Bear!" The voice that came to him through the closed door was agonized. Should he go back? He ought to go back. He touched the handle, then withdrew his fingers and quickly walked away. When he was halfway down the stairs he halted. She might try to do something silly-throw herself out of the window or God knows what! He listened attentively; there was no sound. But he pictured her very clearly, tiptoeing across the room, lifting the sash as high as it would go, leaning out into the cold night air. It was raining a little. Under the window lay the paved terrace. How far below? Twentyfive or thirty feet? Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of a third-story window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall; he had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would; he hated her.

He sat for a long time in the library. What had happened? What was happening. He turned the question over and over in his mind and could find no answer. Suppose the nightmare dreamed itself out to its horrible conclusion. Death was waiting for him. His eyes filled with tears; he wanted so passionately to live. "Just to be alive."

Poor Emily had wished it too, he remembered: "Just to be alive." There were still so many places in this astonishing world unvisited, so many queer delightful people still unknown, so many lovely women never so much as seen. The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines-Tears of Christ and Blood of Judas-others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lane's between the bookshelves in the London Library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground. And why, why? Confusedly he felt that some extraordinary kind of justice was being done. In the past he had been wanton and imbecile and irresponsible. Now Fate was playing as wantonly, as irresponsibly, with him. It was tit for tat, and God existed after all.

He felt that he would like to pray. Forty years ago he used to kneel by his bed every evening. The nightly formula of his childhood came to him almost unsought from some long-unopened chamber of the memory. "God bless Father and Mother, Tom and Cissie and the Baby, Mademoiselle and Nurse, and everyone that I love, and make me a good boy. Amen." They were all dead now, all except Cissie.

His mind seemed to soften and dissolve; a great calm descended upon his spirit. He went upstairs to ask Doris's forgiveness. He found her lying on the couch at the foot of the bed. On the floor beside her stood a blue bottle of liniment, marked Not to be Taken; she seemed to have drunk about half of it.

"You didn't love me," was all she said when she opened

her eyes to find him bending over her.

Dr. Libbard arrived in time to prevent any very serious consequences. "You mustn't do this again," he said while Mr. Hutton was out of the room.

"What's to prevent me?" she asked defiantly.

Dr. Libbard looked at her with his large, sad eyes. "There's nothing to prevent you," he said. "Only yourself and your baby. Isn't it rather bad luck on your baby, not allowing it to come into the world because you want to go out of it?"

Doris was silent for a time. "All right," she whispered, "I

won't."

Mr. Hutton sat by her bedside for the rest of the night. He felt himself now to be indeed a murderer. For a

time he persuaded himself that he loved this pitiable child. Dozing in his chair, he woke up, stiff and cold, to find himself drained dry, as it were, of every emotion. He had become nothing but a tired and suffering carcass. At six o'clock he undressed and went to bed for a couple of hours' sleep. In the course of the same afternoon the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Willful Murder," and Mr. Hutton was committed for trial.

Miss Spence was not at all well. She had found her public appearances in the witness box very trying, and when it was all over she had something that was very nearly a breakdown. She slept badly, and suffered from nervous indigestion. Dr. Libbard used to call every other day. She talked to him a great deal, mostly about the Hutton case. Her moral indignation was always on the boil. Wasn't it appalling to think that one had had a murderer in one's house? Wasn't it extraordinary that one could have been for so long mistaken about the man's character? (But she had had an inkling from the first.) And then the girl he had gone off with—so low class, so little better than a prostitute. The news that the second Mrs. Hutton was expecting a baby, the posthumous child of a condemned and executed criminal, revolted her; the thing was shocking, an obscenity. Dr. Libbard answered her gently and vaguely, and prescribed bromide.

One morning he interrupted her in the midst of her customary tirade. "By the way," he said in his soft, melancholy voice, "I suppose it was really you who reisoned Mrs. Hutter"

poisoned Mrs. Hutton."

Miss Spence stared at him for two or three seconds with enormous eyes, and then quietly said, "Yes." After that she started to cry.

"In the coffee, I suppose."

She seemed to nod assent. Dr. Libbard took out his fountain pen, and in his neat, meticulous calligraphy wrote out a prescription for a sleeping draught.

(from Mortal Coils)

# TOMORROW'S CHILD

He did not want to be the father of a small blue pyramid. Peter Horn hadn't planned it that way at all. Neither he nor his wife imagined that such a thing could happen to them. They had talked quietly for days about the birth of their coming child, they had eaten normal foods, slept a great deal, taken in a few shows, and, when it was time for her to fly in the helicopter to the hospital, her husband held her and kissed her.

"Honey, you'll be home in six hours," he said. "These new birth-mechanisms do everything but father the child for you."

She remembered an old-time song, "No, no, they

can't take that away from me!" and sang it, and they laughed as the helicopter lifted them over the green way from country to city.

The doctor, a quiet gentleman named Wolcott, was very confident. Polly Ann, the wife, was made ready for the task ahead and the father was put, as usual, out in the waiting room where he could suck on cigarettes or take highballs from a convenient mixer. He was feeling pretty good. This was the first baby, but there was not a thing to worry about. Polly Ann was in good hands.

Dr. Wolcott came into the waiting room an hour later. He looked like a man who has seen death. Peter Horn, on his third highball, did not move. His hand

tightened on the glass and he whispered:

"She's dead."

"No," said Wolcott, quietly. "No, no, she's fine. It's the baby."

"The baby's dead, then."

"The baby's alive, too, but-drink the rest of that drink and come along after me. Something's hap-

pened."

Yes, indeed, something had happened. The "something" that had happened had brought the entire hospital out into the corridors. People were going and coming from one room to another. As Peter Horn was led through a hallway where attendants in white uniforms were standing around peering into each other's faces and whispering, he became quite ill.

"Hey, looky looky! The child of Peter Horn! In-

credible!"

They entered a small clean room. There was a crowd in the room, looking down at a low table. There was something on the table.

A small blue pyramid.

"Why've you brought me here?" said Horn, turning to the doctor.

The small blue pyramid moved. It began to cry.

Peter Horn pushed forward and looked down wildly. He was very white and he was breathing rapidly. "You don't mean that's it?"

The doctor named Wolcott nodded.

The blue pyramid had six blue snakelike appendages and three eyes that blinked from the tips of projecting structures.

Horn didn't move.

"It weighs seven pounds, eight ounces," someone said.

Horn thought to himself, they're kidding me. This is some joke. Charlie Ruscoll is behind all this. He'll pop in a door any moment and cry "April Fool!" and everybody'll laugh. That's not my child. Oh, horrible! They're kidding me.

Horn stood there, and the sweat rolled down his

face.

"Get me away from here." Horn turned and his hands were opening and closing without purpose, his eyes were flickering.

Wolcott held his elbow, talking calmly. "This is

your child. Understand that, Mr. Horn."

"No. No, it's not." His mind wouldn't touch the thing. "It's a nightmare. Destroy it?"

"You can't kill a human being."

"Human?" Horn blinked tears. "That's not human!

That's a crime against God!"

The doctor went on, quickly. "We've examined this-child-and we've decided that it is not a mutant, a result of gene destruction or rearrangement. It's not a freak. Nor is it sick. Please listen to everything I say to you."

Horn stared at the wall, his eyes wide and sick. He swayed. The doctor talked distantly, with assurance.

"The child was somehow affected by the birth pressure. There was a dimensional distructure caused by the simultaneous short-circuitings and malfunctionings of the new birth and hypnosis machines. Well, anyway," the doctor ended lamely, "your baby was born into-another dimension."

Horn did not even nod. He stood there, waiting,

Dr. Wolcott made it emphatic. "Your child is alive, well, and happy. It is lying there, on the table. But because it was born into another dimension it has a

shape alien to us. Our eyes, adjusted to a threedimensional concept, cannot recognize it as a baby. But it is. Underneath that camouflage, the strange pyramidal shape and appendages, it is your child."

Horn closed his mouth and shut his eyes. "Can I

have a drink?"

"Certainly." A drink was thrust into Horn's hands.

"Now, let me just sit down, sit down somewhere a moment." Horn sank wearily into a chair. It was coming clear. Everything shifted slowly into place. It was his child, no matter what. He shuddered. No matter how horrible it looked, it was his first child.

At last he looked up and tried to see the doctor. "What'll we tell Polly?" His voice was hardly a whis-

"We'll work that out this morning, as soon as you feel up to it."

"What happens after that? Is there any way to-

change it back?"

"We'll try. That is, if you give us permission to try. After all, it's your child. You can do anything with him you want to do."

"Him?" Horn laughed ironically, shutting his eyes. "How do you know it's a him?" He sank down into

darkness. His ears roared.

Wolcott was visibly upset. "Why, we-that iswell, we don't know, for sure."

Horn drank more of his drink. "What if you can't

change him back?"

"I realize what a shock it is to you, Mr. Horn. If you can't bear to look upon the child, we'll be glad to

raise him here, at the Institute, for you."

Horn thought it over. "Thanks. But he still belongs to me and Polly, I'll give him a home. Raise him like I'd raise any kid. Give him a normal home life. Try to learn to love him. Treat him right." His lips were numb, he couldn't think.

"You realize what a job you're taking on, Mr. Horn? This child can't be allowed to have normal playmates; why, they'd pester it to death in no time. You know how children are. If you decide to raise the child at home, his life will be strictly regimented, he must never be seen by anyone. Is that clear?"

"Yes. Yes, it's clear. Doc. Doc, is he all right men-

tally?"

"Yes. We've tested his reactions. He's a fine healthy child as far as nervous response and such things go."

"I just wanted to be sure. Now, the only problem is

Polly."

Wolcott frowned. "I confess that one has me stumped. You know it is pretty hard on a woman to hear that her child has been born dead. But this, telling a woman she's given birth to something not recognizable as human. It's not as clean as death. There's too much chance for shock. And yet I must tell her the truth. A doctor gets nowhere by lying to his patient."

Horn put his glass down. "I don't want to lose Polly. too. I'd be prepared now, if you destroyed the child, to take it. But I don't want Polly killed by the shock

of this whole thing."

"I think we may be able to change the child back. That's the point which makes me hesitate. If I thought the case was hopeless I'd make out a certificate of euthanasia immediately. But it's at least worth a chance."

Horn was very tired. He was shivering quietly, deeply. "All right, doctor. It needs food, milk, and love until you can fix it up. It's had a raw deal so far, no reason for it to go on getting a raw deal. When will we tell Polly?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, when she wakes up."

Horn got up and walked to the table which was warmed by a soft illumination from overhead. The blue pyramid sat upon the table as Horn held out his hand.

"Hello, Baby," said Horn.

The blue pyramid looked up at Horn with three bright blue eyes. It shifted a tiny blue tendril, touching Horn's fingers with it.

Horn shivered. "Hello, Baby." The doctor produced a special feeding bottle. "This is woman's milk. Here we go."

Baby looked upward through clearing mists. Baby saw the shapes moving over him and knew them to be friendly. Baby was newborn, but already alert,

strangely alert. Baby was aware.

There were moving objects above and around Baby. Six cubes of a gray-white color, bending down. Six cubes with hexagonal appendages and three eyes to each cube. Then there were two other cubes coming from a distance over a crystalline plateau. One of the cubes was white. It had three eyes, too. There was something about this White Cube that Baby liked. There was an attraction. Some relation. There was an odor to the White Cube that reminded Baby of itself.

Shrill sounds came from the six bending-down gray-white cubes. Sounds of curiosity and wonder. It was like a kind of piccolo music, all playing at once.

Now the two newly arrived cubes, the White Cube and the Gray Cube, were whistling. After a while the White Cube extended one of its hexagonal appendages to touch Baby. Baby responded by putting out one of its tendrils from its pyramidal body. Baby liked the White Cube. Baby liked. Baby was hungry. Baby liked. Maybe the White Cube would give it food ...

The Gray Cube produced a pink globe for Baby. Baby was now to be fed. Good. Good. Baby accepted

food eagerly.

Food was good. All the gray-white cubes drifted away, leaving only the nice White Cube standing over Baby looking down and whistling over and over. Over and over.

They told Polly the next day. Not everything. Just enough. Just a hint. They told her the baby was not well, in a certain way. They talked slowly, and in ever-tightening circles, in upon Polly. Then Dr. Wolcott gave a long lecture on the birth-mechanisms,

Tomorrow's Child

how they helped a woman in her labor, and how, this time, they short-circuited. There was another man of scientific means present and he gave her a dry little talk on dimensions, holding up his fingers, so! one, two, three, and four. Still another man talked of energy and matter. Another spoke of underprivileged children.

Polly finally sat up in bed and said, "What's all the talk for? What's wrong with my baby that you should all be talking so long?"

Wolcott told her.

"Of course, you can wait a week and see it," he said. "Or you can sign over guardianship of the child to the Institute."

"There's only one thing I want to know," said

Polly.

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Dr. Wolcott raised his brows.

"Did I make the child that way?" asked Polly.

"You most certainly did not!"

"The child isn't a monster, genetically?" asked Polly.

"The child was thrust into another continuum. Oth-

erwise, it is perfectly normal."

Polly's tight, lined mouth relaxed. She said, simply, "Then bring me my baby. I want to see him. Please. Now."

They brought the "child."

The Horns left the hospital the next day. Polly walked out on her own two good legs, with Peter Horn following her, looking at her in quiet amazement.

They did not have the baby with them. That would come later. Horn helped his wife into their helicopter and sat beside her. He lifted the ship, whirring, into the warm air,

"You're a wonder," he said.

"Am I?" she said, lighting a cigarette.

"You are. You didn't cry. You didn't do anything."

"He's not so bad, you know," she said. "Once you get to know him. I can even-hold him in my arms. He's warm and he cries and he even needs his trian-

gular diapers." Here she laughed. He noticed a nervous tremor in the laugh, however. "No, I didn't cry, Pete, because that's my baby. Or he will be. He isn't dead, I thank God for that. He's-I don't know how to explain-still unborn. I like to think he hasn't been born yet. We're waiting for him to show up. I have confidence in Dr. Wolcott. Haven't you?"

"You're right. You're right." He reached over and held her hand. "You know something? You're a peach."

"I can hold on," she said, sitting there looking ahead as the green country swung under them. "As long as I know something good will happen, I won't let it hurt or shock me. I'll wait six months, and then maybe I'll kill myself."

"Polly!"

She looked at him as if he'd just come in. "Pete, I'm sorry. But this sort of thing doesn't happen. Once it's over and the baby is finally 'born' I'll forget it so quick it'll never have occurred. But if the doctor can't help us, then a mind can't take it, a mind can only tell the body to climb out on a roof and jump."

"Things'll be all right," he said, holding to the

guide-wheel. "They have to be."

She said nothing, but let the cigarette smoke blow out of her mouth in the pounding concussion of the

helicopter fan.

Three weeks passed. Every day they flew in to the Institute to visit "Py." For that was the quiet calm name that Polly Horn gave to the blue pyramid that lay on the warm sleeping-table and blinked up at them. Dr. Wolcott was careful to point out that the habits of the "child" were as normal as any others; so many hours sleep, so many awake, so much attentiveness, so much boredom, so much food, so much elimination. Polly Horn listened, and her face softened and her eyes warmed.

At the end of the third week, Dr. Wolcott said, "Feel up to taking him home now? You live in the country, don't you? All right, you have an enclosed patio, he can be out there in the sunlight, on occa-

sion. He needs a mother's love. That's trite, but nevertheless true. He should be suckled. We have an arrangement where he's been fed by the new feedmech; cooing voice, warmth, hands, and all." Dr. Wolcott's voice was dry. "But still I feel you are familiar enough with him now to know he's a pretty healthy child. Are you game, Mrs. Horn?"

"Yes, I'm game."

"Good. Bring him in every third day for a checkup. Here's his formula. We're working on several solutions now, Mrs. Horn. We should have some results for you by the end of the year. I don't want to say anything definite, but I have reason to believe we'll pull that boy right out of the fourth dimension, like a rabbit out of a hat."

The doctor was mildly surprised and pleased when Polly Horn kissed him, then and there.

Pete Horn took the copter home over the smooth rolling greens of Griffith. From time to time he looked at the pyramid lying in Polly's arms. She was making cooing noises at it, it was replying in approximately the same way.

"I wonder," said Polly.

"What?"

"How do we look to it?" asked his wife.

"I asked Wolcott about that. He said we probably look funny to him, also. He's in one dimension, we're in another."

"You mean we don't look like men and women to

him?"

"If we could see ourselves, no. But remember, the baby knows nothing of men or women. To the baby whatever shape we're in, we are natural. It's accustomed to seeing us shaped like cubes or squares or pyramids, as it sees us from its separate dimension. The baby's had no other experience, no other norm with which to compare what it sees. We are its norm. On the other hand, the baby seems weird to us because we compare it to our accustomed shapes and sizes."

"Yes, I see. I see."

Baby was conscious of movement. One White Cube held him in warm appendages. Another White Cube sat further over, within an oblong of purple. The oblong moved in the air over a vast bright plain of pyramids, hexagons, oblongs, pillars, bubbles, and multi-colored cubes.

One White Cube made a whistling noise. The other White Cube replied with a whistling. The White Cube that held him shifted about. Baby watched the two White Cubes, and watched the fleeing world outside the traveling bubble.

Baby felt-sleepy. Baby closed his eyes, settled his pyramidal youngness upon the lap of the White Cube, and made faint little noises . . .

"He's asleep," said Polly Horn.

Summer came, Peter Horn himself was busy with his export-import business. But he made certain he was home every night. Polly was all right during the day, but, at night, when she had to be alone with the child, she got to smoking too much, and one night he found her passed out on the davenport, an empty sherry bottle on the table beside her. From then on, he took care of the child himself nights. When it cried it made a weird whistling noise, like some jungle animal lost and wailing. It wasn't the sound of

Peter Horn had the nursery soundproofed.

"So your wife won't hear your baby crying?" asked the workman.

"Yes," said Peter Horn. "So she won't hear."

They had few visitors. They were afraid that someone might stumble on Py, dear sweet pyramid little

"What's that noise?" asked a visitor one evening, over his cocktail, "Sounds like some sort of bird. You didn't tell me you had an aviary, Peter?"

"Oh, yes," said Horn, closing the nursery door.

"Have another drink. Let's drink, everyone."

It was like having a dog or a cat in the house. At

least that's how Polly looked upon it. Peter Horn watched her and observed exactly how she talked and petted the small Py. It was Py this and Py that, but somehow with some reserve, and sometimes she would look around the room and touch herself, and her hands would clench, and she would look lost and afraid, as if she were waiting for someone to arrive.

In September, Polly reported to her husband: "He can say Father. Yes he can. Come on, Py. Say, Fa-

ther!"

She held the blue warm pyramid up.

"Wheelly," whistled the little warm blue pyramid.

"Again," repeated Polly.

"Wheelly!" whistled the pyramid.

"For God's sake, stop!" said Pete Horn. He took the child from her and put it in the nursery where it whistled over and over that name, that name, that name. Horn came out and poured himself a stiff drink. Polly was laughing quietly.

"Isn't that terrific?" she said. "Even his voice is in the fourth dimension. Won't it be nice when he learns to talk later? We'll give him Hamlet's soliloguy to memorize and he'll say it but it'll come out like something from James Joyce! Aren't we lucky? Give me a drink."

"You've had enough," he said.

"Thanks, I'll help myself," she said and did.

October, and then November. Py was learning to talk now. He whistled and squealed and made a bell-like tone when he was hungry. Dr. Wolcott visited. "When his color is a constant bright blue," said the doctor, "that means he's healthy. When the color fades, dull-the child is feeling poorly. Remember that."

"Oh, yes, I will, I will," said Polly. "Robin's-egg

blue for health, dull cobalt for illness."

"Young lady," said Wolcott. "You'd better take a couple of these pills and come see me tomorrow for a little chat. I don't like the way you're talking. Stick out your tongue. Ah-hmm. You been drinking? Look

at the stains on your fingers. Cut the cigarettes in half. See you tomorrow."

"You don't give me much to go on," said Polly. "It's

been almost a year now."

"My dear Mrs. Horn, I don't want to excite you continually. When we have our mechs ready we'll let you know. We're working every day. There'll be an experiment soon. Take those pills now and shut that nice mouth." He chucked Py under the "chin." "Good healthy baby, by God! Twenty pounds if he's an ounce!"

Baby was conscious of the goings and comings of the two nice White Cubes who were with him during all of his waking hours. There was another cube, a gray one, who visited on certain days. But mostly it was the two White Cubes who cared for and loved him. He looked up at the one warm, rounder, softer White Cube and made the low warbling soft sound of contentment. The White Cube fed him. He was content. He grew. All was familiar and good.

The New Year, the year 1989, arrived.

Rocket ships flashed on the sky, and helicopters whirred and flourished the warm California winds.

Peter Horn carted home large plates of specially poured blue and gray polarized glass, secretly. Through these, he peered at his "child." Nothing. The pyramid remained a pyramid, no matter if he viewed it through X-ray or yellow cellophane. The barrier was unbreakable. Horn returned quietly to his drinking.

The big thing happened early in February. Horn, arriving home in his helicopter, was appalled to see a crowd of neighbors gathered on the lawn of his home. Some of them were sitting, others were standing, still others were moving away, with frightened

expressions on their faces.

Polly was walking the "child" in the yard.

Polly was quite drunk. She held the small blue pyramid by the hand and walked him up and down. She did not see the helicopter land, nor did she pay much attention as Horn came running up.

One of the neighbors turned. "Oh, Mr. Horn, it's the cutest thing. Where'd you find it?"

One of the others cried, "Hey, you're quite the traveler, Horn. Pick it up in South America?"

Polly held the pyramid up. "Say Father!" she cried, trying to focus on her husband.

"Wheel!" cried the pyramid. "Polly!" Peter Horn said.

"He's friendly as a dog or a cat," said Polly moving the child with her. "Oh, no, he's not dangerous. He's friendly as a baby. My husband brought him from Afghanistan."

The neighbors began to move off.

"Come back!" Polly waved at them. "Don't you want to see my baby? Isn't he simply beautiful!"

He slapped her face.

"My baby," she said, brokenly.

He slapped her again and again until she quit saying it and collapsed. He picked her up and took her into the house. Then he came out and took Py in and then he sat down and phoned the Institute.

"Dr. Wolcott, this is Horn. You'd better have your

stuff ready. It's tonight or not at all."

There was a hesitation. Finally Wolcott sighed. "All right. Bring your wife and the child. We'll try to have things in shape."

They hung up.

Horn sat there studying the pyramid.

"The neighbors thought he was grand," said his wife, lying on the couch, her eyes shut, her lips

trembling ...

The Institute hall smelled clean, neat, sterile. Dr. Wolcott walked along it, followed by Peter Horn and his wife Polly, who was holding Py in her arms. They turned in at a doorway and stood in a large room. In the center of the room were two tables with large black hoods suspended over them.

Behind the tables were a number of machines with dials and levers on them. There was the faintest perceptible hum in the room. Pete Horn looked at Polly for a moment.

Wolcott gave her a glass of liquid. "Drink this." She drank it. "Now. Sit down." They both sat. The doctor put his hands together and looked at them for a moment.

"I want to tell you what I've been doing in the last few months," he said. "I've tried to bring the baby out of whatever hell dimension, fourth, fifth, or sixth, that it is in. Each time you left the baby for a checkup we worked on the problem. Now, we have a solution, but it has nothing to do with bringing the baby out of the dimension in which it exists."

Polly sank back. Horn simply watched the doctor carefully for anything he might say. Wolcott leaned

forward.

"I can't bring Py out, but I can put you people in. That's it." He spread his hands.

Horn looked at the machine in the corner. "You mean you can send us into Py's dimension?"

"If you want to go badly enough."

Polly said nothing. She held Py quietly and looked at him.

Dr. Wolcott explained. "We know what series of malfunctions, mechanical and electrical, forced Py into his present state. We can reproduce those accidents and stresses. But bringing him back is something else. It might take a million trials and failures before we got the combination. The combination that jammed him into another space was an accident, but luckily we saw, observed, and recorded it. There are no records for bringing one back. We have to work in the dark. Therefore, it will be easier to put you in the fourth dimension than to bring Py into ours."

Polly asked, simply and earnestly, "Will I see my

baby as he really is, if I go into his dimension?"

Wolcott nodded.

Polly said, "Then, I want to go."

"Hold on," said Peter Horn. "We've only been in this office five minutes and already you're promising away the rest of your life."

"I'll be with my real baby. I won't care."

Tomorrow's Child

"Dr. Wolcott, what will it be like, in that dimension

on the other side?"

"There will be no change that you will notice. You will both seem the same size and shape to one another. The pyramid will become a baby, however. You will have added an extra sense, you will be able to interpret what you see differently.

"But won't we turn into oblongs or pyramids ourselves? And won't you, doctor, look like some geomet-

rical form instead of a human?"

"Does a blind man who sees for the first time give up his ability to hear or taste?"

"No."

"All right, then. Stop thinking in terms of subtraction. Think in terms of addition. You're gaining something. You lose nothing. You know what a human looks like, which is an advantage Py doesn't have, looking out from his dimension. When you arrive 'over there' you can see Dr. Wolcott as both things, a geometrical abstract or a human, as you choose. It will probably make quite a philosopher out of you. There's one other thing, however."

"And that?"

"To everyone else in the world you, your wife and the child will look like abstract forms. The baby a triangle. Your wife an oblong perhaps. Yourself a hexagonal solid. The world will be shocked, not you." "We'll be freaks."

"You'll be freaks. But you won't know it. You'll

have to lead a secluded life."

"Until you find a way to bring all three of us out

together."

"That's right. It may be ten years, twenty. I won't recommend it to you, you may both go quite mad as a result of feeling apart, different. If there's a grain of paranoia in you, it'll come out. It's up to you, naturally."

Peter Horn looked at his wife, she looked back

gravely.

"We'll go," said Peter Horn.

"Into Py's dimension?" said Wolcott.

"Into Py's dimension."

They stood up from their chairs. "We'll lose no other sense, you're certain, doctor? Will you be able to understand us when we talk to you? Py's talk is incomprehensible."

"Py talks that way because that's what he thinks we sound like when our talk comes through the dimensions to him. He imitates the sound. When you are over there and talk to me, you'll be talking perfect English, because you know how. Dimensions have to do with senses and time and knowledge."

"And what about Py? When we come into his strata of existence. Will he see us as humans, immediately, and won't that be a shock to him? Won't it be

dangerous?"

"He's awfully young. Things haven't got too set for him. There'll be a slight shock, but your odors will be the same, and your voices will have the same timber and pitch and you'll be just as warm and loving, which is most important of all. You'll get on with him

Horn scratched his head slowly. "This seems such a long way around to where we want to go." He sighed. "I wish we could have another kid and forget all about this one."

"This baby is the one that counts. I dare say Polly here wouldn't want any other, would you, Polly?"

"This baby, this baby," said Polly.

Wolcott gave Peter Horn a meaningful look. Horn interpreted it correctly. This baby or no more Polly ever again. This baby or Polly would be in a quiet room somewhere staring into space for the rest of her

They moved toward the machine together. "I guess I can stand it, if she can," said Horn, taking her hand. "I've worked hard for a good many years now, it might be fun retiring and being an abstract for a change."

"I envy you the journey, to be honest with you," said Wolcott, making adjustments on the large dark machine. "I don't mind telling you that as a result of

your being 'over there' you may very well write a volume of philosophy that will set Dewey, Bergson, Hegel, or any of the others on their ears. I might "come over' to visit you one day."

"You'll be welcome. What do we need for the

trip?"

"Nothing. Just lie on these tables and be still."

A humming filled the room. A sound of power and

energy and warmth.

They lay on the tables, holding hands, Polly and Peter Horn. A double black hood came down over them. They were both in darkness. From somewhere far off in the hospital, a voice-clock sang, "Tick tock, seven o'clock. Tick tock, seven o'clock ..." fading away in a little soft gong.

The low humming grew louder. The machine glit-

tered with hidden, shifting, compressed power.

"Is there any danger?" cried Peter Horn.

"None!"

The power screamed. The very atoms of the room divided against each other, into alien and enemy camps. The two sides fought for supremacy. Horn gaped his mouth to shout. His insides became pyramidal, oblong with terrific electric seizures. He felt a pulling, sucking, demanding power claw at his body. The power yearned and nuzzled and pressed through the room. The dimensions of the black hood over his torso were stretched, pulled into wild planes of incomprehension. Sweat, pouring down his face, was not sweat, but a pure dimensional essence! His limbs were wrenched, flung, jabbed, suddenly caught. He began to melt like running wax.

A clicking sliding noise.

Horn thought swiftly, but calmly. How will it be in the future with Polly and me and Py at home and people coming over for a cocktail party? How will it be

Suddenly he knew how it would be and the thought of it filled him with a great awe and a sense

of credulous faith and time. They would live in the same white house on the same quiet, green hill, with a high fence around it to keep out the merely curious. And Dr. Wolcott would come to visit, park his beetle in the yard below, come up the steps and at the door would be a tall slim White Rectangle to meet him with a dry martini in its snakelike hand.

And in an easy chair across the room would sit a Salt White Oblong with a copy of Nietzsche open, reading, smoking a pipe. And on the floor would be Py, running about. And there would be talk and more friends would come in and the White Oblong and the White Rectangle would laugh and joke and offer little finger sandwiches and more drinks and it would be a good evening of talk and laughter.

That's how it would be,

Click.

The humming noise stopped. The hood lifted from Horn.

It was all over.

They were in another dimension.

He heard Polly cry out. There was much light. Then he slipped from the table, stood blinking. Polly was running. She stopped and picked up something from the floor.

It was Peter Horn's son. A living, pink-faced, blueeyed boy, lying in her arms, gasping and blinking and crying.

The pyramidal shape was gone. Polly was crying

with happiness.

Peter Horn walked across the room, trembling, trying to smile himself, to hold on to Polly and the child, both at the same time, and weep with them.

"Well!" said Wolcott, standing back. He did not move for a long while. He only watched the White Oblong and the slim White Rectangle holding the Blue Pyramid on the opposite side of the room. An assistant came in the door.

"Shhh," said Wolcott, hand to his lips. "They'll

want to be alone awhile. Come along." He took the assistant by the arm and tiptoed across the room. The White Rectangle and the White Oblong didn't even look up when the door closed.

### The Cask of Amontillado

THE thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adapted to suit the time and opportunity—to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmary Fortunato, like his country men, was a quack—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially: I was skilful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting partistriped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him: "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts."

"How?" said he. "Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi. If any one has a critical turn, it is he. He will tell me—"

"Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no, I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi——"

"I have no engagement;—come."

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre."

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a roquelaire

closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

'The pipe?" said he.

"It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls.'

He turned toward me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

"Nitre?" he asked, at length.

"Nitre," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?" "Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!-ugh! ugh! ugh!"

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

"It is nothing," he said, at last.

"Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi-

"Enough," he said; "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not

kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily-but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"I drink," he said, "to the buried that repose around us." "And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded. "These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"Nemo me impune lacessit."

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above

"The nitre!" I said; "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough-"

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation I did not

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."

"You are not of the masons." "Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said.

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my roquelaire.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us

proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak, and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

"Proceed," I said; "herein is the Amontillado. As for

Luchesi-

"He is an ignoramus," interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help

feeling the nitre. Indeed it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

'The Amontillado!" ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

'True," I replied; "the Amontillado."

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigor-

ously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed—I aided—I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamorer grew

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined

position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

"Ha! ha! ha!—he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the

palazzo-he! he! he!--over our wine-he! he! he!"

"The Amontillado!" I said.

"He! he! he!—he! he!—yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone."
"For the love of God, Montresor!"
"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud;

"Fortunato!"

No answer. I called again;

"Fortunato!"

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!

face pressed to the rear window, and just before they sirened over a hill, he saw the red fire and heard the big sound and felt the huge tremor as the silver rocket shot up and left him behind on an ordinary Monday morning on the ordinary planet Earth.

# April 2000: THE THIRD EXPEDITION

The ship came down from space. It came from the stars and the black velocities, and the shining movements, and the silent gulfs of space. It was a new ship; it had fire in its body and men in its metal cells, and it moved with a clean silence, fiery and warm. In it were seventeen men, including a captain. The crowd at the Ohio field had shouted and waved their hands up into the sunlight, and the rocket had bloomed out great flowers of heat and color and run away into space on the third

voyage to Mars!

Now it was decelerating with metal efficiency in the upper Martian atmospheres. It was still a thing of beauty and strength. It had moved in the midnight waters of space like a pale sea leviathan; it had passed the ancient moon and thrown itself onward into one nothingness following another. The men within it had been battered, thrown about, sickened, made well again, each in his turn. One man had died, but now the remaining sixteen, with their eyes clear in their heads and their faces pressed to the thick glass ports, watched Mars swing up under them.

"Mars!" cried Navigator Lustig.

"Good old Mars!" said Samuel Hinkston, archaeologist.

"Well," said Captain John Black.

The rocket landed on a lawn of green grass. Outside, upon this lawn, stood an iron deer. Further up on the green stood a tall brown Victorian house, quiet in the sunlight, all covered with scrolls and rococo, its windows made of blue and pink and yellow and green colored glass. Upon the porch were hairy geraniums and an old swing which was hooked into the porch ceiling and which now swung back and forth, back and forth, in a little breeze. At the summit of the house was a

cupola with diamond leaded-glass windows and a dunce-cap roof! Through the front window you could see a piece of music titled "Beautiful Ohio" sitting on the music rest.

Around the rocket in four directions spread the little town, green and motionless in the Martian spring. There were white houses and red brick ones, and tall elm trees blowing in the wind, and tall maples and horse chestnuts. And church steeples with golden bells silent in them.

The rocket men looked out and saw this. Then they looked at one another and then they looked out again. They held to each other's elbows, suddenly unable to breathe, it seemed.

Their faces grew pale.

"I'll be damned," whispered Lustig, rubbing his face with his numb fingers. "I'll be damned."

"It just can't be," said Samuel Hinkston.

"Lord," said Captain John Black.

There was a call from the chemist. "Sir, the atmosphere is thin for breathing. But there's enough oxygen. It's safe."

"Then we'll go out," said Lustig.

"Hold on," said Captain John Black. "How do we know what this is?"

"It's a small town with thin but breathable air in it, sir."

"And it's a small town the like of Earth towns," said Hinkston, the archaeologist. "Incredible. It can't be, but it is."

Captain John Black looked at him idly. "Do you think that the civilizations of two planets can progress at the same rate and evolve in the same way, Hinkston?"

"I wouldn't have thought so, sir."

Captain Black stood by the port. "Look out there. The geraniums. A specialized plant. That specific variety has only been known on Earth for fifty years. Think of the thousands of years it takes to evolve plants. Then tell me if it is logical that the Martians should have: one, leaded-glass windows; two, cupolas; three, porch swings; four, an instrument that looks like a piano and probably is a piano; and five, if you look closely through this telescopic lens here, is it logical that a Martian composer would have published a piece of music titled, strangely enough, 'Beautiful Ohio'? All of which means that we have an Ohio River on Mars!"

"Captain Williams, of course!" cried Hinkston.

"What?"

"Captain Williams and his crew of three men! Or Nathaniel

York and his partner. That would explain it!"

"That would explain absolutely nothing. As far as we've been able to figure, the York expedition exploded the day it reached Mars, killing York and his partner. As for Williams and his three men, their ship exploded the second day after their arrival. At least the pulsations from their radios ceased at that time, so we figure that if the men were alive after that they'd have contacted us. And anyway, the York expedition was only a year ago, while Captain Williams and his men landed here some time during last August. Theorizing that they are still alive, could they, even with the help of a brilliant Martian race, have built such a town as this and aged it in so short a time? Look at that town out there; why, it's been standing here for the last seventy years. Look at the wood on the porch newel; look at the trees, a century old, all of them! No, this isn't York's work or Williams'. It's something else. I don't like it. And I'm not leaving the ship until I know what it is."

"For that matter," said Lustig, nodding, "Williams and his men, as well as York, landed on the opposite side of Mars. We

were very careful to land on this side."

"An excellent point. Just in case a hostile local tribe of Martians killed off York and Williams, we have instructions to land in a further region, to forestall a recurrence of such a disaster. So here we are, as far as we know, in a land that Williams and York never saw."

"Damn it," said Hinkston, "I want to get out into this town, sir, with your permission. It may be there are similar thought patterns, civilization graphs on every planet in our sun system. We may be on the threshold of the greatest psychological and metaphysical discovery of our age!"

"I'm willing to wait a moment," said Captain John Black.

"It may be, sir, that we're looking upon a phenomenon that, for the first time, would absolutely prove the existence of God, sir."

"There are many people who are of good faith without such

proof, Mr. Hinkston."

"I'm one myself, sir. But certainly a town like this could not occur without divine intervention. The *detail*. It fills me with such feelings that I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

"Do neither, then, until we know what we're up against."

"Up against?" Lustig broke in. "Against nothing, Captain. It's a good, quiet green town, a lot like the old-fashioned one I was born in. I like the looks of it."

"When were you born, Lustig?"

"Nineteen-fifty, sir."
"And you, Hinkston?"

"Nineteen fifty-five, sir. Grinnell, Iowa. And this looks like home to me."

"Hinkston, Lustig, I could be either of your fathers. I'm just eighty years old. Born in 1920 in Illinois, and through the grace of God and a science that, in the last fifty years, knows how to make some old men young again, here I am on Mars, not any more tired than the rest of you, but infinitely more suspicious. This town out here looks very peaceful and cool, and so much like Green Bluff, Illinois, that it frightens me. It's too much like Green Bluff." He turned to the radioman. "Radio Earth. Tell them we've landed. That's all. Tell them we'll radio a full report tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

Captain Black looked out the rocket port with his face that should have been the face of a man eighty but seemed like the face of a man in his fortieth year. "Tell you what we'll do, Lustig; you and I and Hinkston'll look the town over. The other men'll stay aboard. If anything happens they can get the hell out. A loss of three men's better than a whole ship. If something bad happens, our crew can warn the next rocket. That's Captain Wilder's rocket, I think, due to be ready to take off next Christmas. If there's something hostile about Mars we certainly want the next rocket to be well armed."

"So are we. We've got a regular arsenal with us."

"Tell the men to stand by the guns then. Come on, Lustig, Hinkston."

The three men walked together down through the levels of the ship.

It was a beautiful spring day. A robin sat on a blossoming apple tree and sang continuously. Showers of petal snow sifted down when the wind touched the green branches, and the blossom scent drifted upon the air. Somewhere in the town someone was playing the piano and the music came and went, came and went, softly, drowsily. The song was "Beautiful Dreamer."

Somewhere else a phonograph, scratchy and faded, was hissing out a record of "Roamin' in the Gloamin'," sung by Harry Lauder.

The three men stood outside the ship. They sucked and gasped at the thin, thin air and moved slowly so as not to tire themselves.

Now the phonograph record being played was:

"Oh, give me a June night The moonlight and you..."

Lustig began to tremble. Samuel Hinkston did likewise.

The sky was serene and quiet, and somewhere a stream of water ran through the cool caverns and tree shadings of a ravine. Somewhere a horse and wagon trotted and rolled by, bumping.

"Sir," said Samuel Hinkston, "it must be, it has to be, that rocket travel to Mars began in the years before the first World

War!"
"No."

"How else can you explain these houses, the iron deer, the pianos, the music?" Hinkston took the captain's elbow persuasively and looked into the captain's face. "Say that there were people in the year 1905 who hated war and got together with some scientists in secret and built a rocket and came out here to Mars——"

"No, no, Hinkston."

"Why not? The world was a different world in 1905; they could have kept it a secret much more easily."

"But a complex thing like a rocket, no, you couldn't keep it

secret."

"And they came up here to live, and naturally the houses they built were similar to Earth houses because they brought the culture with them."

"And they've lived here all these years?" said the captain.

"In peace and quiet, yes. Maybe they made a few trips, enough to bring enough people here for one small town, and then stopped for fear of being discovered. That's why this town seems so old-fashioned. I don't see a thing, myself, older than the year 1927, do you? Or maybe, sir, rocket travel is older

than we think. Perhaps it started in some part of the world centuries ago and was kept secret by the small number of men who came to Mars with only occasional visits to Earth over the centuries."

"You make it sound almost reasonable."

"It has to be. We've the proof here before us; all we have to

do is find some people and verify it."

Their boots were deadened of all sound in the thick green grass. It smelled from a fresh mowing. In spite of himself, Captain John Black felt a great peace come over him. It had been thirty years since he had been in a small town, and the buzzing of spring bees on the air lulled and quieted him, and the fresh look of things was a balm to the soul.

They set foot upon the porch. Hollow echoes sounded from under the boards as they walked to the screen door. Inside they could see a bead curtain hung across the hall entry, and a crystal chandelier and a Maxfield Parrish painting framed on one wall over a comfortable Morris chair. The house smelled old, and of the attic, and infinitely comfortable. You could hear the tinkle of ice in a lemonade pitcher. In a distant kitchen, because of the heat of the day, someone was preparing a cold lunch. Someone was humming under her breath, high and sweet.

Captain John Black rang the bell.

Footsteps, dainty and thin, came along the hall, and a kind-faced lady of some forty years, dressed in a sort of dress you might expect in the year 1909, peered out at them.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Beg your pardon," said Captain Black uncertainly. "But we're looking for—that is, could you help us——" He stopped. She looked out at him with dark, wondering eyes.

"If you're selling something—" she began.
"No, wait!" he cried. "What town is this?"

She looked him up and down. "What do you mean, what town is it? How could you be in a town and not know the name?"

The captain looked as if he wanted to go sit under a shady apple tree. "We're strangers here. We want to know how this town got here and how you got here."

"Are you census takers?"

"No."

"Everyone knows," she said, "this town was built in 1868, Is this a game?"

"No, not a game!" cried the captain. "We're from Earth."

"Out of the ground, do you mean?" she wondered.

"No, we came from the third planet, Earth, in a ship. And we've landed here on the fourth planet, Mars——"

"This," explained the woman, as if she were addressing a child, "is Green Bluff, Illinois, on the continent of America, surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, on a place called the world, or, sometimes, the Earth. Go away now. Goodby."

She trotted down the hall, running her fingers through the beaded curtains.

The three men looked at one another.

"Let's knock the screen door in," said Lustig.

"We can't do that. This is private property. Good God!"

They went to sit down on the porch step.

"Did it ever strike you, Hinkston, that perhaps we got ourselves somehow, in some way, off track, and by accident came back and landed on Earth?"

"How could we have done that?"

"I don't know, I don't know. Oh God, let me think."

Hinkston said, "But we checked every mile of the way. Our chronometers said so many miles. We went past the Moon and out into space, and here we are. I'm positive we're on Mars."

Lustig said, "But suppose, by accident, in space, in time, we got lost in the dimensions and landed on an Earth that is thirty or forty years ago."

"Oh, go away, Lustig!"

Lustig went to the door, rang the bell, and called into the cool dim rooms: "What year is this?"

"Nineteen twenty-six, of course," said the lady, sitting in a

rocking chair, taking a sip of her lemonade.

"Did you hear that?" Lustig turned wildly to the others. "Nineteen twenty-six! We have gone back in time! This is Earth!"

Lustig sat down, and the three men let the wonder and terror of the thought afflict them. Their hands stirred fitfully on their knees. The captain said, "I didn't ask for a thing like this. It scares the hell out of me. How can a thing like this happen?
I wish we'd brought Einstein with us."

"Will anyone in this town believe us?" said Hinkston. "Are we playing with something dangerous? Time, I mean. Shouldn't we just take off and go home?"

"No. Not until we try another house."

They walked three houses down to a little white cottage under an oak tree. "I like to be as logical as I can be," said the captain. "And I don't believe we've put our finger on it yet. Suppose, Hinkston, as you originally suggested, that rocket travel occurred years ago? And when the Earth people lived here a number of years they began to get homesick for Earth. First a mild neurosis about it, then a full-fledged psychosis. Then threatened insanity. What would you do as a psychiatrist if faced with such a problem?"

Hinkston thought. "Well, I think I'd rearrange the civilization on Mars so it resembled Earth more and more each day. If there was any way of reproducing every plant, every road, and every lake, and even an ocean, I'd do so. Then by some vast crowd hypnosis I'd convince everyone in a town this size that

this really was Earth, not Mars at all."

"Good enough, Hinkston. I think we're on the right track now. That woman in that house back there just thinks she's living on Earth. It protects her sanity. She and all the others in this town are the patients of the greatest experiment in migration and hypnosis you will ever lay eyes on in your life."

"That's it, sir!" cried Lustig. "Right!" said Hinkston.

"Well." The captain sighed. "Now we've got somewhere. I feel better. It's all a bit more logical. That talk about time and going back and forth and traveling through time turns my stomach upside down. But this way——" The captain smiled. "Well, well, it looks as if we'll be fairly popular here."

"Or will we?" said Lustig. "After all, like the Pilgrims, these people came here to escape Earth. Maybe they won't be too happy to see us. Maybe they'll try to drive us out or kill us."

"We have superior weapons. This next house now. Up we

go."

But they had hardly crossed the lawn when Lustig stopped and looked off across the town, down the quiet, dreaming afternoon street. "Sir," he said. "What is it, Lustig?"

"Oh, sir, sir, what I see——" said Lustig, and he began to cry. His fingers came up, twisting and shaking, and his face was all wonder and joy and incredulity. He sounded as if at any moment he might go quite insane with happiness. He looked down the street and began to run, stumbling awkwardly, falling, picking himself up, and running on. "Look, look!"

"Don't let him get away!" The captain broke into a run.

Now Lustig was running swiftly, shouting. He turned into a yard halfway down the shady street and leaped up upon the porch of a large green house with an iron rooster on the roof.

He was beating at the door, hollering and crying, when Hinkston and the captain ran up behind him. They were all gasping and wheezing, exhausted from their run in the thin air. "Grandma! Grandpa!" cried Lustig.

Two old people stood in the doorway.

"David!" their voices piped, and they rushed out to embrace and pat him on the back and move around him. "David, oh, David, it's been so many years! How you've grown, boy; how big you are, boy. Oh, David boy, how are you?"

"Grandma, Grandpa!" sobbed David Lustig. "You look fine, fine!" He held them, turned them, kissed them, hugged them, cried on them, held them out again, blinking at the little old people. The sun was in the sky, the wind blew, the grass was green, the screen door stood wide.

"Come in, boy, come in. There's iced tea for you, fresh,

lots of it!"

"I've got friends here." Lustig turned and waved at the captain and Hinkston frantically, laughing. "Captain, come on up."

"Howdy," said the old people. "Come in. Any friends of

David's are our friends too. Don't stand there!"

In the living room of the old house it was cool, and a grandfather clock ticked high and long and bronzed in one corner. There were soft pillows on large couches and walls filled with books and a rug cut in a thick rose pattern, and iced tea in the hand, sweating, and cool on the thirsty tongue.

"Here's to our health." Grandma tipped her glass to her

porcelain teeth.

"How long you been here, Grandma?" said Lustig.

"Ever since we died," she said tartly.

"Ever since you what?" Captain John Black set down his glass.

"Oh yes." Lustig nodded. "They've been dead thirty years."

"And you sit there calmly!" shouted the captain.

"Tush." The old woman winked glitteringly. "Who are you to question what happens? Here we are. What's life, anyway? Who does what for why and where? All we know is here we are, alive again, and no questions asked. A second chance." She toddled over and held out her thin wrist. "Feel." The captain felt. "Solid, ain't it?" she asked. He nodded. "Well, then," she said triumphantly, "why go around questioning?"

"Well," said the captain, "it's simply that we never thought

we'd find a thing like this on Mars."

"And now you've found it. I dare say there's lots on every planet that'll show you God's infinite ways."

"Is this Heaven?" asked Hinkston.

"Nonsense, no. It's a world and we get a second chance. Nobody told us why. But then nobody told us why we were on Earth, either. That other Earth, I mean. The one you came from. How do we know there wasn't another before that one?"

"A good question," said the captain.

Lustig kept smiling at his grandparents. "Gosh, it's good to

see you. Gosh, it's good."

The captain stood up and slapped his hand on his leg in a casual fashion. "We've got to be going. Thank you for the drinks."

"You'll be back, of course," said the old people. "For supper tonight?"

"We'll try to make it, thanks. There's so much to be done. My men are waiting for me back at the rocket and——"

He stopped. He looked toward the door, startled.

Far away in the sunlight there was a sound of voices, a shouting and a great hello.

"What's that?" asked Hinkston.

"We'll soon find out." And Captain John Black was out the front door abruptly, running across the green lawn into the street of the Martian town.

He stood looking at the rocket. The ports were open and his crew was streaming out, waving their hands. A crowd of people had gathered, and in and through and among these people the

members of the crew were hurrying, talking, laughing, shaking hands. People did little dances. People swarmed. The rocket

lay empty and abandoned.

A brass band exploded in the sunlight, flinging off a gay tune from upraised tubas and trumpets. There was a bang of drums and a shrill of fifes. Little girls with golden hair jumped up and down. Little boys shouted, "Hooray!" Fat men passed around ten-cent cigars. The town mayor made a speech. Then each member of the crew, with a mother on one arm, a father or sister on the other, was spirited off down the street into little cottages or big mansions.

"Stop!" cried Captain Black, The doors slammed shut,

The heat rose in the clear spring sky, and all was silent. The brass band banged off around a corner, leaving the rocket to shine and dazzle alone in the sunlight.

"Abandoned!" said the captain. "They abandoned the ship, they did! I'll have their skins, by God! They had orders!"

"Sir," said Lustig, "don't be too hard on them. Those were all old relatives and friends."

"That's no exuse!"

"Think how they felt, Captain, seeing familiar faces outside the ship!"

"They had their orders, damn it!"

"But how would you have felt, Captain?"

"I would have obeyed orders-" The captain's mouth

remained open.

Striding along the sidewalk under the Martian sun, tall, smiling, eyes amazingly clear and blue, came a young man of some twenty-six years. "John!" the man called out, and broke into a trot.

"What?" Captain John Black swayed.

"John, you old son of a bitch!"

The man ran up and gripped his hand and slapped him on the back.

"It's you," said Captain Black.

"Of course, who'd you think it was?"

"Edward!" The captain appealed now to Lustig and Hinkston, holding the stranger's hand. "This is my brother Edward. Ed, meet my men, Lustig, Hinkston! My brother!"

They tugged at each other's hands and arms and then finally

embraced. "Ed!" "John, you bum, you!" "You're looking fine, Ed, but, Ed, what is this? You haven't changed over the years. You died, I remember, when you were twenty-six and I was nineteen. Good God, so many years ago, and here you are and, Lord, what goes on?"

"Mom's waiting," said Edward Black, grinning.

"Mom?"

"And Dad too."

"Dad?" The captain almost fell as if he had been hit by a mighty weapon. He walked stiffly and without co-ordination. "Mom and Dad alive? Where?"

"At the old house on Oak Knoll Avenue."

"The old house." The captain stared in delighted amaze. "Did you hear that, Lustig, Hinkston?"

Hinkston was gone. He had seen his own house down the street and was running for it. Lustig was laughing. "You see, Captain, what happened to everyone on the rocket? They couldn't help themselves."

"Yes. Yes." The captain shut his eyes. "When I open my eyes you'll be gone." He blinked. "You're still there. God,

Ed, but you look fine!"

"Come on, lunch's waiting. I told Mom."

Lustig said, "Sir, I'll be with my grandfolks if you need me."

"What? Oh, fine, Lustig. Later, then."

Edward seized his arm and marched him. "There's the house. Remember it?"

"Hell! Bet I can beat you to the front porch!"

They ran. The trees roared over Captain Black's head; the earth roared under his feet. He saw the golden figure of Edward Black pull ahead of him in the amazing dream of reality. He saw the house rush forward, the screen door swing wide. "Beat you!" cried Edward. "I'm an old man," panted the captain, "and you're still young. But then, you always beat me, I remember!"

In the doorway, Mom, pink, plump, and bright. Behind her, pepper-gray, Dad, his pipe in his hand.

"Mom, Dad!"

He ran up the steps like a child to meet them.

It was a fine long afternoon. They finished a late lunch and they sat in the parlor and he told them all about his rocket and they nodded and smiled upon him and Mother was just the same and Dad bit the end off a cigar and lighted it thoughtfully in his old fashion. There was a big turkey dinner at night and time flowing on. When the drumsticks were sucked clean and lay brittle upon the plates, the captain leaned back and exhaled his deep satisfaction. Night was in all the trees and coloring the sky, and the lamps were halos of pink light in the gentle house. From all the other houses down the street came sounds of music, pianos playing, doors slamming.

Mom put a record on the victrola, and she and Captain John Black had a dance. She was wearing the same perfume he remembered from the summer when she and Dad had been killed in the train accident. She was very real in his arms as they danced lightly to the music. "It's not every day," she said,

"you get a second chance to live."

"I'll wake in the morning," said the captain. "And I'll be in my rocket, in space, and all this will be gone."

"No, don't think that," she cried softly. "Don't question. God's good to us. Let's be happy."

"Sorry, Mom."

The record ended in a circular hissing.

"You're tired, Son." Dad pointed with his pipe. "Your old bedroom's waiting for you, brass bed and all."

"But I should report my men in."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, I don't know. No reason, I guess. No, none at all. They're all eating or in bed. A good night's sleep won't hurt them."

"Good night, Son." Mom kissed his cheek. "It's good to have you home."

"It's good to be home."

He left the land of cigar smoke and perfume and books and gentle light and ascended the stairs, talking, talking with Edward. Edward pushed a door open, and there was the yellow brass bed and the old semaphore banners from college and a very musty raccoon coat which he stroked with muted affection. "It's too much," said the captain. "I'm numb and I'm tired. Too much has happened today. I feel as if I'd been out in a pounding rain for forty-eight hours without an umbrella or a coat. I'm soaked to the skin with emotion."

Edward slapped wide the snowy linens and flounced the

pillows. He slid the window up and let the night-blooming jasmine float in. There was moonlight and the sound of distant dancing and whispering.

"So this is Mars," said the captain, undressing.

"This is it." Edward undressed in idle, leisurely moves, drawing his shirt off over his head, revealing golden shoulders and the good muscular neck.

The lights were out; they were in bed, side by side, as in the days how many decades ago? The captain lolled and was nourished by the scent of jasmine pushing the lace curtains out upon the dark air of the room. Among the trees, upon a lawn, someone had cranked up a portable phonograph and now it was playing softly, "Always."

The thought of Marilyn came to his mind.

"Is Marilyn here?"

His brother, lying straight out in the moonlight from the window, waited and then said, "Yes. She's out of town. But she'll be here in the morning."

The captain shut his eyes. "I want to see Marilyn very much."

The room was square and quiet except for their breathing. "Good night, Ed."

A pause. "Good night, John."

He lay peacefully, letting his thoughts float. For the first time the stress of the day was moved aside; he could think logically now. It had all been emotion. The bands playing, the familiar faces. But now . . .

How? he wondered. How was all this made? And why? For what purpose? Out of the goodness of some divine intervention? Was God, then, really that thoughtful of his children? How and why and what for?

He considered the various theories advanced in the first heat of the afternoon by Hinkston and Lustig. He let all kinds of new theories drop in lazy pebbles down through his mind, turning, throwing out dull flashes of light. Mom. Dad. Edward. Mars. Earth. Mars. Martians.

Who had lived here a thousand years ago on Mars? Martians? Or had this always been the way it was today?

Martians. He repeated the word idly, inwardly.

He laughed out loud almost. He had the most ridiculous theory quite suddenly. It gave him a kind of chill. It was really nothing to consider, of course. Highly improbable. Silly,

Forget it. Ridiculous.

But, he thought, just suppose... Just suppose, now, that there were Martians living on Mars and they saw our ship coming and saw us inside our ship and hated us. Suppose, now, just for the hell of it, that they wanted to destroy us, as invaders, as unwanted ones, and they wanted to do it in a very clever way, so that we would be taken off guard. Well, what would the best weapon be that a Martian could use against Earth Men with atomic weapons?

The answer was interesting. Telepathy, hypnosis, memory,

and imagination.

Suppose all of these houses aren't real at all, this bed not real, but only figments of my own imagination, given substance by telepathy and hypnosis through the Martians, thought Captain John Black. Suppose these houses are really some *other* shape, a Martian shape, but, by playing on my desires and wants, these Martians have made this seem like my old home town, my old house, to lull me out of my suspicions. What better way to fool a man, using his own mother and father as bait?

And this town, so old, from the year 1926, long before any of my men were born. From a year when I was six years old and there were records of Harry Lauder, and Maxfield Parrish paintings still hanging, and bead curtains, and "Beautiful Ohio," and turn-of-the-century architecture. What if the Martians took the memories of a town exclusively from my mind? They say childhood memories are the clearest. And after they built the town from my mind, they populated it with the most-loved people from all the minds of the people on the rocket!

And suppose those two people in the next room, asleep, are not my mother and father at all. But two Martians, incredibly brilliant, with the ability to keep me under this dreaming hyp-

nosis all of the time.

And that brass band today? What a startlingly wonderful plan it would be. First, fool Lustig, then Hinkston, then gather a crowd; and all the men in the rocket, seeing mothers, aunts, uncles, sweethearts, dead ten, twenty wears ago, naturally, disregarding orders, rush out and abandon ship. What more natural? What more unsuspecting? What more simple? A man doesn't ask too many questions when his mother is suddenly brought back to life; he's much too happy. And here we

all are tonight, in various houses, in various beds, with no weapons to protect us, and the rocket lies in the moonlight, empty. And wouldn't it be horrible and terrifying to discover that all of this was part of some great clever plan by the Martians to divide and conquer us, and kill us? Sometime during the night, perhaps, my brother here on this bed will change form, melt, shift, and become another thing, a terrible thing, a Martian. It would be very simple for him just to turn over in bed and put a knife into my heart. And in all those other houses down the street, a dozen other brothers or fathers suddenly melting away and taking knives and doing things to the unsuspecting, sleeping men of Earth. . . .

His hands were shaking under the covers. His body was cold. Suddenly it was not a theory. Suddenly he was very afraid.

He lifted himself in bed and listened. The night was very quiet. The music had stopped. The wind had died. His brother

lay sleeping beside him.

Carefully he lifted the covers, rolled them back. He slipped from bed and was walking softly across the room when his brother's voice said, "Where are you going?"

"What?"

His brother's voice was quite cold. "I said, where do you think you're going?"

"For a drink of water."

"But you're not thirsty."

"Yes, yes, I am."

"No, you're not."

Captain John Black broke and ran across the room. He screamed. He screamed twice.

He never reached the door.

In the morning the brass band played a mournful dirge. From every house in the street came little solemn processions bearing long boxes, and along the sun-filled street, weeping, came the grandmas and mothers and sisters and brothers and uncles and fathers, walking to the churchyard, where there were new holes freshly dug and new tombstones installed. Sixteen holes in all, and sixteen tombstones.

The mayor made a little sad speech, his face sometimes looking like the mayor, sometimes looking like something else.

Mother and Father Black were there, with Brother Edward,

and they cried, their faces melting now from a familiar face

into something else.

Grandpa and Grandma Lustig were there, weeping, their faces shifting like wax, shimmering as all things shimmer on a hot day.

The coffins were lowered. Someone murmured about "the unexpected and sudden deaths of sixteen fine men during the

night---"

Earth pounded down on the coffin lids.

The brass band, playing "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," marched and slammed back into town, and everyone took the day off.

# June 2001: -AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT\*

I' was so cold when they first came from the rocket into the night that Spender began to gather the dry Martian wood and build a small fire. He didn't say anything about a celebration; he merely gathered the wood, set fire to it, and watched it burn.

In the flare that lighted the thin air of this dried-up sea of Mars he looked over his shoulder and saw the rocket that had brought them all, Captain Wilder and Cheroke and Hathaway and Sam Parkhill and himself, across a silent black space of

stars to land upon a dead, dreaming world.

Jeff Spender waited for the noise. He watched the other men and waited for them to jump around and shout. It would happen as soon as the numbness of being the "first" men to Mars wore off. None of them said anything, but many of them were hoping, perhaps, that the other expeditions had failed and that this, the Fourth, would be the one. They meant nothing evil by it. But they stood thinking it, nevertheless, thinking of the honor and fame, while their lungs became accustomed to the thinness of the atmosphere, which almost made you drunk if you moved too quickly.

Gibbs walked over to the freshly ignited fire and said, "Why don't we use the ship chemical fire instead of that wood?"

<sup>\*</sup> Copyright, 1948, by Standard Magazines, Inc.

#### SUICIDE AS A SORT OF PRESENT

There was once a mother who had a very hard time indeed, emotionally, inside.

As she remembered it, she had always had a hard time, even as a child. She remembered few of her childhood's specifics, but what she could remember were feelings of self-loathing, terror, and despair that seemed to have been with her always.

From an objective perspective, it would not be inaccurate to say that this mother-to-be had had some very heavy psychic shit laid on her as a little girl, and that some of this shit qualified as parental abuse. Her childhood had not been as bad as some, but it had been no picnic. All this, while accurate, would not be to the point.

The point is that, from as early an age as she could recall, this mother-to-be loathed herself. She viewed everything in life with apprehension, as if every occasion or opportunity were some sort of dreadfully important exam for which she had been too lazy or stupid to prepare properly. It felt as if a perfect score on each such exam was necessary in order to avert some shattering punishment. She was terrified of everything, and terrified to show it.

The mother-to-be knew perfectly well, from an early age, that this constant horrible pressure she felt was an internal pressure. That it was not anyone else's fault. Thus she loathed herself even more. Her expectations of herself were of utter perfection, and each time she fell short of perfection she was filled with an unbearable plunging despair that threatened to shatter her like a cheap mirror.2 These very high expectations applied to every department of the future mother's life, particularly those departments which involved others' approval or disapproval. She was thus, in childhood and adolescence, viewed as bright, attractive, popular, impressive; she was commended and approved. Peers appeared to envy her energy, drive, appearance, intelligence, disposition, and unfailing consideration for the needs and feelings of others3; she had few close friends. Throughout her adolescence, authorities such as teachers, employers, troop leaders, pastors, and F.S.A. Faculty Advisers commented that the young mother-in-waiting 'seem[ed] to have very, very high expectations of [her]self,' and while these comments were often delivered in a spirit of gentle concern or reproof, there was no failing to discern in them that slight unmistakable note of approval of an authority's detached, objective judgment and decision to approve - and at any rate the future mother felt (for the moment) approved. And felt seen: her standards were high. She took a sort of abject pride in her mercilessness toward herself.4

By the time she was grown up, it would be accurate to say that the mother-to-be was having a very hard interior time of it indeed.

When she became a mother, things became even harder. The mother's expectations of her small child were also, it turned out,

 $<sup>^{1}</sup>$  Her parents, by the way, did not beat her or ever even really discipline her, nor did they pressure her.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Her parents had been low-income, physically imperfect, and not very bright — features which the child disliked herself for noting.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The phrases lighten up and chill out had not at this time come into currency (nor, in fact, had psychic shit; nor had parental abuse or even objective perspective).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In fact, one explanation the soon-to-be mother's own parents gave for their disciplining her so little was that their daughter had seemed so mercilessly to upbraid herself for any shortcoming or transgression that disciplining her would have felt 'a little bit like kicking a dog.'

impossibly high. And every time the child fell short, her natural inclination was to loathe it. In other words, every time it (the child) threatened to compromise the high standards that were all the mother felt she really had, inside, the mother's instinctive self-loathing tended to project itself outward and downward onto the child itself. This tendency was compounded by the fact that there existed only a very tiny and indistinct separation in the mother's mind between her own identity and that of her small child. The child appeared in a sense to be the mother's own reflection in a diminishing and deeply flawed mirror. Thus every time the child was rude, greedy, foul, dense, selfish, cruel, disobedient, lazy, foolish, willful, or childish, the mother's deepest and most natural inclination was to loathe it.

But she could not loathe it. No good mother can loathe her child or judge it or abuse it or wish it harm in any way. The mother knew this. And her standards for herself as a mother were, as one would expect, extremely high. It was thus that whenever she 'slipped,' 'snapped,' 'lost her patience' and expressed (or even felt) loathing (however brief) for the child, the mother was instantly plunged into such a chasm of self-recrimination and despair that she felt it just could not be borne. Hence the mother was at war. Her expectations were in fundamental conflict. It was a conflict in which she felt her very life was at stake: to fail to overcome her instinctive dissatisfaction with her child would result in a terrible, shattering punishment which she knew she herself would administer, inside. She was determined — desperate — to succeed, to satisfy her expectations of herself as a mother, no matter what it cost.

From an objective perspective, the mother was wildly successful in her efforts at self-control. In her outward conduct toward the child, the mother was indefatigably loving, compassionate, empathetic, patient, warm, effusive, unconditional, and devoid of any apparent capacity to judge or disapprove or withhold love in any

form. The more loathsome the child was, the more loving the mother required herself to be. Her conduct was, by any standard of what an outstanding mother might be expected to be, impeccable.

In return, the small child, as it grew, loved the mother more than all other things in the world put together. If it had had the capacity to speak of itself truly somehow, the child would have said that it felt itself to be a very wicked, loathsome child who through some undeserved stroke of good fortune got to have the very best, most loving and patient and beautiful mother in the whole world.

Inside, as the child grew, the mother was filled with self-loathing

and despair. Surely, she felt, the fact that the child lied and cheated and terrorized neighborhood pets was her fault; surely the child was simply expressing for all the world to see her own grotesque and pathetic deficiencies as a mother. Thus, when the child stole his class's UNICEF money or swung a cat by its tail and struck it repeatedly against the sharp corner of a brick home next door, she took the child's grotesque deficiencies upon herself, rewarding the child's tears and self-recriminations with an unconditionally loving forgiveness that made her seem to the child to be his lone refuge in a world of impossible expectations and merciless judgment and unending psychic shit. As he (the child) grew, the mother took all that was imperfect in him deep into herself and bore it all and thus absolved him, redeemed and renewed him, even as she added to her own inner fund of loathing.

So it went, throughout his childhood and adolescence, such that, by the time the child was old enough to apply for various licenses and permits, the mother was almost entirely filled, deep inside, with loathing: loathing for herself, for the delinquent and unhappy child, for a world of impossible expectations and merciless judgment. She could not, of course, express any of this. And so the son — desperate, as are all children, to repay the perfect love we may expect only of mothers — expressed it all for her.

Yes. Someday he might come again. Someday.

And then the Fire Balloons blew away and were gone, and he was like a child, on his knees, tears streaming from his eyes, crying to himself, "Come back, come back!" And at any moment Grandfather might lift him and carry him upstairs to his bedroom in a long-gone Ohio town...

They filed down out of the hills at sunset. Looking back, Father Peregrine saw the blue fires burning. No, he thought, we couldn't build a church for the likes of you. You're Beauty itself. What church could compete with the fireworks of the pure soul?

Father Stone moved in silence beside him. And at last he

spoke:

"The way I see it is there's a Truth on every planet. All parts of the Big Truth. On a certain day they'll all fit together like the pieces of jigsaw. This has been a shaking experience. I'll never doubt again, Father Peregrine. For this Truth here is as true as Earth's Truth, and they lie side by side. And we'll go on to other worlds, adding the sum of the parts of the Truth until one day the whole Total will stand before us like the light of a new day."

"That's a lot, coming from you, Father Stone."

"I'm sorry now, in a way, we're going down to the town to handle our own kind. Those blue lights now. When they settled about us, and that voice . . ." Father Stone shivered.

Father Peregrine reached out to take the other's arm.

They walked together.

"And you know," said Father Stone finally, fixing his eyes on Brother Mathias, who strode ahead with the glass sphere tenderly carried in his arms, that glass sphere with the blue phosphorous light glowing forever inside it, "you know, Father Peregrine, that globe there——"

"Yes?"

"It's Him. It is Him, after all."

Father Peregrine smiled, and they walked down out of the hills toward the new town.

#### The Last Night of the World

"What would you do if you knew that this was the last night of the world?"

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"What would I do? You mean seriously?"

"Yes, seriously."

"I don't know. I hadn't thought."

He poured some coffee. In the background the two girls were playing blocks on the parlor rug in the light of the green hurricane lamps. There was an easy, clean aroma of the brewed coffee in the evening air.

"Well, better start thinking about it," he said.

"You don't mean it!"

He nodded.
"A war?"

He shook his head.

"Not the hydrogen or atom bomb?"

"No."

"Or germ warfare?"

"None of those at all," he said, stirring his coffee slowly. "But just, let's say, the closing of a book."

"I don't think I understand."

"No, nor do I, really; it's just a feeling. Sometimes it frightens me, sometimes I'm not frightened at all but at peace." He glanced in at the girls and their yellow hair shining in the lamplight. "I didn't say anything to you. It first happened about four nights ago."

"What?"

"A dream I had. I dreamed that it was all going to be over, and a voice said it was; not any kind of voice I can remember, but a voice anyway, and it said things would stop here on Earth. I didn't think too much about it the next day, but then I went to the office and caught Stan Willis looking out the window in the middle of the afternoon, and I said a penny for your thoughts, Stan, and he said, I had a dream last night, and before he even told me the dream I knew what it was. I could have told him, but he told me and I listened to him."

"It was the same dream?"

"The same. I told Stan I had dreamed it too. He didn't seem surprised. He relaxed, in fact. Then we started walking through the office, for the hell of it. It wasn't planned. We didn't say, 'Let's walk around.' We just walked on our own, and everywhere we saw people looking at their desks or their hands or out windows. I talked to a few. So did Stan."

"And they all had dreamed?"

"All of them. The same dream, with no difference."

"Do you believe in it?"

"Yes. I've never been more certain."

"And when will it stop? The world, I mean."
"Sometime during the night for us, and then as the night

goes on around the world, that'll go too. It'll take twenty-four hours for it all to go."

They sat awhile not touching their coffee. Then they lifted

it slowly and drank, looking at each other.

"Do we deserve this?" she said.

"It's not a matter of deserving; it's just that things didn't work out. I notice you didn't even argue about this. Why not?"

"I guess I've a reason," she said.

"The same one everyone at the office had?"

She nodded slowly. "I didn't want to say anything. It happened last night. And the women on the block talked about it, among themselves, today. They dreamed. I thought it was only a coincidence." She picked up the evening paper. "There's nothing in the paper about it."

"Everyone knows, so there's no need."

He sat back in his chair, watching her. "Are you afraid?" "No. I always thought I would be, but I'm not."

"Where's that spirit called self-preservation they talk so

much about?"

"I don't know. You don't get too excited when you feel things are logical. This is logical. Nothing else but this could have happened from the way we've lived."

"We haven't been too bad, have we?"

"No, nor enormously good. I suppose that's the trouble—we haven't been very much of anything except us, while a big part of the world was busy being lots of quite awful things."

The girls were laughing in the parlor.

"I always thought people would be screaming in the streets

at a time like this."

"I guess not. You don't scream about the real thing."

"Do you know, I won't miss anything but you and the girls. I never liked cities or my work or anything except you three. I won't miss a thing except perhaps the change in the weather, and a glass of ice water when it's hot, and I might miss sleeping. How can we sit here and talk this way?"

"Because there's nothing else to do."

"That's it, of course; for if there were, we'd be doing it. I suppose this is the first time in the history of the world that everyone has known just what they were going to do during the night."

"I wonder what everyone else will do now, this evening, for

the next few hours."

"Go to a show, listen to the radio, watch television, play cards, put the children to bed, go to bed themselves, like always."

"In a way that's something to be proud of—like always."
They sat a moment and then he poured himself another coffee. "Why do you suppose it's tonight?"

"Because."

"Why not some other night in the last century, or five cen-

turies ago, or ten?"

"Maybe it's because it was never October 19, 1969, ever before in history, and now it is and that's it; because this date means more than any other date ever meant; because it's the year when things are as they are all over the world and that's why it's the end."

"There are bombers on their schedules both ways across

the ocean tonight that'll never see land."

"That's part of the reason why."

"Well," he said, getting up, "what shall it be? Wash the

dishes?"

They washed the dishes and stacked them away with special neatness. At eight-thirty the girls were put to bed and kissed good night and the little lights by their beds turned on and the door left open just a trifle.

"I wonder," said the husband, coming from the bedroom and glancing back, standing there with his pipe for a moment.

"What?"

"If the door will be shut all the way, or if it'll be left just a little ajar so some light comes in."

"I wonder if the children know."

"No, of course not."

They sat and read the papers and talked and listened to some radio music and then sat together by the fireplace watching the charcoal embers as the clock struck ten-thirty and eleven and eleven-thirty. They thought of all the other people in the world who had spent their evening, each in his own special way.

"Well," he said at last.

He kissed his wife for a long time.

"We've been good for each other, anyway."

"Do you want to cry?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

They moved through the house and turned out the lights and went into the bedroom and stood in the night cool darkness undressing and pushing back the covers. "The sheets are so clean and nice."

"I'm tired."

"We're all tired."

They got into bed and lay back.

"Just a moment," she said.

He heard her get out of bed and go into the kitchen. A mo-

ment later, she returned. "I left the water running in the sink," she said.

Something about this was so very funny that he had to

laugh.

She laughed with him, knowing what it was that she had done that was funny. They stopped laughing at last and lay in their cool night bed, their hands clasped, their heads together.

"Good night," he said, after a moment. "Good night," she said.

#### The Exiles

THEIR EYES were fire and the breath flamed out the witches' mouths as they bent to probe the caldron with greasy stick and bony finger.

> "When shall we three meet again In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

They danced drunkenly on the shore of an empty sea, fouling the air with their three tongues, and burning it with their cats' eyes malevolently aglitter:

> "Round about the cauldron go; In the poison'd entrails throw. . . . Double, double, toil and trouble: Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!"

They paused and cast a glance about. "Where's the crystal? Where the needles?"

"Herel" "Good!"

"Is the yellow wax thickened?"

"Yes!"

"Pour it in the iron mold!"

"Is the wax figure done?" They shaped it like molasses adrip on their green hands.

"Shove the needle through the heart!"

"The crystal, the crystal; fetch it from the tarot bag. Dust it off; have a look!"

They bent to the crystal, their faces white.

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## The October Game

He put the gun back into the bureau drawer and shut the drawer.

No, not that way. Louise wouldn't suffer that way. She would be dead and it would be over and she wouldn't suffer. It was very important that this thing have, above all, duration. Duration through imagination. How to prolong the suffering? How, first of all, to bring it about? Well.

The man standing before the bedroom mirror carefully fitted his cuff links together. He paused long enough to hear the children run by swiftly on the street below, outside this warm two-story house; like so many gray mice the children, like so many leaves.

By the sound of the children you knew the calendar day. By their screams you knew what evening it was. You knew it was very late in the year. October. The last day of October, with white bone masks and cut pumpkins and the smell of dropped candle fat.

No. Things hadn't been right for some time. October

didn't help any. If anything it made things worse. He adjusted his black bow-tie. If this were spring, he nodded slowly, quietly, emotionlessly, at his image in the mirror, then there might be a chance. But tonight all the world was burning down into ruin. There was no green of spring, none of the freshness, none of the promise.

There was a soft running in the hall. "That's Marion," he told himself. "My little one. All eight quiet years of her. Never a word. Just her luminous gray eyes and her wondering little mouth." His daughter had been in and out all evening, trying on various masks, asking him which was most terrifying, most horrible. They had both finally decided on the skeleton mask. It was "just awful!" It would "scare the beans" from people!

Again he caught the long look of thought and deliberation he gave himself in the mirror. He had never liked October. Ever since he first lay in the autumn leaves before his grandmother's house many years ago and heard the wind and saw the empty trees. It had made him cry, without a reason. And a little of that sadness returned each year to him. It always went away with spring.

But, it was different tonight. There was a feeling of autumn coming to last a million years.

There would be no spring.

He had been crying quietly all evening. It did not show, not a vestige of it, on his face. It was all hidden somewhere and it wouldn't stop.

A rich syrupy smell of candy filled the bustling house. Louise had laid out apples in new skins of caramel; there were vast bowls of punch fresh-mixed, stringed apples in each door, scooped, vented pumpkins peering triangularly from each cold window. There was a water tub in the center of the living room, waiting, with a sack of apples nearby, for dunking to begin. All that was needed was the catalyst, the inpouring of children, to start the apples bobbling, the stringed apples to pendu-

luming in the crowded doors, the candy to vanish, the halls to echo with fright or delight, it was all the same.

Now, the house was silent with preparation. And just

a little more than that.

Louise had managed to be in every other room save the room he was in today. It was her very fine way of intimating, Oh look, Mich, see how busy I am! So busy that when you walk into a room I'm in there's always something I need to do in another room! Just see how I dash about!

For a while he had played a little game with her, a nasty childish game. When she was in the kitchen then he came to the kitchen saying, "I need a glass of water." After a moment, he standing, drinking water, she like a crystal witch over the caramel brew bubbling like a prehistoric mudpot on the stove, she said, "Oh, I must light the pumpkins!" and she rushed to the living room to make the pumpkins smile with light. He came after her, smiling, "I must get my pipe." "Oh, the cider!" she had cried, running to the dining room. "I'll check the cider," he had said. But when he tried following she ran to the bathroom and locked the door.

He stood outside the bathroom door, laughing strangely and senselessly, his pipe gone cold in his mouth, and then, tired of the game, but stubborn, he waited another five minutes. There was not a sound from the bath. And lest she enjoy in any way knowing that he waited outside, irritated, he suddenly jerked about and walked upstairs, whistling merrily.

At the top of the stairs he had waited. Finally he had heard the bathroom door unlatch and she had come out and life below-stairs had resumed, as life in a jungle must resume once a terror has passed on away and the antelope return to their spring.

Now, as he finished his bow-tie and put on his dark coat there was a mouse-rustle in the hall. Marion appeared in the door, all skeletonous in her disguise.

"How do I look, Papa?"

"Finel"

From under the mask, blonde hair showed. From the skull sockets small blue eyes smiled. He sighed. Marion and Louise, the two silent denouncers of his virility, his dark power. What alchemy had there been in Louise that took the dark of a dark man and bleached and bleached the dark brown eyes and black hair and washed and bleached the ingrown baby all during the period before birth until the child was born, Marion, blonde, blue-eyed, ruddy-cheeked? Sometimes he suspected that Louise had conceived the child as an idea, completely asexual, an immaculate conception of contemptuous mind and cell. As a firm rebuke to him she had produced a child in her own image, and, to top it, she had somehow fixed the doctor so he shook his head and said, "Sorry, Mr. Wilder, your wife will never have another child. This is the last one."

"And I wanted a boy," Mich had said, eight years

ago.

He almost bent to take hold of Marion now, in her skull mask. He felt an inexplicable rush of pity for her, because she had never had a father's love, only the crushing, holding love of a loveless mother. But most of all he pitied himself, that somehow he had not made the most of a bad birth, enjoyed his daughter for herself, regardless of her not being dark and a son and like himself. Somewhere he had missed out. Other things being equal, he would have loved the child. But Louise hadn't wanted a child, anyway, in the first place. She had been frightened of the idea of birth. He had forced the child on her, and from that night, all through the year until the agony of the birth itself, Louise had lived in another part of the house. She had expected to die with the forced child. It had been very easy for Louise to hate this husband who so wanted a son that he gave his only wife over to the mortuary.

But—Louise had lived. And in triumph! Her eyes, the day he came to the hospital, were cold. I'm alive, they said. And I have a blonde daughter! Just look! And when he had put out a hand to touch, the mother had

turned away to conspire with her new pink daughterchild—away from that dark forcing murderer. It had all been so beautifully ironic. His selfishness deserved it,

But now it was October again. There had been other Octobers and when he thought of the long winter he had been filled with horror year after year to think of the endless months mortared into the house by an insane fall of snow, trapped with a woman and child, neither of whom loved him, for months on end. During the eight years there had been respites. In spring and summer you got out, walked, picnicked; these were desperate solutions to the desperate problem of a hated man.

But, in winter, the hikes and picnics and escapes fell away with the leaves. Life, like a tree, stood empty, the fruit picked, the sap run to earth. Yes, you invited people in, but people were hard to get in winter with blizzards and all. Once he had been clever enough to save for a Florida trip. They had gone south. He had walked in the open.

But now, the eighth winter coming, he knew things were finally at an end. He simply could not wear this one through. There was an acid walled off in him that slowly had eaten through tissue and bone over the years, and now, tonight, it would reach the wild explosive in him and all would be over!

There was a mad ringing of the bell below. In the hall, Louise went to see. Marion, without a word, ran down to greet the first arrivals. There were shouts and hilarity.

He walked to the top of the stairs.

Louise was below, taking wraps. She was tall and slender and blonde to the point of whiteness, laughing down upon the new children.

He hesitated. What was all this? The years? The boredom of living? Where had it gone wrong? Certainly not with the birth of the child alone. But it had been a symbol of all their tensions, he imagined. His jealousies and his business failures and all the rotten

rest of it. Why didn't he just turn, pack a suitcase, and leave? No. Not without hurting Louise as much as she had hurt him. It was simple as that. Divorce wouldn't hurt her at all. It would simply be an end to numb indecision. If he thought divorce would give her pleasure in any way he would stay married the rest of his life to her, for damned spite. No, he must hurt her. Figure some way, perhaps, to take Marion away from her, legally. Yes. That was it. That would hurt most of all. To take Marion away.

"Hello down therei" He descended the stairs, beam-

ing.

Louise didn't look up. "Hi, Mr. Wilder!"

The children shouted, waved, as he came down.

By ten o'clock the doorbell had stopped ringing, the apples were bitten from stringed doors, the pink child faces were wiped dry from the apple bobbing, napkins were smeared with caramel and punch, and he, the husband, with pleasant efficiency had taken over. He took the party right out of Louise's hands. He ran about talking to the twenty children and the twelve parents who had come and were happy with the special spiked cider he had fixed them. He supervised pin the tail on the donkey, spin the bottle, musical chairs, and all the rest, amid fits of shouting laughter. Then, in the triangular-eyed pumpkin shine, all house lights out, he cried, "Hush! Follow me!" toptoeing toward the cellar.

The parents, on the outer periphery of the costumed riot, commented to each other, nodding at the clever husband, speaking to the lucky wife. How well he got on

with children, they said.

The children crowded after the husband, squealing. "The cellar!" he cried. "The tomb of the witch!"

More squealing. He made a mock shiver. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here!"

The parents chuckled.

One by one the children slid down a slide which Mich had fixed up from lengths of table-section, into

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the dark cellar. He hissed and shouted ghastly utterances after them. A wonderful wailing filled the dark pumpkin-lighted house. Everybody talked at once. Everybody but Marion. She had gone through all the party with a minimum of sound or talk; it was all inside her, all the excitement and joy. What a little troll, he thought. With a shut mouth and shiny eyes she had watched her own party, like so many serpentines thrown before her.

Now, the parents. With laughing reluctance they slid down the short incline, uproarious, while little Marion stood by, always wanting to see it all, to be last. Louise went down without help. He moved to aid her, but she was gone even before he bent.

The upper house was empty and silent in the candle-

shine.

Marion stood by the slide. "Here we go," he said,

and picked her up.

They sat in a vast circle in the cellar. Warmth came from the distant bulk of the furnace. The chairs stood in a long line along each wall, twenty squealing children, twelve rustling relatives, alternately spaced, with Louise down at the far end, Mich up at this end, near the stairs. He peered but saw nothing. They had all grouped to their chairs, catch-as-you-can in the blackness. The entire program from here on was to be enacted in the dark, he as Mr. Interlocutor. There was a child scampering, a smell of damp cement, and the sound of the wind out in the October stars.

"Now!" cried the husband in the dark cellar. "Quiet!"

Everybody settled.

The room was black black. Not a light, not a shine, not a glint of an eye.

A scraping of crockery, a metal rattle.

"The witch is dead," intoned the husband.

"Eeeeeeeeeeee," said the children.

"The witch is dead, she has been killed, and here is the knife she was killed with."

He handed over the knife. It was passed from hand to hand, down and around the circle, with chuckles and little odd cries and comments from the adults.

"The witch is dead, and this is her head," whispered the husband, and handed an item to the nearest person.

"Oh, I know how this game is played," some child cried, happily, in the dark. "He gets some old chicken innards from the icebox and hands them around and says, "These are her innards!' And he makes a clay head and passes it for her head, and passes a soup bone for her arm. And he take a marble and says, "This is her eye!' And he takes some corn and says, "This is her teeth!' And he takes a sack of plum pudding and gives that and says, "This is her stomach!' I know how this is played!"

"Hush, you'll spoil everything," some girl said.
"The witch came to harm, and this is her arm," said

Mich.

"Eeeee!"

The items were passed and passed, like hot potatoes, around the circle. Some children screamed, wouldn't touch them. Some ran from their chairs to stand in the center of the cellar until the grisly items had passed.

"Aw, it's only chicken insides," scoffed a boy. "Come

back, Helen!"

Shot from hand to hand, with small scream after scream, the items went down, down, to be followed by another and another.

"The witch cut apart, and this is her heart," said the

husband.

Six or seven items moving at once through the laughing, trembling dark.

Louise spoke up. "Marion, don't be afraid; it's only

play."

Marion didn't say anything.

"Marion?" asked Louise. "Are you afraid?"

Marion didn't speak.

"She's all right," said the husband, "She's not afraid."

THE OCTOBER GAME

On and on the passing, the screams, the hilarity.

The autumn wind sighed about the house. And he, the husband, stood at the head of the dark cellar, intoning the words, handing out the items.

"Marion?" asked Louise again, from far across the

cellar.

Everybody was talking. "Marion?" called Louise.

Everybody quieted.

"Marion, answer me, are you afraid?"

Marion didn't answer.

The husband stood there, at the bottom of the cellar steps.

Louise called, "Marion, are you there?"

No answer. The room was silent. "Where's Marion?" called Louise.

"She was here," said a boy. "Maybe she's upstairs."

"Marion!"

No answer. It was quiet.

Louise cried out, "Marion, Marion!"

"Turn on the lights," said one of the adults.

The items stopped passing. The children and adults

sat with the witch's items in their hands.

"No." Louise gasped. There was a scraping of her chair, wildly, in the dark. "No. Don't turn on the lights, oh, God, God, God, don't turn them on, please, please don't turn on the lights, don't!" Louise was shrieking now. The entire cellar froze with the scream.

Nobody moved.

Everyone sat in the dark cellar, suspended in the suddenly frozen task of this October game; the wind blew outside, banging the house, the smell of pumpkins and apples filled the room with the smell of the objects in their fingers while one boy cried, "I'll go upstairs and look!" and he ran upstairs hopefully and out around the house, four times around the house, calling, "Marion, Marion, Marion!" over and over and

at last coming slowly down the stairs into the waiting breathing cellar and saying to the darkness, "I can't find her."

Then ... some idiot turned on the lights.

their tails at one another and trying to deceive one another; but just see how,

in a short time, they will be acting like fierce wolves."

The muzhiks drained their glasses once more, and their talk became louder and rougher. In place of buttery speeches, they began to indulge in abuse; they began to get angry, and tweak one another's noses. The host also took part in the squabble. Even him they beat unmercifully.

The big devil looked on, and praised him for this also.

"This," said he, "is good." But the little devil said:—

"Just wait! See what more will happen. Let them take a third drink. Now they are as mad as wolves; but give them time, let them drink once more;

they will instantly begin to behave like hogs."

The muzhiks drank for the third time. They lost all control of themselves. They themselves had no idea what they stammered or shrieked, and they talked all at once. They started to go home, each in his own way, or in groups of two and three. They all fell into the gutter. The host went to see his guests out; he fell on his nose in a pool and got all smeared; he lay there like a boar, grunting.

This delighted the big devil still more.

"Well," says he, "this scheme of drunkenness was good. You have earned your crust. Now tell me," says he, "how did you make this liquor? You must have put into it some fox's blood, in the first place: that was what made the muzhik keen as a fox; and then some wolf's blood: that was what made him fierce as a wolf; and finally, of course, you added swine's blood: that made him act

like a hog."

"No," said the little devil, "I did nothing of the sort. I only made it for him out of all the superfluous grain. This wild blood always exists in him, but has no way of getting out when the grain is properly used. At first he did not grudge even his last crust; but as soon as he began to have a superfluity of grain, he began to scheme how he might amuse himself. And I taught him the fun,—brandy-drinking. And as soon as he began to distil God's gift for his fun, the blood of the fox and the wolf and the hog began to show itself. Now all he needs, to be always a beast, is to keep on drinking brandy."

The chief of the devils praised the little devil, forgave him for the crust of

bread, and made him one of his staff.

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up her life in the city; how she lived roomily and elegantly, and went out, and how she dressed her children, and what rich things she had to eat and drink and how she went to drive, and to walk, and to the theater.

The younger sister felt affronted, and began to depreciate the life of a merchant, and to set forth the advantages of her own,-that of the peasant.

"I wouldn't exchange my life for yours," says she. "Granted that we live coarsely, still we don't know what fear is. You live more elegantly; but you have to sell a great deal, else you find yourselves entirely sold. And the proverb runs, 'Loss is Gain's bigger brother.' It also happens, to-day you're rich, but tomorrow you're a beggar. But our muzhiks' affairs are more reliable; the muzhik's life is meager, but long; we may not be rich, but we have enough."

The elder sister began to sav:-

"Enough,-I should think so! So do pigs and calves! No fine dresses, no good society. How your goodman works! how you live in the dunghill! and so

you will die and it will be the same thing with your children."

"Indeed," said the younger, "our affairs are all right. We live well. We truckle to no one, we stand in fear of no one. But you in the city all live in the midst of temptations: to-day it's all right; but to-morrow up comes some improper person, I fear, to tempt you, and tempts your khozyaïn either to cards, or to wine, or to women. And everything goes to ruin. Isn't it so?"

Pakhom, the "goodman," was listening on the oven, as the women discussed. "That's true," says he, "the veritable truth. As we peasants from childhood turn up mother earth, so folly stays in our head, and does not depart. Our one trouble is, -so little land. If I only had as much land as I wanted, I shouldn't be afraid of any one-even of the Devil."

The women drank up their tea, talked some more about dresses, put away the dishes, and went to bed.

But the Devil was sitting behind the oven; he heard everything. He was delighted because the peasant woman had induced her husband to boast with her; he had boasted that, if he had land enough, the Devil could not get him!

"All right," he thinks; "you and I'll have to fight it out. I will give you a

lot of land. I'll get you through the land."

Next the muzhiks lived a lady. She had one hundred and twenty desyatins1 of land. And she had always lived peaceably with the muzhiks, never taking any advantage of them. But a retired soldier engaged himself as her overseer, and he began to vex the muzhiks with fines. No matter how careful Pakhom was, either his horse would trample down the oats, or his cow would wander into the garden, or his calves would get into the meadows; there was a fine for everything.

Pakhom paid the fines, and scolded and beat the domestics. And during the summer Pakhom fell into many a sin on account of this overseer. And still he was glad that he had cattle in his dvor; though fodder was scarce, he was n no apprehension.

During the winter, the rumor spread that the lady was going to sell her

<sup>1</sup> Three hundred and twenty-four acres.

land, and that a dvornik from the highway had made arrangements to buy it. The muzhiks heard it, and groaned.

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"Now," think they, "the land will belong to the dvornik; he will make us pay worse fines than the lady did. It is impossible for us to live without this land. All of us around here live on it."

The peasants went to the lady in a body and began to beg her not to sell the land to the dvornik, but to let them have it. They promised to pay a higher price.

The lady agreed. The muzhiks tried to arrange, as a mir, to buy all the land. Once, twice, they collected in meeting, but there was a hitch in affairs. The evil one put them at variance; they were utterly unable to come to any agreement.

And the muzhiks determined to purchase the land individually, according

to the ability of each. And the lady agreed to this also.

Pakhom heard that a neighbor had bought twenty desyatins2 from the lady, and that she had given him a year in which to pay her half of the money. Pakhom was envious.

"They will buy all the land," he said to himself, "and I shall be behind

them." He began to reason with his wife.

"The people are buying it up," said he. "We must buy ten desyatins too. Otherwise it will be impossible to live; the overseer was eating us up with fines."

They planned how to buy it. They had laid up a hundred rubles; then they sold a colt and half their bees; and they put their son out as a laborer, and they got some more from their brother-in-law; and thus they collected half of the money.

Pakhom gathered up the money, selected fifteen desyatins of the land with forest on it, and went to the lady to make the purchase. He negotiated for fifteen desyatins, struck a bargain, and paid down the earnest-money. They went to the city, ratified the purchase; he paid down half of the money; the

remainder he bound himself to pay in two years.

And Pakhom now had his land. Pakhom took seed, and sowed the land that he had bought. In a single year he paid up the debt to the lady and to his brother-in-law. And Pakhom became a proprietor. He plowed all his land, and sowed it; he made hay on his own land; he cut stakes on his own land; and on his own land he pastured cattle. Pakhom would ride out over his wide fields to plow, or he would take note of his crops, or gaze at his meadows. And yet he was not happy. The grass seemed to him to be wasted, and the flowers flowering in it seemed entirely different. Formerly he used to ride over this land,—the land as land; but now the land began to be absolutely peculiar.

Thus Pakhom lived, and enjoyed himself. Everything would have been good, only the muzhiks began to trespass on his grain and meadows. He begged them to refrain, but they would not stop it. Now the cowboys let the cows into the meadow; now the horses escaped from the night-guard into his corn-field.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Fifty-four acres.

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And Pakhom drove them out, and forgave it, and never went to law; then he got tired of it, and complained to the volost-court.1 And though he knew that the muzhiks did it from carelessness, and not from malice, he said to himself:—

"It is impossible to overlook it, otherwise they'll always be pasturing their cattle there. We must teach them a lesson."

He thus taught them in court once; he taught them twice: first one was fined, then another. The muzhiks, Pakhom's neighbors, began to harbor spite against him. Once more they began to trespass, and this time on purpose. Some one got into his woodland by night. They cut down a dozen of his lindens for basts. Pakhom went to his grove, saw what had been done, and turned pale. Some one had been there; the linden branches lay scattered about, the stumps stood out. The whole clump had been cut down to the very last; the rascal had cleaned it all out; only one was left standing.

Pakhom fell into a rage. "Akh!" said he to himself, "if I only knew who

did that, I would give him a kneading."

He thought and he thought, "Who could it be?"

"No one more likely," said he to himself, "than Semka."

He went to search through Semka's dvor; he found nothing; they only exchanged some quarrelsome words. And Pakhom felt still more certain that Semyon had done it. He entered a complaint against him. They took it into court and had a long trial. The muzhik was acquitted, for there was no proof against him. Pakhom was still more affronted; he got incensed at the starshina and at the judges.

"You," said he, "are on the side of a pack of thieves. If you were decent

men, you wouldn't acquit thieves."

Pakhom quarreled both with the judges and with his neighbors. They began even to threaten him with the "red rooster."2 Pakhom had come to live on a broader scale on his farm, but with more constraint in the commune.

And about this time the rumor spread that the people were going to new

places. And Pakhom said to himself:-

"There is no reason for me to go from my land; but if any of our neighbors should go, it would give us more room. I would take their land for myself; I would get it around here: life would be much better, for now it is too confined."

One time Pakhom was sitting at home; a wandering muzhik came along. They let the muzhik have a night's lodging; they gave him something to eat; they entered into conversation with him:-

"Whither, please, is God taking you?"

The muzhik said that he was on his way from down the Volga, where he had been at work. The muzhik related, a word at a time, how the people had gone colonizing there. He related how they had settled there, made a community, and given each soul ten desyatins of land. "But the land is such," said he, "that they sowed rye. Such stalks-the horses never saw the likeso thick! five handfuls made a sheaf. One muzhik," said he, "was perfectly

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poor,-came with his hands alone,-and now he has six horses and two cows." Pakhom's heart burned within him; he said to himself: "Why remain here in straitened circumstances, when it is possible to live well? I will sell my house and land here; then, with the money I get, I will start anew, and have a complete establishment. But here in these narrow quarters-it's a sin. Only I must find out all about it for myself."

He planned to be gone all summer, and started. From Samara he sailed down the Volga in a steamboat, then he went on foot four hundred versts. He reached the place. It was just so. The muzhiks were living on a generous scale, on farms of ten desyatins each, and they were glad to have accessions to their community. "And any one who has a little money can buy for three rubles as much of the very best land as he wishes, besides his allotment. You can buy just as much as you wish."

Pakhom made a thorough study of it; in the autumn he returned home, and proceeded to sell out everything. He sold his land to advantage, sold his dvor, sold all his cattle, withdrew his name from the community, waited till

spring, and moved with his family to the new place.

Pakhom came with his family to the new place, and enrolled himself in a large village. He treated the elders to vodka, arranged all the papers. Pakhom was accepted; he was alloted, as for five persons, fifty desyatins1 of the land, to be located in different fields, besides the pasturage. Pakhom settled down. He got cattle. He had three times as much land as he had had before, and the land was fertile. Life was tenfold better than what it had been in the old time; he had all the arable land and fodder that he needed. He could keep as many cattle as he liked.

At first, while he was getting settled, and putting his house in order, Pakhom was well pleased; but after he began to feel at home, even this farm

seemed to him rather narrow quarters.

The first year Pakhom sowed wheat on his allotment; it came up well. He was anxious to sow wheat; but his allotment seemed to him altogether too small for his ambition.

Wheat is sowed there on grass or fallow land. They sow it one year, two years, and let it lie fallow till the feather-grass comes up again. There are many rival claimants for such land and there's not nearly enough to go round.

Quarrels also arose on account of this; one was richer than another: they all wanted to sow, but the poorer ones had to resort to merchants for loans.

Pakhom was desirous of sowing as much as possible. The next year he went to a merchant and hired land for a year. He sowed more; it came up well, but he had to go a long way from the village, not less than fifteen versts. He saw how muzhik-merchants in the vicinity lived in fine houses, and got rich.

"That's the thing," said Pakhom to himself. "If only I could buy the land,

then I would have a fine house. It would all be in one piece."

And Pakhom began to cogitate how he might get a perpetual title. Thus Pakhom lived three years. He hired land and sowed more wheat. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The volost is a district including several villages.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The picturesque Russian metaphor for a conflagration.

<sup>1</sup> One hundred and thirty-five acres.

years were good, and the wheat grew well, and extra money was laid away. As life passed, it became every year irksome to Pakhom to buy land with the men, to waste time over it; where the land is pretty good, the muzhiks instantly fly to it and divide it all up. He was always too late to buy cheap, and he had nothing to sow on.

But in the third year, he bought, on shares with a merchant, a pasturage of the muzhiks; and they had already plowed it. The muzhiks had been at law about it, and so the work was lost. "If I owned the land," he thinks, "I should not truckle to any one; and it would not be a sin."

And Pakhom began to inquire where he might buy land in perpetuity. And he struck upon a muzhik. The muzhik had five hundred desyatins2 for sale; and, as he was anxious to get rid of it, he would sell at a bargain.

Pakhom began to dicker with him. He argued and argued, and finally the muzhik agreed to sell for fifteen hundred rubles, half the money on mortgage. They had already come to an agreement, when a peddler happened along, and asked Pakhom to let him have a little something to eat.

While they were drinking a cup of tea, they entered into conversation. The peddler related how he was on his way from the distant Bashkirs.

"There," said he, "I bought of the Bashkirs fifteen hundred desyatins of land; and I had to pay only a thousand rubles."

Pakhom began to ask questions. The peddler told his story.

"All I did," said he, "was to satisfy the old men. I distributed some khalats and carpets, worth a hundred rubles, besides a chest of tea; and I gave a little wine to those who drank. And I got it for twenty kopeks a desyatin." -He exhibited the title-deed .- "The land," says he, "is by a little river, and the steppe is all covered with grass."

Pakhom went on asking more questions,-How he managed it, and who? "The land," said the merchant, "you wouldn't go round it in a year,—it's all Bashkirian. And the people are as stupid as rams. You could almost get it for nothing."

"Well," said Pakhom to himself, "why should I spend my thousand rubles for five hundred desyatins, and hang a burden of debt around my neck besides? But there, how much I could get for a thousand rubles!"

Pakhom asked how he went; and, as soon as he said good-by to the peddler, he determined to go. He left his house in his wife's care, took his man, and started. When they reached the city, he bought a chest of tea, gifts, wine, just as the merchant said. They traveled and traveled; they traveled five hundred versts.1 On the seventh day they came to the range of the wandering Bashkirs. It was all just as the merchant had said. They all live in the steppe, along a little river, in felt-covered kibitkas. They themselves do not plow and they eat no bread. And their cattle graze along the steppe, and their horses are in droves. Behind the kibitkas the colts are tied, and twice a day they bring the mares to them. They milk the mares, and make kumys out of the milk. The women

churn the mares' milk, and make cheese; and all the muzhiks can do is drink kumys and tea, to eat mutton, and play on their dudkas.2 All are polite and jolly; they keep festival all summer. The people are very dark, and cannot speak Russian, but are affable.

As soon as the Bashkirs saw Pakhom, they came forth from their kibitkas; they surrounded their guest. The interpreter made his acquaintance. Pakhom told him that he had come to see about land. The Bashkirs were delighted, took him to a fine kibitka, spread rugs down, gave him a down-cushion to sit on, sat round him, and proceeded to treat him to tea and kymys. They slaughtered a ram, and gave him mutton.

Pakhom fetched from his tarantas his gifts, and began to distribute them

among the Bashkirs.

Pakhom gave the Bashkirs his gifts, and divided the tea. The Bashkirs were overjoyed. They jabbered and jabbered together, and then commanded the interpreter to speak.

"Thy bid me tell you," says the interpreter, "that they have taken a fancy to you; and that we have a custom of doing everything possible to gratify a guest, and repay him for his gifts. You have given us gifts. Now tell what you wish from among our possessions, in order that we may give it to you."

"Above all else that you have," says Pakhom, "I would like some of your land. In my country," says he, "there is a scarcity of land. The land is cultivated to death. But you have much land, and good land. I never saw the like."

The interpreter translated for him. The Bashkirs talked and talked. Pakhom could not understand what they were saying; but he saw that they were goodnatured, that they were talking at the top of their voices and laughing. Then they relapsed into silence, looked at Pakhom; and the interpreter said:-

"They bid me tell you that, in return for your kindness, they are happy to give you as much land as you wish. Only show us your hand—it shall be yours."

They were still talking, and began to dispute angrily. And Pakhom asked what they were quarreling about.

And the interpreter replied:-

"Some say that they ought to ask the head man about the land, and that without his consent it is impossible. And others say that it can be done without the head man."

The Bashkirs were quarreling; suddenly a man came in a foxskin shapka. They grew silent, and all stood up. And the interpreter said:—

"This is the head man himself."

Instantly Pakhom got out his best khalat, and gave it to the head man, together with five pounds of tea.

The head man accepted it, and sat down in the chief place. And immediately

the Bashkirs began to tell him all about it.

The head man listened and listened; nodded his head, in sign of silence for all, and began to speak to Pakhom in Russian.

"Well," said he, "it can be done. Take it wherever you please. There is plenty of land."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Thirteen hundred and fifty acres.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Three hundred and thirty miles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Reed-pipes.

"I shall get as much as I want," said Pakhom to himself. "I must secure

it immediately, else they'll say it's mine, and then take it away."

"I thank you," says he, "for your kind words. I have seen that you have much land, and I need not very much. Only you must let me know what shall be mine. As soon as possible you must have it measured off and secured to  $m_{\text{e}}$ God disposes of life and death. You good people make the grant, but the time may come when your children will take it away."

"You are right," says the head man; "it must be secured to you."

Pakhom began to speak:---

"I have heard that a merchant was here with you. You also gave him land, and struck a bargain. I should like to do the same."

The head man understood perfectly.

"This can all be done," says he. "We have a clerk; and we will go to the city, and will all put on our seals."

"And the price will be how much?" asked Pakhom. "We have one price: one thousand rubles a day."

Pakhom did not understand. "What is this measure, the day? How many desyatins are there in it?"

"We can't reckon it," says he. "But we sell it by the day: all that you can go round in a day—that is yours; and the price of a day is one thousand rubles." Pakhom was astonished.

"Look here," said he. "What I can go round in a day is a good deal of land!"

The head man laughed.

"It's all yours," said he. "Only one stipulation: if you don't come back within the day to the place from which you started, your money is lost."

"But how," says Pakhom, "can I mark where I am going?"

"Well, we'll stand on the place where it pleases you; we will be standing there; and you shall go and draw the circle, and take with you a hoe, and make a mark wherever you please; at the angle dig a little hole, put some turf in it; and we will go over it, from hole to hole, with the plow. Make your circle as large as you like, only at sunset you must be back at that place from which you set out. All that you encircle is yours."

Pakhom was delighted. They agreed to go out early. They talked it over, drank still more kumys, ate the mutton, and drank some more tea. It approached night-fall. They arranged for Pakhom to sleep in a down-bed, and the Bashkirs went off. They agreed to come together at early dawn the next day,

and to go out at sunrise.

Pakhom lay in his down-bed; and there he could not sleep, all on account of thinking of his land.

"I will get hold of a great tract," said he to himself. "I can go over fifty versts in one day. A day now is worth a year. There'll be a good bit of land in a circle of fifty versts. I will sell off the worst parts, or let it to the muzhiks; and I will pick out what I like, and I will settle on it. I will have a two-ox plow, and I will take two men as laborers. I will cultivate fifty desyatins, and I will pasture my cattle on the rest."

Pakhom did not get a wink of sleep all night. Just before dawn he dropped

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into a doze. He just dropped into a doze and had a dream. He seemed to see himself lying in this very same kibitka, and listening to somebody cackling outside. And it seemed to him that he wanted to see who was laughing; and he got up and went out of the kibitka, and lo! that very same head man of the Bashkirs was sitting in front of the kibitka, and was holding his sides, and roaring and cackling about something.

He went up to him and asked:-

"What are you laughing at?"

And then it seemed to him that it was no longer the head man of the Bashkirs, but the peddler who had come to him and told him about the land.

And as soon as he saw that it was the peddler, he asked:-

"Have you been here long?"

And then it was no longer the peddler, but that muzhik who had come

down the Volga so long ago.

And Pakhom saw that it was not the muzhik either, but the Devil himself, with horns and hoofs, sitting and laughing; and before him was lying a man barefooted, in shirt and drawers. And Pakhom looked more attentively to find out who the man was.

And he saw that the dead man was none other than-himself! Pakhom

was frightened, and woke up.

He woke up.

"What was I dreaming about?" he asked himself. He looked around, he peered out of the closed door: it was already getting light, day was beginning to dawn.

"The people must be getting up," he thinks; "it's time to start."

Pakhom arose, aroused his man in the tarantas, told him to harness up, and then went to arouse the Bashkirs.

"Time," says he, "to go out on the steppe, to measure it off."

The Bashkirs got up, all collected; and the head man came forth. The Bashkirs again began by drinking kumys; they wished Pakhom to treat them to tea, but he was not inclined to delay.

"If we go . . . it is time to go now," said he.

The Bashkirs made ready; some got on horseback, some climbed into carts; they started. And Pakhom rode with his man in their tarantas, and took with him a hoe. They rode out into the steppe; the dawn was beginning. They reached a mound-shikhan in Bashkirian. They descended from their carts, dismounted from their horses, collected in a crowd. The chief man came to Pakhom, and pointed with his hand.

"Here," says he, "all is ours, as far as you can see. Take what you desire."

Pakhom's eyes burned. The whole region was grassy, flat as the palm of your hand, black as a pot; and where there was a hollow, it was filled with grass as high as one's breast.

The chief man took off his foxskin cap, and laid it on the ground.

"Here," says he, "is the spot. Start from here, come back here. All that you go round shall be yours."

Pakhom took out his money, laid it in the cap; took off his kaftan, stood

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in his blouse alone; girded himself around the belly with his sash, pulled it tighter; hung round his neck a little bag with bread, put a little flask with water into his belt, tightened his leg-wrappers, took the hoe from his man, and got ready to start. He pondered and pondered on which side to take it; it was good everywhere.

He said to himself:-

"It's all one; I will go toward the sunrise."

He faced toward the east and paced back and forth, waiting till the sun should show above the horizon.

He said to himself, "I will not lose any time. It's cool, and easier to walk."

As soon as the sunlight gushed out over the horizon, he threw his hoe over his shoulder, and started out on the steppe.

Pakhom proceeded neither slow nor fast. He went about a verst;1 he halted and he dug a little pit and piled the turf in it, so that it might attract attention.

He went farther. As he went on, he quickened his pace. As he kept going on, he dug other little pits.

Pakhom looked around. The shikhan was still in sight in the sun, and the people were standing on it; the tires on the tarantas wheels glistened. Pakhom conjectured that he has been five versts. He began to get warm; he took off his blouse, threw it over his shoulder, and went on. It grew hot. He looked at

the sun. It was already breakfast-time.

"One stage over," thinks Pakhom, "and four of them make a day; it's too early as yet to turn round. Only let me take off my boots." He sat down and took off his boots, put them in his belt, and went on. It

was easy walking. He said to himself, "Let me go five versts farther, then I will swing round to the left. This place is very good; it's a pity to give it up."

The farther he went, the better it became. He still went straight ahead. He looked round—the shikhan was now scarcely visible; and the people, like little ants, made a black spot on it; and something barely glistened.

"Well," said Pakhom, "I have enough in this direction; I must be turning round. I am sweaty enough. I should like a drink,"

He halted, dug a pit, filled it with turf, unfastened his flask, took a drink, and turned sharply to the left. He went and went—the grass was deep, and it was hot.

Pakhom began to feel weary; he looked at the sun and saw that it was dinner-time.

"Well," said he, "I must have a rest."

Pakhom halted. He sat down and ate his bread and water, but did not try to lie down. He said to himself:-

"If I lie down, I may fall asleep."

He sat a little while; then he started on again; he found it easy walking; his strength was renewed by his meal, but now it was growing very hot-yes, and the sun began to decline; but still he kept going. He said:-

"Endure it for an hour, and you have an age to live."

He still went on a long distance in this direction. He kept intending to turn to the left, but lo! it was a low land and moist soil. It was a pity to throw it away! He said to himself:-

<sup>1</sup> Thirty-five hundred feet.

"This day has been a good one."

He still continued straight on. He took in the low land-dug his pit on the farther side of the low land, the hollow, and then turned the second corner. Pakhom gazed back in the direction of the shikhan. The heat had caused a haziness, there was a quivering in the atmosphere, and through the haziness the people on the shikhan could scarcely be seen.

"Well," said Pakhom, "I have taken long sides-I must make this one

shorter." He started on the third side—he tried to hasten his pace. He looked at the

sun-it was already far down the west, and on the third side he had only gone two versts; and back to the starting-point, there were fifteen versts. "No," he said, "even though the tract should be uneven I must hurry back in a straight line. It wouldn't do to take too much; even as it is, I have already

a good deal of land." Pakhom dug his little pit in all haste, and headed straight for the shikhan.

Pakhom went straight toward the shikhan, and now it began to be heavy work for him. He was bathed in sweat; and his bare legs were cut and torn, and began to fail under him. He felt a desire to rest, but it was impossible; he could not stop till sunset. The sun did not delay, but was sinking lower and lower.

"Akh!" he says to himself, "can I have made a blunder? can I have taken too much? why don't you hurry along faster?"

He gazed at the shikhan—it gleamed in the sun; it was still a long distance to the place, and the sun was now not far from the horizon.

Still Pakhom hurried on; it was hard for him, but he kept quickening his pace, quickening his pace. He walked and walked—it was still always far away.

He took to the double-quick. He threw away his blouse, his boots, his flask. He threw away his cap, but he clung to his hoe and helped himself along with it. "Akh!" he said to himself, "I was too greedy; I have ruined the whole

than ever.

business; I shall not get there before sunset." And his breath began to fail him all the worse because of his apprehension. Pakhom ran-his shirt and drawers clung to his body by reason of sweat-his mouth was parched. In his breast a pair of blacksmith's bellows, as it were,

were working; and in his heart a mill was beating; and his legs were almost breaking down under him.

It became painful for Pakhom. He said to himself:-

"Suppose I should die from the strain?"

He was afraid of dropping dead, and yet he could not stop. "If after running, I were to stop now, they would call me a fool."

He ran and ran. He was now getting near, and he could hear the Bashkirs shouting-screaming at him; and their screams made his heart pain him more

Pakhom ran on with the last of his strength, and the sun was still hovering on the horizon's edge; it went into the haze; there was a great glow, red as blood. Now-now it was setting! The sun had nearly set, but now Pakhom was not far from the place. He could see it; and the people on the shikhan gesticulating to him, urging him on. He saw the foxskin cap on the ground, he could even see the money in it. And he saw the head man sitting on the ground, holding his belly with his hands. And Pakhom remembered his dream.

"Much land," he said to himself, "but perhaps God has not willed me to

live on it. Okh! I have ruined myself," he thinks. "I shall not get it."

Pakhom looked at the sun, but the sun had gone down under the earth; its body was already hidden, and its last segment had disappeared under the horizon.

Pakhom exerted his last energies, threw himself forward with his body; his legs just kept him from falling.

Just as Pakhom reached the shikhan, it suddenly grew dark. He saw that

the sun had gone. Pakhom groaned.

"I have lost my labor," thinks he. He was just about to stop; but as he still heard the Bashkirs all screaming, he remembered that he was below them, and therefore the sun seemed to have set, although it had not set to those on top of the shikhan. Pakhom took a breath and ran up the shikhan. It was still light on the mound. Pakhom ran, and there was the cap. In front of the cap sat the head man, laughing and holding his sides.

Pakhom remembered his dream, groaned "Akh!" his legs gave way under him,

and he fell forward, reaching out his arms toward the cap.

"Ai! brave lad!" shouted the head man. "You have got a good piece of land." Pakhom's man ran to him, attempted to help him to his feet; but from his mouth poured a stream of blood, and he lay dead.

The Bashkirs clucked with their tongues, expressing their sorrow.

Pakhom's man took the hoe, dug a grave for him, made it just long enough, from head to foot,—three arshins,—and buried him.

#### KHOLSTOMER

#### THE HISTORY OF A HORSE

1

Ever higher and higher rose the sky, wider spread the dawn, whiter grew the pallid silver of the dew, more lifeless the sickle of the moon, more vocal the forest. . . .

People were beginning to arise; and at the stables belonging to the barin were heard with increasing frequency the whinnying of the horses, the stamping of hoofs on the straw, and also the angry, shrill neighing of the animals collecting together, and even disputing with one another over something.

"We-e-ll! you've got time enough; half-starved, ain't you?" said the old drover,

# IN THE PENAL COLONY

"It's a singular apparatus," the officer said to the explorer, running his somewhat admiring eyes over the apparatus, with which he was after all familiar. The traveler seemed to have accepted the invitation purely out of courtesy: the commander had asked him to attend the execution of a soldier, who had been condemned to death for insubordination and for insulting a superior. There probably wasn't all that much interest in this execution even within the penal colony. At least, here in this deep, sandy valley, which was closed in by naked slopes on all sides, the only people present, aside from the officer and the traveler, were the condemned man—an obtuse person with a broad mouth and seedy hair and face—and a soldier clutching the heavy shackle with the small, interconnected chains that fettered the condemned man's ankles, wrists, and neck. At any rate, the condemned man looked so doglike and cringing that they could, no doubt, have let him run free over the slopes and would have needed only to whistle for him to come at the beginning of the execution.

The traveler had little interest in the apparatus and

was almost visibly unconcerned as he walked up and down behind the condemned man, while the officer took care of the final adjustments, crawling underneath the apparatus, which was inserted deep in the ground, or scaling a ladder to examine the upper parts. These were chores that could have actually been left to a mechanic; but the officer performed them with great zeal either because he was a strong supporter of this apparatus or because there were other reasons why the job could not have been entrusted to anyone else.

"It's all set!" he finally called and climbed down the ladder. He was extremely worn out, breathed with his mouth wide open, and had two delicate ladies' handkerchiefs tucked in behind his uniform collar.

"These uniforms must be far too heavy for the tropics," the traveler said instead of inquiring about the apparatus, as the officer had expected.

"True enough," said the officer, washing his greasy, oily hands in a pail of water that stood ready, "but they represent our homeland, and we do not want to lose our homeland.

"But now look at this apparatus," he promptly added, drying his hands with a towel while simultaneously motioning toward the apparatus. "Up to this point, it requires manual labor, but from now on, the apparatus works automatically."

The traveler nodded and followed him. The officer, seeking to protect himself against all contingencies, then said, "Naturally, malfunctions do occur, but while I hope we won't have any today, they must be reckoned with. After all, the apparatus has to keep

working uninterruptedly for twelve hours. If malfunctions do occur, however, they are very minor and they can be dealt with immediately.

"Won't you sit down?" he finally asked, pulling out a cane chair from a whole pile of them and offering it to the traveler; the latter could not refuse. He now sat at the edge of a pit, into which he fleetingly glanced. It wasn't very deep. On one side of the pit, the excavated soil was heaped up into an embankment; on the other side stood the apparatus.

"I don't know," said the officer, "whether the commander has already filled you in about the apparatus." The traveler gestured vaguely; the officer could ask for nothing better, since now he could explain the apparatus himself. "This apparatus," he said, grasping a crank handle and leaning against it, "was invented by our former commander. I assisted in the very first tests and I was involved in all the work until it was perfected. However, he alone deserves the credit for the invention. Have you heard about our former commander? No? Well, I'm not exaggerating when I say that the entire setup of the penal colony is his achievement. By the time he died, we, his friends, already knew that the colony, as he had organized it, was so self-contained that it would take his successor many years to change anything, even if he had a thousand plans in mind. And our prediction was correct; the new commander was forced to realize it. Too bad you never met the old commander! But," the officer interrupted himself, "I'm rattling on, and his apparatus is standing here in front of us. It consists, as you can see, of three parts. Over the years,

a popular nickname has developed for each of these parts. The lower part is called the 'bed,' the upper one the 'draftsman,' and the middle one floating here is called the 'harrow.'

"The 'harrow'?" asked the traveler. He hadn't been listening very closely, the sun was entangled all too deeply in the shadeless valley, it was hard to focus one's thoughts. Thus, the officer, in his tight, fulldress tunic, which was weighed down with epaulets and loaded with piping, struck him as all the more admirable, so eagerly explaining his subject and also, while speaking, applying a screwdriver to an occasional screw. The soldier appeared to be in the same frame of mind as the traveler. The chain attached to the condemned man was wound about both the soldier's wrists, his one hand was propped on his rifle, his head was drooping at the neck, and he was utterly indifferent. The traveler was not surprised, for the officer was speaking French, and presumably neither the soldier nor the condemned man understood French. It was therefore all the more striking that the condemned man nevertheless made an effort to follow the officer's explanations. With a kind of sleepy obstinacy, he kept peering at whatever the officer happened to be showing, and when the traveler now interrupted him with a question, the condemned man, just like the officer, looked at the traveler.

"Yes, the 'harrow,' " said the officer, "the name fits. The needles are arranged like the teeth in a harrow, and the whole thing is handled like a harrow, though it acts in only one place and far more skillfully. Anyhow, you'll understand it right away. The conIn the Penal Colony

demned man is laid out here on the bed. You see, first I want to describe the apparatus and only then set the procedure in motion. You'll be able to follow it better. Besides, one cog in the draftsman is ground down far too much-it screaks loudly when it's running, you can barely communicate. Unfortunately, it's hard getting spare parts here. Well, here's the bed, as I've pointed out. It's fully padded with a layer of cotton; you'll soon find out why. The condemned man is put belly-down on this cotton-naked, of course. We have straps to tie him in-here for his hands, here for his feet, here for his neck. And here at the top of the bed, where the man, as I have said, lies face down, we have this small felt stump, which can be easily regulated so that it pushes precisely into the man's mouth. Its purpose is to prevent him from screaming and from chewing up his tongue. Naturally, he has to take in the felt; otherwise the neck strap will break his neck."

"This is cotton?" asked the traveler, bending forward.

"Yes, certainly," said the officer with a smile, "feel it for yourself." He took the traveler's hand and guided it across the bed. "It's a specially prepared cotton, that's why it looks so unusual; I'll get back to its purpose later on."

The traveler now felt a slight interest in the apparatus. Shading his eyes with one hand to protect them from the sun, he peered up the side of the structure. It was huge. The bed and the draftsman were of equal size and looked like two dark chests. The draftsman was installed almost seven feet above the bed; their

corners were linked by four brass rods that practically radiated in the sunlight. Between the chests, the harrow shuttled on a steel band.

The officer had barely noticed the traveler's earlier indifference, but he was alive to his now budding interest; that was why he broke off his explanations—to give the traveler time for undisturbed study. The condemned man imitated the traveler; since he couldn't shade his eyes with his hand, they squinted upward uncovered.

"So now the man is lying there," said the traveler, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs.

"Yes," said the officer, pushing his cap back slightly and running his hand over his hot face, "now listen! Both the bed and the draftsman have an electric battery each; the bed needs one for itself, the draftsman needs one for the harrow. Once the man is strapped tight, the bed is set in motion. It quivers in tiny, very rapid twitches, both sideways and up and down. You must have seen similar apparatuses in sanitariums; except that in our bed all the movements are precisely calculated. You see, they have to be meticulously geared to the motions of the harrow. But this harrow has the job of actually carrying out the judgment."

"Just what is the judgment?" asked the traveler.

"You don't know even that?" said the astounded officer, then bit his lip. "Please forgive me if my explanations are unsystematic; I apologize from the bottom of my heart. You see, it was the commander who used to provide the explanations; but the new commander has backed out of this honorary obliga-

#### In the Penal Colony

tion. Although his failure to inform such an important visitor—" (the traveler tried to ward off the tribute with both hands, but the officer insisted on his wording) "such an important visitor about even the form of our judgment is a further new development that . . ." He had some strong words on the tip of his tongue, but, checking himself, merely said: "I was not informed, I am not the guilty one. Still and all, I am the person most capable of explaining our modes of judgment, for I have on me"—he patted his breast pocket—"the pertinent designs hand-drawn by the former commander."

"The commander's own hand-drawn designs?" asked the traveler. "Did he wear all those hats? Was he a soldier, a judge, an engineer, a chemist, a draftsman?"

"Yes, indeed," said the officer, nodding, with a thoughtful, glassy stare. Then he scrutinized his hands: he didn't find them clean enough to touch the drawings; so he walked over to the pail and washed them again. Then he produced a small leather portfolio, saying: "Our judgment does not sound severe. The commandment that the condemned man has broken is written on his body by the harrow. For instance, on this condemned man's body," the officer pointed at him, "the harrow is to write: 'Honor Thy Superior!'"

The traveler glanced casually at the man, who, when pointed at by the officer, had kept his head lowered and now seemed to be all ears, trying to catch something. But the movements of his pressed, pouting lips made it obvious that he could understand nothing. The traveler had wanted to put various questions to

the officer, but, at the sight of the condemned man, asked only: "Does he know his judgment?"

"No," said the officer, about to continue his explanations; but the traveler broke in: "He doesn't know his own judgment?"

"No," the officer repeated, pausing for an instant as if demanding a more detailed explanation of the question. The officer then said: "It would be no use informing him. He's going to experience it on his body anyway."

The traveler wanted to hold his tongue, but he felt the condemned man staring at him: he seemed to be asking whether the traveler could approve of the described procedure. That was why the traveler, who had already leaned back in his chair, now bent forward again and asked: "But he does know that he has been condemned?"

"No again," said the officer, smiling at the traveler as if expecting further bizarre revelations from him.

"No," said the traveler, rubbing his forehead. "Then the man doesn't yet know how his defense was received?"

"He had no opportunity to defend himself," said the officer, looking sideways as if talking to himself and not caring to embarrass the traveler by telling him about these self-evident matters.

"He must have had an opportunity to defend himself," said the traveler, rising from the chair.

The officer realized he was in danger of delaying his explanation of the apparatus for a long time; so he went over to the traveler, took him by the arm, and motioned toward the condemned man, who, now In the Penai Colony

that he was so obviously the center of attention, pulled himself up rigidly—the soldier had also yanked on the chain.

"This is how things stand," said the officer. "I have been appointed judge here in the penal colony. Despite my youth. For I assisted the former commander in all criminal matters and I am also the person most familiar with the apparatus. The principle on which I base my decisions is: guilt is always beyond doubt. Other courts of law cannot follow this principle, for they consist of many people and they also have higher courts over them. But this is not the case here, or at least it wasn't the case under the former commander. The new one, to be sure, has shown some desire to interfere in my court; but so far, I have managed to hold him at bay, and I will keep managing to do so.

"You wanted an explanation of this case; it is as simple as any other case. This man was assigned to a captain as his orderly and slept outside his door; but this morning the captain brought charges against him for sleeping while on duty. You see, he has standing orders to get up at the stroke of each hour and salute outside the captain's door. Certainly not a hard task, but an important one, for he is to remain alert both as a sentry and as an orderly. Last night, the captain wanted to check whether the man was performing his duty. At the stroke of two, he opened the door and found him curled up asleep. He got his riding crop and lashed the man's face. Instead of standing up and asking his forgiveness, the man grabbed his superior's legs, shook him, and yelled,

'Throw away that crop or I'll eat you alive!' Those are the facts of the case. The captain came to see me one hour ago: I wrote down his statement and then appended the judgment. Next I had the man put in chains. It was all quite simple. Had I first summoned the man and questioned him, it would have brought nothing but confusion. He would have lied, and once I had exposed his lies, he would have piled on new lies, and so forth. But now I've got him and I'll never let him go.

"Is everything clarified? But we're wasting time, the execution should have started by now, and I still haven't finished explaining the apparatus."

He pressed the traveler back down on the chair, returned to the apparatus, and began: "As you can see, the harrows correspond to the human shape: this is the harrow for the upper body, these are the harrows for the legs. This tiny spike is all that's used for the head. Is that clear?" He leaned amiably toward the traveler, ready to launch into the most comprehensive explanations.

The traveler frowned at the harrow. He had not been satisfied with the information on the judicial procedure. Nevertheless he had to remind himself that this was a penal colony, that unusual measures were needed here, and that they had to resort to even the most stringent military discipline. However, he also pinned some hope on the new commander, who evidently planned to introduce, though gradually, a new procedure that was simply beyond the officer's narrow grasp. It was this train of thought that led the traveler to ask, "Will the commander be attending the execution?"

"It's not certain," said the officer, embarrassed by the abrupt question, and his friendly expression became distorted: "That's precisely why we have to hurry. Much as I regret it, I'll have to shorten my explanations. But tomorrow, of course, when the apparatus has been cleaned (its only failing is that it gets so dirty), I can go into greater detail. For now, just the bare gist.

"When the man lies on the bed, and the bed begins to quiver, the harrow is lowered upon the body. It automatically adjusts itself so that its points just barely graze the skin. Once it's in place, this steel cable instantly stiffens into a rigid band. And now the performance begins. An outsider won't notice any external difference between the punishments. The harrow seems to work identically. As it quivers, it sticks its points into the body, which, moreover, quivers with the bed. Now to enable anyone to check the progress of the judgment, the harrow is made of glass. Attaching the needles involved some technical difficulties, but we succeeded after a lot of trial and error. We simply spared no effort. And now everyone can see through the glass and watch the inscription emerging on the body. Won't you come closer and look at the needles?"

The traveler slowly rose, walked across, and bent over the harrow. "You can see," said the officer, "two kinds of needles in multiple patterns. Each long needle is accompanied by a short one. The long one does the writing, you know, and the short one spurts out water to wash away the blood and to keep the writing clear. The mixture of blood and water is then channeled into tiny runnels and eventually flows into the

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main gutter, from where the drain pipe leads to the pit." The officer pointed out the precise route that the mixture had to take. When, in order to make it as graphic as possible, he pretended to scoop up the liquid with both hands at the mouth of the drainpipe, the traveler raised his head and, groping backwards with one hand, tried to return to his chair. But then to his horror, he saw that the condemned man had likewise followed the officer's invitation to look closely at the way the harrow was set up. The condemned man had tugged the drowsy soldier slightly forward by his chain and was also bending over the glass. One could see that his uncertain eyes were seeking what the two gentlemen had just observed, but that he would fail since he hadn't heard the explanation. He kept bending every which way. His eyes kept scurrying over the glass. The traveler wanted to drive him away, for what he was doing must have been punishable. But with one hand the officer held on to the traveler and with the other hand he took a clod of soil from the embankment and threw it at the soldier. The soldier's head jolted up; upon seeing what the condemned man had dared to do, he dropped the rifle, dug his heels into the ground, and yanked the condemned man back so hard that he instantly fell down; the soldier then watched him writhing and rattling his chains.

"Get him on his feet!" the officer yelled, for he noticed that the traveler was being all too greatly distracted by the condemned man. The traveler even leaned across the harrow, paying it no heed, trying only to determine what was happening to the con-

demned man. "Treat him carefully!" the officer again yelled. He hurried around the apparatus, grabbed the condemned man under the shoulders, and, with the soldier's help, got him back on his feet, which, however, kept slipping.

"Now I know everything," said the traveler when the officer came back to him.

"Except the most important part," said the officer, grabbing the traveler's arm and pointing upward: "Up there in the draftsman you'll find the gear unit that controls the movements of the harrow; now this unit is regulated according to the design prescribed by the judgment. I still use the former commander's drawings. Here they are. . . ." He pulled a few pages from the leather portfolio. "Unfortunately, I can't let you handle them, they are my most precious possessions. Sit down, I'll hold them up to you from here: then you'll be able to see everything clearly."

He showed him the first sheet. The traveler would have liked to express his appreciation, but all he could see was a crisscross of labyrinthine lines covering the paper so densely that the blank gaps were barely discernible.

"Read it," said the officer.

"I can't," said the traveler.

"But it's quite legible," said the officer.

"It's very intricate," said the traveler evasively, "but I can't decipher it."

"Yes," said the officer, laughing and putting the portfolio away. "It's no calligraphy for schoolchildren. It has to be studied for a long time. Eventually, you'd be able to make it out too. It can't be a simple script,

of course-after all, it's not supposed to kill right

away, it's planned for an average of twelve hours; the climax is calculated for the sixth hour. So lots and lots of curlicues have to surround the actual script: the script itself forms only a narrow belt around the body, the rest of the skin is reserved for embellishments. Can you now appreciate the work of the harrow and the entire apparatus? Just look!" He bounded up the ladder, turned a wheel, called down, "Watch out, step aside!" and everything started moving. If the cog hadn't screaked, it would have been wonderful. As if surprised by this troublesome cog, the officer shook his fist, then, by way of apology, held out his arms to the traveler and hastily clambered down in order to observe the workings of the apparatus from below. Something was still amiss, which he alone noticed. He climbed up again, thrust both hands into the draftsman, then, in order to descend more quickly, he slid down the pole instead of using the ladder, and, trying to make himself heard above the racket, yelled into the traveler's ear at the top of his lungs: "Do you understand the procedure? The harrow starts writing. Once it's applied the first round of script to the man's back, the layer of cotton slowly rolls the man over on his side to offer the harrow new space. Meanwhile, the raw areas wounded by the script gradually move into the cotton, which because of its special treatment immediately staunches the bleeding and prepares the body for deeper penetration by the script. Here, when the body is rolled over again, the teeth along the edge of the harrow rip the cotton from the wounds, hurl it into the pit, and the harrow then

has more work. And so it keeps writing deeper and deeper for those twelve hours. During the first six hours, the condemned man remains alive almost as before, he only suffers pain. The felt is removed after two hours, for the man has no strength left for screaming. Here, at the head end, warm rice pudding is placed in this electrically heated basin, and if he likes, the man can take whatever he manages to lap up with his tongue. No man ignores the opportunity. I know of no one, and I've had lots of experience. He doesn't lose his pleasure in eating until the sixth hour. Usually I then kneel down here and observe this phenomenon. The man seldom swallows the last morsel: he merely rolls it in his mouth and spits it out into the pit. At that point, I have to duck—otherwise it would hit me in the face. And how quiet the man becomes at the sixth hour! Even the stupidest man is now enlightened. It starts around the eyes. From there it spreads out. A look that might lure you into joining him under the harrow. Nothing else happens, the man simply begins to decipher the writing; he purses his lips as if he were listening. You've seen that it's not easy deciphering the script with your eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds. It's a lot of work, to be sure; it takes him six hours to complete it. But then the harrow forks up his entire body and dumps him into the pit, where he flops down on the cotton and the bloody water. Now the judicial procedure is over, and we—I and the soldier—bury him quickly." The traveler had lowered his ear toward the officer

and, with his hands in his coat pockets, was watching the machine working. The condemned man was also

watching it, but without comprehending. He was bent forward slightly, following the reeling needles, when the soldier, at a sign from the officer, took a knife and slashed the back of the man's shirt and trousers so that they dropped off. He tried to grab his falling clothes to cover his nakedness, but the soldier lifted him up and shook off his final rags. The officer switched on the machine and in the sudden hush the condemned man was laid out under the harrow. The chains were loosened and the straps fastened in their stead; in the first moment, it seemed almost a relief for the condmened man. And now the harrow came down a bit, for he was a thin man. When the needle points touched him, a shudder ran over his skin; while the soldier was busy strapping in his right hand, he stretched out his left hand, not knowing where; but it was toward where the traveler was standing. The officer kept gazing at the traveler from the side, probing his face as if to read the effect made on him by the execution, which he had at least outlined for him.

The wrist strap tore; the soldier must have drawn it too tight. The officer had to step in; the soldier showed him the torn-off scrap. The officer walked over to him and said, facing the traveler: "The machine is extremely intricate, something is bound to rip or break now and then; but that shouldn't interfere with one's overall opinion. Anyway, the strap can be replaced immediately: I'll use a chain. Of course, it will interfere with the delicacy of the vibrations for the right arm." And while fastening the chains, he added, "The wherewithal for maintaining the machine is greatly reduced now. The former commander granted me an

unlimited budget for this sole purpose. We had a depot here, where all possible spare parts were stored. I confess, I was practically a spendthrift—I mean earlier, not now, as the new commander claims—he uses anything as a pretext for battling old institutions. Now he oversees the machine budget himself, and if I order a new strap, the torn one is demanded as evidence; it takes ten days for the replacement to arrive, but it's an inferior brand and not worth much. And meanwhile, no one cares how I'm supposed to run the machine without a strap."

The traveler pondered: It's always risky interfering decisively in other people's business. He was a citizen of neither the penal colony nor the country it belonged to. If he were to condemn or even obstruct this execution, he might be told: You're a foreigner, keep quiet. He couldn't have responded to that, he could only have added that he was surprised at himself in this case, for he traveled purely with the goal of observing but in no way altering judicial methods in other countries. Of course, the situation here was highly tempting. The injustice of the procedure and the inhumanity of the execution were beyond all doubt. No one could assume any self-serving motives on the traveler's part, for the condemned man was a stranger to him, a foreigner, and no one he sympathized with. The traveler himself had letters of recommendation from high places, had been welcomed here with great cordiality, and his being invited to this execution even seemed to indicate that they were asking his opinion about this legal action. And this was all the more probable in that the commander, as the traveler had now heard

loud and clear, was no supporter of this procedure and was almost hostile toward the officer.

Suddenly the traveler heard a shriek of rage from the officer. He had just shoved the felt stump into the condemned man's mouth, not without some effort, when the man, unable to fight his nausea, had shut his eyes and vomited. The officer hastily pulled him up from the stump and was about to turn the man's head toward the pit; but it was too late, the vomit was already flowing down into the machine. "It's all the commander's fault!" the officer shouted and in his daze he shook the brass rods in front. "My machine is being soiled like a stable!" With trembling hands, he showed the traveler what had happened. "Haven't I spent hours at a time trying to make the commander understand that no food should be served to the condemned man a whole day before the execution? But our new mild policy reflects a different attitude. The commander's ladies stuff the man's belly with sweets before he's taken away. All his life he's eaten nothing but stinking fish, and now he has to eat sweets! Still, it could be possible, I would not object-but why don't they get a new felt gag, which I've been requesting for the last three months? How can a man help feeling nauseated when he gets that felt into his mouth after over a hundred men have sucked and gnawed on it while dying?"

The condemned man had laid down his head and he looked peaceful; the soldier was busy cleaning the machine with the man's shirt. The officer went over to the traveler, who, with some vague foreboding, stepped back; but the officer grabbed his hand and pulled him aside. "I want to speak to you privately," he said, "may I?"

"By all means," said the traveler, listening with downcast eyes.

"At present, this procedure and this execution, which you now have a chance to admire, no longer have any open supporters in the colony. I am their sole representative and simultaneously the sole representative of the old commander's legacy. I can't even think of expanding the procedure any further-it takes all my energy just to preserve it as is. When the old commander was alive, the colony was full of his supporters; to some extent, I have the old commander's persuasiveness, but I entirely lack his power. As a result, his supporters have kept a low profile; there are lots of them left, but nobody admits it. If you go to the teahouse today-during an execution, that is-and keep your ears open, you may hear some ambiguous remarks. Those people are all supporters, but under the current commander and with his current views, they're completely useless to me. And now I ask you: Should such a life's work"he pointed at the machine-"perish because of this commander and his women, who influence him? Should one put up with this? Even if one is only a foreigner visiting our island for a few days? But there's no time to lose, they're preparing some action against my judicial authority. Talks are already taking place at the commander's headquarters without my being allowed to attend. Even your visit today strikes me as characteristic of the entire situation; they're cowards and so they send you, a foreigner, ahead. How

different the executions used to be! The entire valley was mobbed a whole day in advance: they all came just to watch. Early in the morning, the commander showed up with his ladies; fanfares awoke the entire camp; I reported that everything was ready; the company (no high official dared to be absent) grouped around the machine; this heap of cane chairs is a wretched leftover from that era. The machine was freshly polished and glistening; I used new replacement parts for almost every execution. In front of a hundred eyes—all the spectators stood on tiptoe as far as the hills-the commander himself placed the condemned man under the harrow. Something that a common soldier may do today was assigned to me, the presiding judge, and it was an honor for me. And now the execution began! No jarring note disturbed the running of the machine. Some people stopped watching altogether; they lay in the sand, closing their eyes. Everyone knew: Justice was being done. In the hush, all we heard was the condemned man's sighs, muffled by the felt gag. Today the machine no longer succeeds in wringing a louder sigh from the condemned man than the felt gag can throttle; but back then, the writing needles emitted a mordant liquid, which we are not allowed to use anymore. Well, and then came the sixth hour! It was impossible to allow everyone who requested it to watch from up close. The commander, wise as he was, ordered that preference be given to the children. I, however, because of my profession, was always permitted to stand close by; I would often squat there with a small child in each arm, right and left. How profoundly we took in

the transfigured expression from the tortured face, how intensely our cheeks basked in the glow of that justice, attained at long last and already fading! What wonderful times, my friend!"

The officer had obviously forgotten whom he was dealing with; he had thrown his arms around the traveler and placed his head on his shoulder. The traveler was deeply embarrassed; he gazed impatiently over the officer's head. The soldier had finished the cleanup work and had now poured some rice pudding from a can into the basin. No sooner did the condemned man, who seemed to have recovered completely, notice the pudding than his tongue began snapping at it. The soldier kept shoving him away, for the pudding was probably meant for some later time; but in any case, it was equally unbecoming of the soldier to reach into it with his dirty hands and eat it in front of the ravenous prisoner.

The officer quickly pulled himself together. "I didn't mean to touch you," he told the traveler. "I know it's impossible to make those times comprehensible today. Anyway, the machine is still running and it still works on its own. It works on its own even when it's alone in this valley. And ultimately, the corpse, in an incomprehensibly gentle flight, still drops into the pit even if hundreds of people no longer gather round the pit like flies, as they used to do. Back then, we had to install a sturdy railing around the pit, but it was torn down long ago."

The traveler, wanting to get his face away from the officer, glanced about aimlessly. The officer assumed he was contemplating the desolation of the valley; he

therefore took hold of the traveler's hands, circled

around him to meet his eyes, and asked: "Are you aware of the disgrace?" But the traveler held his tongue. The officer left off him for a brief while; with legs apart, hands on hips, he stood silently, gazing at the ground. Then, with an encouraging smile, he said: "I was near you yesterday when the commander invited you. I heard the invitation. I know the commander. I instantly understood what he was up to. Even though he has enough power to take action against me, he doesn't dare as yet; but he does want to expose me to your judgment—that of a distinguished foreigner. He is meticulous in his calculations: this is your second day on the island, you didn't know the old commander or his ideas, you are trapped in European attitudes—perhaps you're opposed on principle to capital punishment in general and this kind of mechanical execution in particular. Furthermore, you watch the execution take place without public participation, dismally, on a somewhat defective machine. Given all these things, would it not (the commander thinks) be highly possible that you do not consider my procedure appropriate? And if you do not consider it appropriate, you will not (I am still speaking from the commander's point of view) hold back your opinion, for you must certainly rely on your tried-and-tested convictions. True, you have gotten to know and respect many peculiarities of many nations. You will therefore probably not state your

wholehearted opposition to this procedure as you

might in your own country. But the commander doesn't

even need that: a casual, a simply careless word would

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be enough. It doesn't have to express your conviction so long as it merely seems to comply with his wishes. And he will question you very insidiously-of that I am certain. And his ladies will sit around in a circle and prick up their ears. You will say something like, 'In my country a judicial procedure is different,' or, 'In my country the defendant is interrogated before the verdict,' or, 'In my country the condemned man is informed of the verdict,' or, 'In my country there are other forms of punishment besides capital punishment,' or, 'In my country torture existed only in the Middle Ages.' Those are all remarks that are as correct as they may sound natural to you-innocent remarks that do not discredit my procedure. But how will the commander receive them? I can see him, the good commander, instantly shoving his chair aside and hurrying out to the balcony, I can see his ladies thronging after him, I can hear his voice now (the ladies call it a thunderous voice), and he says, 'A great researcher of Western Civilization, assigned to investigate judicial operations in all countries, has just said that our procedure, an old custom, is inhumane. With this verdict from such a personage, it is naturally no longer possible for me to tolerate this procedure. As of today I therefore order . . . etc.' You try to cut in: you did not say what he is proclaiming, you did not call my procedure inhumane—quite the contrary: on the basis of your deep understanding you regard it as thoroughly humane and human; you also admire this machinery-but it's too late: you don't even get out on the balcony, which is already crowded with ladies; you try to draw attention; you try to shout; but a lady's

hand covers your mouth—and I and the old commander's work are doomed."

The traveler had to suppress a smile; so the task he had thought so hard was that easy. He said evasively, "You overestimate my influence. The commander has read my letter of recommendation, he knows I am no expert in judicial proceedings. Were I to express my opinion, it would be that of a private individual, no more significant than anyone else's opinion, and in any case far more insignificant than the opinion of the commander, who, as I am led to believe, has very far-reaching powers in his penal colony. Now if his opinion is as firmly set as you believe, then I fear that the end has come for this procedure with no need for my modest help."

Did the officer see the light? No, not yet. He emphatically shook his head and glanced back at the condemned man and the soldier, both of whom flinched and stopped eating the rice; then the officer walked up very close to the traveler, looked at something on his jacket instead of at his face, and said more softly than before:

"You don't know the commander, you are—please forgive the expression—somewhat innocent in regard to him and indeed all of us. Your influence, believe me, cannot be assessed high enough. Why, I was in seventh heaven when I heard that you would be attending the execution all by yourself. This order from the commander was aimed at me, but I will now turn it to my advantage. Undiverted by false insinuations and scornful looks—which could not have been avoided if a greater audience had come to the execu-

tion—you have heard my explanations, viewed the machine, and are now about to watch the execution. Your verdict must already be formed; should you feel any minor uncertainties, then the sight of the execution will eliminate them. And now let me request something of you: please help me in regard to the commander!"

The traveler did not let him continue. "How could I?" he exclaimed. "That's quite impossible. I can help you as little as I can harm you."

"You can," said the officer. With some dread the traveler saw the officer clenching his fists. "You can," the officer repeated more urgently. "I have a plan that is sure to work. You believe that your influence does not suffice. I believe that it does suffice. But even granting that you are right: is it not necessary to try anything, even something that may be insufficient, in order to preserve this procedure? So then listen to my plan. For me to carry it out, the most essential thing today is that in the colony you conceal your verdict on the procedure as much as possible. If you are not asked outright, you must say nothing at all; and your statements must be brief and vague. People should notice that it is hard for you to speak about it, that you are embittered, that, in case you should talk openly, you would absolutely swear and curse. I am not asking you to lie. Not on your life. But your answers should be brief, say: 'Yes, I watched the execution,' or 'Yes, I heard all the explanations.' Just that, nothing more. There are reasons enough—though not what the commander may think—for the embitterment that people will notice in you. Naturally he

will misunderstand it altogether and construe it by his lights. That is the basis of my plan. Tomorrow, at his headquarters, the commander will preside over a major conference of all the higher administrative officials. Naturally the commander knows how to turn such a meeting into a public spectacle. A gallery was built, and it is always packed with spectators. I am forced to take part in the conferences, but I shake with disgust. Now you are bound to be invited to the session in any case; if you act in accordance with my plan, the invitation will become an urgent plea. But if for some unfathomable reason you are not invited, then you have to request an invitation; you will then receive one beyond any doubt. Thus tomorrow you will be sitting with the ladies in the commander's box. He will frequently glance up to make sure you are there. After various indifferent, ridiculous agenda items discussed purely for the audience's benefitand mostly concerning harbor construction, always that harbor construction!—the issue of the judicial procedure will be raised. If it is not brought up by the commander, or not soon enough, then I will see to it that it is brought up. I will get to my feet and deliver my report on today's execution. Very briefly, just this report. Such a report is not usual there, but I will deliver it anyway. The commander will thank me, as always, with a friendly smile and now he cannot hold back, he will seize the favorable opportunity. 'The report,' he will speak like that more or less, 'on the execution has just been delivered. I would like to add to this report only that this execution was witnessed by the great explorer, who, as you all know,

has been paying us the extraordinary honor of visiting our colony. Our meeting today has likewise been made more important by his presence. Should we not ask this great explorer what he thinks of the old, traditional mode of execution and the preliminary procedure?' Naturally there will be applause everywhere, general concurrence, I will be the loudest. The commander will bow to you and say, 'Then I shall ask you on behalf of us all.' And now you will step over to the railing. Put your hands down so they will be visible to everyone, otherwise the ladies will grab them and play with your fingers. And now you finally take the floor. I don't know how I will endure the suspense of waiting until then. You must put no restraints on your speech. Blast out the truth, lean over the railing, yell, yes indeed, yell your opinion, your unshakable opinion, at the commander. But perhaps you don't wish to, it's not in your character, people in your country may act differently in such situations. Well, that's all right too, that suffices fully, don't stand up, just say a few words, whisper them so that only the officials below you just barely catch themthat will suffice, you do not have to talk about the poor turnout for the execution, about the screaking gear, the torn strap, the repulsive felt gag-no, I will take over for you, and believe me, if my speech does not drive him from the hall, then it will force him to his knees and he will have to avow: Old commander, I bow to you. . . . That is my plan; do you want to help me carry it out? But naturally you want tomore than that, you have to."

And the officer grabbed both the traveler's arms

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and peered, heavily breathing, into his face. He had shouted the last few sentences so loudly that even the soldier and the condemned man had taken notice; although they understood nothing, they stopped eating and gazed over at the traveler while chewing.

From the very outset, the traveler had no doubt about the answer he had to give; he had experienced too much in his life to waver here; he was basically honest and unafraid. Nonetheless, within sight of the soldier and the condemned man, he now hesitated for a heartbeat. Finally, however, he said as he had to: "No."

The officer blinked several times, but did not avert his eyes.

"Would you like an explanation?" asked the traveler. The officer nodded mutely. "I oppose this procedure," the traveler now said. "Even before you took me into your confidence—naturally I will never betray this confidence under any circumstances—I was already wondering if I had the right to intervene against this procedure and if my intervention could have even a tiny prospect of success. It was clear to me whom I should turn to first: the commander, of course. You made it clearer to me but without hardening my resolution—on the contrary, your sincere conviction is touching even though it cannot deter me."

The officer remained mute, turned to the machine, clutched one of the brass rods, and then, leaning back slightly, looked up at the draftsman as if checking whether everything was in order. The soldier and the condemned man seemed to have made friends with one another; the condemned man, difficult as it was

because of the tight straps, made signs at the soldier; the soldier bent toward him; the condemned man whispered something, and the soldier nodded.

The traveler went after the officer, saying, "You don't yet know what I intend to do. I will give the commander my opinion of the procedure, but privately and not in a meeting. Nor will I be staying here long enough to be called in for any kind of meeting; I am sailing tomorrow morning or at least boarding ship."

It did not look as if the officer had listened. "So the procedure has not convinced you," he said to himself, smiling the way an old man smiles at a child's nonsense but hides his true thoughts behind the smile.

"Well, then it's time," he finally said, and his clear eyes, which contained some kind of challenge, some kind of appeal for cooperation, suddenly rested on the traveler.

"Time for what?" asked the traveler nervously, but received no answer.

"You are free," said the officer to the condemned man in his native language. The condemned did not believe it right off. "Well, you're free," said the officer. For the first time life actually came into the condemned man's face. Was it true? Was it merely a passing whim for the officer? Had the foreign traveler obtained clemency for him? What was it? That was what his face seemed to be asking. But not for long. Whatever it might be, he wanted, if he were allowed, to be really free and he began struggling to the extent that the harrow permitted.

"You're ripping my straps," shouted the officer. "Lie still! We're unbuckling them." And together with

the soldier, to whom he signaled, he got to work. The condemned man laughed to himself wordlessly; he kept turning his face alternately left, toward the officer, and right, toward the soldier, nor did he forget the traveler.

"Pull him out," the officer ordered the soldier. Care had to be taken on account of the harrow. Because of the condemned man's impatience there were already a few small rips in his back.

But from now on the officer paid him scant heed. He walked over to the traveler, pulled out his small leather portfolio again, leafed through the papers, finally located the page he was seeking, and showed it to the traveler. "Read this," he said.

"I can't," said the traveler, "I've already told you I can't read this."

"Just take a close look at the page," said the officer, stepping nearer to the traveler in order to read with him. But when that did not help either, then, as if the page must not be touched no matter what, he raised his little finger and moved it high across the paper to make it easier for the traveler to read. The traveler also made an effort to at least accommodate the officer, but it was impossible. Now the officer began to spell out the inscription and then he read out the words. "Be just!"—that is what it says," he said, "now you can read it."

The traveler bent so close to the paper that the officer, fearing any touch, pulled it further away. The traveler said nothing now, but it was obvious that he still could not read it. "'Be just!'—that's what it says," the officer repeated.

"Could be," said the traveler, "I believe that that is what it says."

"Fine," said the officer, at least partly satisfied, and climbed the ladder with the page. He very carefully bedded the page in the draftsman and apparently readjusted the gears entirely. It was very arduous work, some of the gears must have been very tiny; the officer had to examine the gear unit so precisely that at times his head vanished completely inside the draftsman.

The traveler uninterruptedly watched this work from below; his neck grew stiff, and his eyes smarted because the sky was streaming with sunlight. The soldier and the condemned man were occupied only with each other. The condemned man's shirt and trousers, already lying in the pit, were fished out on the point of the soldier's bayonet. The shirt was dreadfully filthy, and the condemned man washed it in the pail of water. When he then put on his shirt and trousers, both the soldier and the condemned man burst into loud guffaws because the backs of the garments were sliced in half. Perhaps the condemned man felt obliged to entertain the soldier; in his slashed clothes he turned all around in front of the soldier, who squatted on the ground, laughing and slapping his knees. Nevertheless they did restrain themselves out of deference to the gentlemen.

When the officer was eventually done up above, he smiled as he once more surveyed the whole apparatus in all its parts and shut the lid of the draftsman, which had been open until now. He climbed down, looked into the pit and then at the condemned man, who, he was pleased to note, had taken out his clothes. The

officer now went over to the pail of water to wash his hands, recognized the repulsive filth too late, felt sad that he could not wash his hands, finally plunged them into the sand (this surrogate did not satisfy him, but he had to make do), then stood up, and began unbuttoning his tunic. As he did so, the two ladies' handkerchiefs tucked under his collar fell into his hands. "Here are your handkerchiefs," he said, tossing them to the condemned man. And by way of explanation he told the traveler, "Gifts from the ladies."

Despite his obvious haste in discarding his tunic and then stripping down, he handled every clothing item very lovingly; his fingers even purposely stroked the silver piping on his service coat, shaking a tassel into place. It was, however, inconsistent with this caution that as soon as he was done handling an item, he angrily flung it into the pit. The last remaining object was his short sword with its belt. He drew the sword from its sheath, smashed it, then gathered everything together—the sword fragments, the sheath, and the belt—and hurled them away so violently that they banged against each other in the pit.

Now he stood there naked. The traveler bit his lips and said nothing. He knew what was about to happen, but he had no right to hinder the officer in any way. If the judicial procedure that the officer revered was really on the verge of being eliminated—possibly because of the traveler's intervention, which he considered his duty—then the officer's action now was entirely correct; the traveler would have acted no differently in his place.

At first the soldier and the condemned man under-

stood nothing, they were not even watching. The condemned man was delighted that he had gotten back the handkerchiefs, but he could not delight in them for long, because the soldier snatched them from him quickly and unforeseeably. Now the condemned man tried to pull them out from behind the soldier, who had stowed them in his belt, but the soldier was alert. Thus they fought half playfully. It was only when the officer was stark naked that they noticed him. The condemned man in particular seemed struck by an inkling of some great sudden change. What had happened to him before was now happening to the officer. Perhaps he would go all the way. The foreign traveler had probably given the order. So this was revenge. Without having suffered to the end he would nevertheless be avenged to the end. A broad, soundless grin now appeared on his face and did not vanish.

The officer, however, had turned to the machine. If it had been plain earlier that he quite understood the machine, it was now almost staggering to see him running it and the machine obeying him. His hand merely approached the harrow, and the harrow rose and dropped several times until it was in just the right position for receiving him; he merely touched the edge of the bed, and it already began quivering. The felt stump came toward his mouth, they saw that the officer did not really want to have it, but his qualms lasted only an instant, he promptly yielded and took it in. Everything was ready, only the straps still hung down the sides; but they were obviously unnecessary, the officer did not have to be strapped in. Now the condemned man noticed the loose straps, to his mind

the execution was incomplete unless the straps were buckled in; he eagerly signaled the soldier, and they ran over to strap in the officer. The officer had already stretched out one foot to kick the crank that started the draftsman. Now he saw that the two men had come; he therefore pulled back his foot and allowed himself to be strapped in. But now his foot could not reach the crank; neither the soldier nor the condemned man would find it, and the traveler was determined not to stir. It did not matter; hardly were the straps tightened when the machine began working; the bed quivered, the needles danced on the skin, the harrow floated up and down. The traveler had been staring at it for a while when it struck him that a gear in the draftsman should have been screaking; but everything was quiet, not the slightest humming could be heard.

Because of this stillness the machine simply escaped all notice. The traveler peered over at the soldier and the condemned man. The condemned man was the livelier of the two, everything about the machine interested him: he kept bending down or stretching out, constantly pointing his forefinger to show the soldier some detail. The traveler was annoyed. He was determined to see it through, but he would not have endured the sight of them for long. "Go home," he told them. The soldier might have been willing to do so, but the condemned man regarded the order as an out-and-out punishment. Clasping his hands he begged to be left here, and when the traveler shook his head, refusing to give in, the condemned man actually knelt down. The traveler saw that orders were

useless here, he decided to go across and drive the two men away. But then he heard a noise overhead, in the draftsman. He looked up. Was that cogwheel causing trouble after all? It was something else, however. Slowly the lid of the draftsman surged and then clapped wide open. The cogs of a gear surfaced and rose, soon the entire gear emerged; it was as if some tremendous force were squeezing the draftsman together, leaving no room for this gear. The gear turned all the way to the edge of the draftsman, fell down, trundled upright over a stretch of sand, and then lay flat. But now a further gear was already rising up above; it was followed by many others, large, small, and barely discernible ones. The same thing happened to all of them. Whenever the onlookers figured that the draftsman must be empty by now, a new, very large group appeared, rose, plummeted, trundled across the sand, and lay flat. During this process, the condemned man forgot all about the traveler's order, he was utterly absorbed in the gears; he kept trying to grab one, simultaneously urged the soldier to help him, but withdrew his hand in fright for another gear would promptly follow, terrifying him, at least when it began rolling.

The traveler, however, was alarmed; the machine was obviously falling to pieces; its tranquil operation was deceptive. He felt he had to look after the officer, since he could no longer take care of himself. But while the tumbling cogwheels had monopolized his attention, he had failed to observe the rest of the machine. Now, however, when, after the final gear had left the draftsman, he bent over the harrow, he

had a new and even harsher surprise. The harrow was not writing, it was only pricking, and the bed was not rolling the body, it was only lifting it, quivering, against the needles. The traveler wanted to do something, perhaps stop the machine: this was no torture, such as the officer was aiming for, it was full-blown murder. The traveler stretched out his hands. But the harrow with the forked-up body was already turning aside, which it normally did only in the twelfth hour. The blood flowed in a hundred streams—not mingled with water; the small water pipes had likewise failed this time. And now the very last element failed: the body did not separate from the long needles, it poured out its blood but dangled over the pit without dropping. The harrow was about to return to its old position, but as if noticing that it had not yet freed itself of its burden, it remained above the pit.

"Do something!" the traveler shouted at the soldier and the condemned man and grabbed the officer's feet himself. He wanted to push against the feet while the other two men grabbed the head at the opposite end so that the officer could be eased off the needles. But the two men could not make up their minds to come over; the prisoner even turned away. The traveler had to go over and violently shove them toward the officer's head. In so doing, he reluctantly saw the face of the corpse. It was as it had been in life; no sign of the promised redemption was perceptible; the officer had not found what all the others had found in the machine. His lips were squeezed tight, his eyes were open, with the same expression as in life, his gaze was calm and convinced, the point of the large iron spike had passed through the forehead.

When the traveler, with the soldier and the condemned man behind him, reached the first few houses in the colony, the soldier pointed to one, saying, "That's the teahouse."

On the ground floor of a house lay a deep, low, cavernous room with smoky walls and ceiling. It was open full-breadth toward the street. Even though it barely differed from the colony's other houses, which, except for the commander's palatial headquarters, were all very decrepit, the teahouse nevertheless looked like a historic relic to the traveler, and he felt the power of earlier times. He stepped closer, walked, followed by his companions, between the small, unoccupied tables on the street in front of the teahouse, and breathed in the cool, dank air coming from the interior.

"The old man is buried here," said the soldier. "The priest refused to let him lie in the cemetery. For a while they couldn't decide where to bury him. Finally they buried him here. The officer probably told you nothing about that, for naturally this is the thing he is most ashamed of. A few times he even tried to dig the old man up at night, but he was always chased away."

"Where is the grave?" asked the traveler, unable to believe the soldier. Instantly both the soldier and the condemned man ran ahead of him, stretching out their hands toward the location of the grave. They took the traveler all the way to the back wall, where patrons were seated at several tables. They were probably dockworkers, strong men with short, shiny black

beards. None of them wore a jacket, their shirts were ripped, they were poor, humiliated creatures. When the traveler approached, a few stood up, hugged the wall, and gazed at him.

"He's a foreigner," the whispers circled the traveler, "he wants to look at the grave." They pushed aside one of the tables, underneath which there actually was a gravestone. It was a simple stone, low enough to be concealed under a table. It bore an inscription in very tiny letters; the traveler had to kneel down to read it. It said: "Here lies the old commander. His followers, who must remain anonymous now, have dug him this grave and set up the stone. There is a prophecy that the commander will be resurrected after a certain number of years and lead his followers from this house to reconquer the colony. Have faith and abide!"

Upon reading this and getting to his feet, the traveler saw the men standing around him, smiling, as if they had read the inscription with him, had found it ridiculous, and were asking him to concur in their opinion. The traveler pretended not to notice. He distributed a few coins among them, waited until the table had been pushed back over the grave, left the teahouse, and headed toward the harbor.

In the teahouse, the soldier and the condemned man had found acquaintances, who held them back. But they must have soon shaken them off, for the traveler was still midway down the long stairway leading to the rowboats when they came running after him. They probably wanted to force the traveler to take them along in the last moment. While the traveler

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was below, negotiating with a ferryman to row him to the steamer, the two men dashed down the stairs, holding their tongues, for they did not dare shout. But by the time they arrived below, the traveler was already in the rowboat, and the ferryman was already casting off. They might have jumped into the boat, but the traveler pulled up a heavy, knotted rope from the floor and threatened them with it, thereby preventing them from jumping in.

In philosophic phase
Tried words like moron child.

#### Again he paused. How did the thing end? Wait-

Thus mindless beast All treasuring of vowels and consonants Saves up a miracle of bad advice And lets it filter whisper, heartbeat out One lisping murmur at a time.

So one night soon someone sits up Hears sharp bell ring, lifts phone And hears a Voice like Holy Ghost Gone far in nebulae That Beast upon the wire, Which with sibilance and savorings Down continental madnesses of time Says Hell and O And then Hell-o.

#### He took a breath and finished:

To such Creation
Such dumb brute lost Electric Beast,
What is your wise reply?

He sat silently.

He sat, a man eighty years old. He sat in an empty room in an empty house on an empty street in an empty town on the empty planet Mars.

He sat as he had sat now for fifty years, waiting. On the table in front of him lay a telephone that had not rung for a long, long time.

It trembled now with some secret preparation. Perhaps that trembling had summoned forth the poem

haps that trembling had summoned forth the p

His nostrils twitched. His eyes flared wide. The phone shivered ever so softly. He leaned forward, staring at it. The phone ... rang.

### NIGHT CALL, COLLECT

What made the old poem run in his mind he could not guess, but run it did:

Suppose and then suppose and then suppose That wires on the far-slung telephone black poles Sopped up the billion-flooded words they heard Each night all night and saved the sense And meaning of it all.

He stopped. What next? Ah, yes ...

Then, jigsaw in the night, Put all together and

He leapt up and back, the chair fell to the floor. He cried out: cried out:

"No!"

The phone rang again.

"Noi"

He wanted to reach out, he did reach out and knock the thing off the table. It fell out of the cradle at the exact moment of its third ring.

"No ... oh, no, no," he said softly, hands covering his chest, head wagging, the telephone at his feet. "It

can't be ... can't be ... ?

For after all, he was alone in a room in an empty house in an empty town on the planet Mars where no one was alive, only he lived, he was King of the Barren Hill ...

And yet ...

... Barton ..."

Someone called his name.

No. Some thing buzzed and made a noise of crickets and cicadas in far desertlands.

Barton? he thought. Why ... why that's me!

He hadn't heard anyone say his name in so long he had quite forgot. He was not one for ambling about calling himself by name. He had never-

"Barton," said the phone. "Barton. Barton. Barton."

"Shut up!!" he cried.

And kicked the receiver and bent sweating, panting, to put the phone back on its cradle.

No sooner did he do this than the damned thing

rang again.

This time he made a fist around it, squeezed it, as if to throttle the sound, but at last, seeing his knuckles burn color away to whiteness, let go and picked up the receiver.

"Barton," said a far voice, a billion miles away.

He waited until his heart had beat another three times and then said:

"Barton here," he said.

"Well, well," said the voice, only a million miles away now. "Do you know who this is?"

"Christ," said the old man. "The first call I've had

in half a lifetime, and we play games."

"Sorry. How stupid of me. Of course you wouldn't recognize your own voice on the telephone. No one ever does. We are accustomed, all of us, to hearing our voice conducted through the bones of our head. Barton, this is Barton."

"What?"

"Who did you think it was?" said the voice. "A rocket captain? Did you think someone had come to rescue you?"

"No."

"What's the date?" "July 20, 2097."

"Good Lord. Fifty years! Have you been sitting there that long waiting for a rocket to come from Earth?"

The old man nodded.

"Now, old man, do you know who I am?"

"Yes." He trembled. "I remember. We are one, I am Emil Barton and you are Emil Barton."

"With one difference. You're eighty, I'm only twen-

ty. All of life before me!"

The old man began to laugh and then to cry. He sat holding the phone like a lost and silly child in his fingers. The conversation was impossible, and should not be continued, yet he went on with it. When he got hold of himself he held the phone close and said, "You there! Listen, oh God, if I could warn you! How can I? You're only a voice. If I could show you how lonely the years are. End it, kill yourself! Don't wait! If you knew what it is to change from the thing you are to the thing that is me, today, here, now, at this end."

"Impossible!" The voice of the young Barton laughed, far away. "I've no way to tell if you ever get this call. This is all mechanical. You're talking to a transcription, no more. This is 2037. Sixty years in your past. Today, the atom war started on Earth. All colonials were called home from Mars, by rocket. I got left behind!"

"I remember," whispered the old man.

"Alone on Mars," laughed the young voice. "A month, a year, who cares? There are foods and books. In my spare time I've made transcription libraries of ten thousand words, responses, my voice, connected to phone relays. In later months I'll call, have someone to talk with."

"Yes."

"Sixty years from now my own tapes will ring me up. I don't really think I'll be here on Mars that long, it's just a beautiful ironic idea of mine, something to pass the time. Is that really you, Barton? Is that really me?"

Tears fell from the old man's eyes. "Yes."

"I've made a thousand Bartons, tapes, sensitive to all questions, in one thousand Martian towns. An army of Bartons over Mars, while I wait for the rockets to return."

"Fool." The old man shook his head, wearily. "You waited sixty years. You grew old waiting, always alone. And now you've become me and you're still

alone in the empty cities."

"Don't expect my sympathy. You're like a stranger, off in another country. I can't be sad. I'm alive when I make these tapes. And you're alive when you hear them. Both of us, to the other, incomprehensible. Neither can warn the other, even though both respond, one to the other, one automatically, the other warmly and humanly. I'm human now. You're human later. It's insane. I can't cry, because not knowing the future I can only be optimistic. These hidden tapes can only react to a certain number of stimuli from you. Can you ask a dead man to weep?"

"Stop it!" cried the old man. He felt the familiar seizures of pain. Nausea moved through him, and blackness. "Oh God, but you were heartless. Go

awav!"

"Were, old man? I am. As long as the tapes glide on, as long as spindles and hidden electronic eyes read and select and convert words to send to you, I'll be young and cruel. I'll go on being young and cruel long after you're dead. Good-bye."

"Wait!" cried the old man.

Click.

Barton sat holding the silent phone a long time. His

heart gave him intense pain.

What insanity it had been. In his youth how silly, how inspired, those first secluded years, fixing the telephonic brains, the tapes, the circuits, scheduling calls on time relays:

The phone bell.

"Morning, Barton. This is Barton. Seven o'clock. Rise and shine!"

Again!

"Barton? Barton calling. You're to go to Mars Town at noon. Install a telephonic brain. Thought I'd remind you."

"Thanks." The bell!

"Barton? Barton. Have lunch with me? The Rocket Inn?"

"Right."

"See you. So long!" Brrrrinnnnng!

"That you, B.? Thought I'd cheer you. Firm chin, and all that. The rescue rocket might come tomorrow, to save us."

"Yes, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow,"

Click.

But the years had burned into smoke. Barton had muted the insidious phones and their clever, clever repartee. They were to call him only after he was eighty, if he still lived. And now today, the phone ringing, the past breathing in his ear, whispering, remembering.

The phone! He let it ring.

I don't have to answer it, he thought.

The bell!

There's no one there at all, he thought.

The ringing!

It's like talking to yourself, he thought. But different. Oh God, how different.

He felt his hands lift the phone.

"Hello, old Barton, this is young Barton, I'm twentyone today! In the last year I've put voice-brains in two hundred more towns. I've populated Mars with Bartons!"

"Yes." The old man remembered those nights six decades ago, rushing over blue hills and into iron valleys, with a truckful of machinery, whistling, happy. Another telephone, another relay. Something to do. Something clever and wonderful and sad. Hidden voices. Hidden, hidden. In those young days when death was not death, time was not time, old age a faint echo from the long cavern of years ahead. That young idiot, that sadistic fool, never thinking someday he might reap this harvest.

"Last night," said Barton, aged twenty-one, "I sat alone in a movie theater in an empty town. I played an old Laurel and Hardy. God, how I laughed."

"Yes."

"I got an idea. I recorded my voice one thousand times on one tape. Broadcast from the town, it sounds like a thousand people. A comforting noise, the noise of a crowd. I fixed it so doors slam in town, children sing, music boxes play, all by clockworks. If I don't look out the window, if I just listen, it's all right. But if I look, it spoils the illusion. I guess I'm getting lonely."

The old man said, "That was your first sign."

"What?"

"The first time you admitted you were lonely."

"I've experimented with smells. As I walk the empty streets, the smell of bacon, eggs, ham, fillets, come from the houses. All done with hidden machines."

"Madness."

"Self-protection!"

"I'm tired." Abruptly, the old man hung up. It was too much. The past drowning him . . .

Swaying, he moved down the tower stairs to the streets of the town.

The town was dark. No longer did red neons burn, music play, or cooking smells linger. Long ago he had abandoned the fantasy of the mechanical lie. Listen! Are those footsteps? Smell! Isn't that strawberry pie! He had stopped it all.

He moved to the canal where the stars shone in the

quivering waters.

Underwater, in row after fishlike row, rusting, were the robot population of Mars he had constructed over the years, and, in a wild realization of his own insane inadequacy, had commanded to march, one two three four! into the canal deeps, plunging, bubbling like sunken bottles. He had killed them and shown no remorse.

Faintly a phone rang in a lightless cottage.

He walked on. The phone ceased.

Another cottage ahead rang its bell as if it knew of his passing. He began to run. The ringing stayed behind. Only to be taken up by a ringing from now this house-now that, now here, there! He darted on. Another phone!

"All right!" he shrieked, exhausted. "I'm coming!"

"Hello, Barton."

"What do you want!"

"I'm lonely. I only live when I speak. So I must speak. You can't shut me up forever."

"Leave me alone!" said the old man, in horror.

"Oh, my heart!"

"This is Barton, age twenty-four. Another couple of years gone. Waiting. A little lonelier. I've read War and Peace, drunk sherry, run restaurants with myself as waiter, cook, entertainer. Tonight, I star in a film at the Tivoli-Emil Barton in Love's Labor Lost, playing all the parts, some with wigs!"

"Stop calling me-or I'll kill you!"

"You can't kill me. You'll have to find me, first!"

"I'll find you!"

"You've forgotten where you hid me. I'm every-

where, in boxes, houses, cables, towers, underground! Go ahead, try! What'll you call it? Telecide? Suicide? Jealous, are you? Jealous of me here, only twentyfour, bright-eyed, strong, young. All right, old man, it's war! Between us. Between me! A whole regiment of us, all ages from against you, the real one. Go ahead, declare war!"

"I'll kill you!" Click, Silence.

He threw the phone out the window.

In the midnight cold, the automobile moved in deep valleys. Under Barton's feet on the floorboard were revolvers, rifles, dynamite. The roar of the car was in his thin, tired bones.

I'll find them, he thought, and destroy all of them.

Oh, God, how can he do this to me?

He stopped the car. A strange town lay under the

late moons. There was no wind.

He held the rifle in his cold hands. He peered at the poles, the towers, the boxes. Where was this town's voice hidden? That tower? Or that one there! So many years ago. He turned his head now this way, now that, wildly.

He raised the rifle.

The tower fell with the first bullet.

All of them, he thought. All of the towers in this town will have to be cut apart. I've forgotten. Too long.

The car moved along the silent street.

A phone rang.

He looked at the deserted drugstore.

A phone.

Pistol in hand, he shot the lock off the door, and entered.

Click.

"Hello, Barton? Just a warning. Don't try to rip down all the towers, blow things up. Cut your own throat that way. Think it over ...?

Click.

He stepped out of the phone booth slowly and

moved into the street and listened to the telephone towers humming high in the air, still alive, still untouched. He looked at them and then he understood.

He could not destroy the towers. Suppose a rocket came from Earth, impossible idea, but suppose it came tonight, tomorrow, next week? And landed on the other side of the planet, and used the phones to try to call Barton, only to find the circuits dead?

Barton dropped his gun.

"A rocket won't come," he argued, softly with himself, "I'm old. It's too late."

But suppose it came, and you never knew, he thought. No, you've got to keep the lines open.

Again, a phone ringing.

He turned dully. He shuffled back into the drugstore and fumbled with the receiver.

"Hello?" A strange voice.

"Please," said the old man, "don't bother me."

"Who's this, who's there? Who is it? Where are you?" cried the voice, surprised.

"Wait a minute." The old man staggered. "This is

Emil Barton, who's that?"

"This is Captain Rockwell, Apollo Rocket 48. Just arrived from Earth."

"No, no, no."

"Are you there, Mr. Barton?"

"No, no, it can't be." "Where are you?"

"You're lying!" The old man had to lean against the booth. His eyes were cold blind. "It's you, Barton, making fun of me, lying again!"

"This is Captain Rockwell. Just landed. In New

Chicago. Where are you?"

"In Green Villa," he gasped. "That's six hundred miles from you."

"Look, Barton, can you come here?"

"What?"

"We've repairs on our rocket. Exhausted from the flight. Can you come help?"

"Yes, yes."

"We're at the field outside town. Can you come by tomorrow?"

"Yes, but-"
"Well?"

The old man petted the phone. "How's Earth? How's New York? Is the war over? Who's President now? What happened?"

"Plenty of time for gossip when you arrive."

"Is everything fine?"

"Fine."

"Thank God." The old man listened to the far voice. "Are you sure you're Captain Rockwell?"

"Dammit, man!"
"I'm sorry!"

He hung up and ran.

They were here, after many years, unbelievable, his own people who would take him back to Earth's seas and skies and mountains.

He started the car. He would drive all night. It would be worth a risk, to see people, to shake hands, to hear them again.

The car thundered in the hills.

That voice. Captain Rockwell. It couldn't be himself, forty years ago. He had never made a recording like that. Or had he? In one of his depressive fits, in a spell of drunken cynicism, hadn't he once made a false tape of a false landing on Mars with a synthetic captain, an imaginary crew? He jerked his head, savagely. No. He was a suspicious fool. Now was no time to doubt. He must run with the moons of Mars, all night. What a party they would have!

The sun rose. He was immensely tired, full of thorns and brambles, his heart plunging, his fingers fumbling the wheel, but the thing that pleased him most was the thought of one last phone call: Hello, young Barton, this is old Barton. I'm leaving for

Earth today! Rescued! He smiled weakly.

He drove into the shadowy limits of New Chicago at sundown. Stepping from his car he stood staring at the rocket tarmac, rubbing his reddened eyes. The rocket field was empty. No one ran to meet him. No one shook his hand, shouted, or laughed.

He felt his heart roar. He knew blackness and a sensation of falling through the open sky. He stumbled toward an office.

Inside, six phones sat in a neat row.

He waited, gasping. Finally: the bell.

He lifted the heavy receiver.

A voice said, "I was wondering if you'd get there alive."

The old man did not speak but stood with the phone in his hands.

The voice continued, "Captain Rockwell reporting for duty. Your orders, sir?"

"You," groaned the old man.
"How's your heart, old man?"

"No!"

"Had to eliminate you some way, so I could live, if you call a transcription living."

"I'm going out now," replied the old man. "I don't care. I'll blow up everything until you're all dead!"

"You haven't the strength. Why do you think I had

you travel so far, so fast? This is your last trip!"

The old man felt his heart falter. He would never make the other towns. The war was lost. He slid into a chair and made low, mournful noises with his mouth. He glared at the five other phones. As if at a signal, they burst into chorus! A nest of ugly birds screaming!

Automatic receivers popped up.

The office whirled. "Barton, Barton, Barton!"

He throttled a phone in his hands. He choked it and still it laughed at him. He beat it. He kicked it. He furled the hot wire like serpentine in his fingers, ripped it. It fell about his stumbling feet.

He destroyed three other phones. There was a sud-

den silence.

And as if his body now discovered a thing which it had long kept secret, it seemed to sink upon his tired bones. The flesh of his eyelids fell away like petals. His mouth withered. The lobes of his ears were melting wax. He pushed his chest with his hands and fell face down. He lay still. His breathing stopped. His heart stopped.

After a long spell, the remaining two phones rang.

A relay snapped somewhere. The two phone voices were connected, one to the other.

"Hello, Barton?"
"Yes, Barton?"

"Aged twenty-four."

"I'm twenty-six. We're both young. What's happened?"

"I don't know, Listen."

The silent room. The old man did not stir on the floor. The wind blew in the broken window. The air was cool.

"Congratulate me, Barton, this is my twenty-sixth

birthday!"

"Congratulations!"

The voices sang together, about birthdays, and the singing blew out the window, faintly, faintly, into the dead city.

## The Things They Carried

irst Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried letters from a girl named Martha, a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey. They were not love letters, but Lieutenant Cross was hoping, so he kept them folded in plastic at the bottom of his rucksack. In the late afternoon, after a day's march, he would dig his foxhole, wash his hands under a canteen, unwrap the letters, hold them with the tips of his fingers, and spend the last hour of light pretending. He would imagine romantic camping trips into the White Mountains in New Hampshire. He would sometimes taste the envelope flaps, knowing her tongue had been there. More than anything, he wanted Martha to love him as he loved her, but the letters were mostly chatty, elusive on the matter of love. She was a virgin, he was almost sure. She was an English major at Mount Sebastian, and she wrote beautifully about her professors and roommates and midterm exams, about her respect for Chaucer and her great affection for Virginia Woolf. She often quoted lines of poetry; she never mentioned the war,

except to say, Jimmy, take care of yourself. The letters weighed 10 ounces. They were signed Love, Martha, but Lieutenant Cross understood that Love was only a way of signing and did not mean what he sometimes pretended it meant. At dusk, he would carefully return the letters to his rucksack. Slowly, a bit distracted, he would get up and move among his men, checking the perimeter, then at full dark he would return to his hole and watch the night and wonder if Martha was a virgin.

The things they carried were largely determined by necessity. Among the necessities or near-necessities were P-38 can openers, pocket knives, heat tabs, wristwatches, dog tags, mosquito repellent, chewing gum, candy, cigarettes, salt tablets, packets of Kool-Aid, lighters, matches, sewing kits, Military Payment Certificates, C rations, and two or three canteens of water. Together, these items weighed between 15 and 20 pounds, depending upon a man's habits or rate of metabolism. Henry Dobbins, who was a big man, carried extra rations; he was especially fond of canned peaches in heavy syrup over pound cake. Dave Jensen, who practiced field hygiene, carried a toothbrush, dental floss, and several hotel-sized bars of soap he'd stolen on R&R in Sydney, Australia. Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried tranquilizers until he was shot in the head outside the village of Than Khe in mid-April. By necessity, and because it was SOP, they all carried steel helmets that weighed 5 pounds including the liner and camouflage cover. They carried the standard fatigue jackets and trousers. Very few carried underwear. On their feet they

carried jungle boots—2.1 pounds—and Dave Jensen carried three pairs of socks and a can of Dr. Scholl's foot powder as a precaution against trench foot. Until he was shot, Ted Lavender carried 6 or 7 ounces of premium dope, which for him was a necessity. Mitchell Sanders, the RTO, carried condoms. Norman Bowker carried a diary. Rat Kilev carried comic books. Kiowa, a devout Baptist, carried an illustrated New Testament that had been presented to him by his father, who taught Sunday school in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. As a hedge against bad times, however, Kiowa also carried his grandmother's distrust of the white man, his grandfather's old hunting hatchet. Necessity dictated. Because the land was mined and booby-trapped, it was SOP for each man to carry a steel-centered, nyloncovered flak jacket, which weighed 6.7 pounds, but which on hot days seemed much heavier. Because you could die so quickly, each man carried at least one large compress bandage, usually in the helmet band for easy access. Because the nights were cold, and because the monsoons were wet, each carried a green plastic poncho that could be used as a raincoat or groundsheet or makeshift tent. With its quilted liner, the poncho weighed almost 2 pounds, but it was worth every ounce. In April, for instance, when Ted Lavender was shot, they used his poncho to wrap him up, then to carry him across the paddy, then to lift him into the chopper that took him away.

They were called legs or grunts.

To carry something was to hump it, as when Lieutenant Jimmy Cross humped his love for Martha up the hills

and through the swamps. In its intransitive form, to hump meant to walk, or to march, but it implied burdens far beyond the intransitive.

Almost everyone humped photographs. In his wallet, Lieutenant Cross carried two photographs of Martha. The first was a Kodacolor snapshot signed Love, though he knew better. She stood against a brick wall. Her eyes were gray and neutral, her lips slightly open as she stared straight-on at the camera. At night, sometimes, Lieutenant Cross wondered who had taken the picture, because he knew she had boyfriends, because he loved her so much. and because he could see the shadow of the picture-taker spreading out against the brick wall. The second photograph had been clipped from the 1968 Mount Sebastian yearbook. It was an action shot—women's volleyball—and Martha was bent horizontal to the floor, reaching, the palms of her hands in sharp focus, the tongue taut, the expression frank and competitive. There was no visible sweat. She wore white gym shorts. Her legs, he thought, were almost certainly the legs of a virgin, dry and without hair, the left knee cocked and carrying her entire weight, which was just over 100 pounds. Lieutenant Cross remembered touching that left knee. A dark theater, he remembered, and the movie was Bonnie and Clyde, and Martha wore a tweed skirt, and during the final scene, when he touched her knee, she turned and looked at him in a sad, sober way that made him pull his hand back, but he would always remember the feel of the tweed skirt and the knee beneath it and the sound of the gunfire that killed Bonnie and Clyde, how embarrassing it was, how slow and oppressive. He remembered kissing her good night at the dorm door. Right then, he thought, he should've done something brave. He should've carried her up the stairs to her room and tied her to the bed and touched that left knee all night long. He should've risked it. Whenever he looked at the photographs, he thought of new things he should've done.

What they carried was partly a function of rank, partly of field specialty.

As a first lieutenant and platoon leader, Jimmy Cross carried a compass, maps, code books, binoculars, and a .45-caliber pistol that weighed 2.9 pounds fully loaded. He carried a strobe light and the responsibility for the lives of his men.

As an RTO, Mitchell Sanders carried the PRC-25 radio, a killer, 26 pounds with its battery.

As a medic, Rat Kiley carried a canvas satchel filled with morphine and plasma and malaria tablets and surgical tape and comic books and all the things a medic must carry, including M&M's for especially bad wounds, for a total weight of nearly 20 pounds.

As a big man, therefore a machine gunner, Henry Dobbins carried the M-60, which weighed 23 pounds unloaded, but which was almost always loaded. In addition, Dobbins carried between 10 and 15 pounds of ammunition draped in belts across his chest and shoulders.

As PFCs or Spec 4s, most of them were common grunts and carried the standard M-16 gas-operated assault rifle. The weapon weighed 7.5 pounds unloaded, 8.2 Pounds with its full 20-round magazine. Depending on numerous factors, such as topography and psychology, the

riflemen carried anywhere from 12 to 20 magazines, usually in cloth bandoliers, adding on another 8.4 pounds at minimum, 14 pounds at maximum. When it was available, they also carried M-16 maintenance gear-rods and steel brushes and swabs and tubes of LSA oil-all of which weighed about a pound. Among the grunts, some carried the M-79 grenade launcher, 5.9 pounds unloaded, a reasonably light weapon except for the ammunition, which was heavy. A single round weighed 10 ounces. The typical load was 25 rounds. But Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried 34 rounds when he was shot and killed outside Than Khe, and he went down under an exceptional burden, more than 20 pounds of ammunition, plus the flak jacket and helmet and rations and water and toilet paper and tranquilizers and all the rest, plus the unweighed fear. He was dead weight. There was no twitching or flopping. Kiowa, who saw it happen, said it was like watching a rock fall, or a big sandbag or something-just boom, then down-not like the movies where the dead guy rolls around and does fancy spins and goes ass over teakettlenot like that, Kiowa said, the poor bastard just flat-fuck fell. Boom. Down. Nothing else. It was a bright morning in mid-April. Lieutenant Cross felt the pain. He blamed himself. They stripped off Lavender's canteens and ammo, all the heavy things, and Rat Kiley said the obvious, the guy's dead, and Mitchell Sanders used his radio to report one U.S. KIA and to request a chopper. Then they wrapped Lavender in his poncho. They carried him out to a dry paddy, established security, and sat smoking the dead man's dope until the chopper came. Lieutenant Cross kept to himself. He pictured Martha's smooth young face,

thinking he loved her more than anything, more than his men, and now Ted Lavender was dead because he loved her so much and could not stop thinking about her. When the dustoff arrived, they carried Lavender aboard. Afterward they burned Than Khe. They marched until dusk, then dug their holes, and that night Kiowa kept explaining how you had to be there, how fast it was, how the poor guy just dropped like so much concrete. Boom-down, he said. Like cement.

In addition to the three standard weapons—the M-60. M-16, and M-79—they carried whatever presented itself, or whatever seemed appropriate as a means of killing or staying alive. They carried catch-as-catch-can. At various times, in various situations, they carried M-14s and CAR-15s and Swedish Ks and grease guns and captured AK-47s and Chi-Coms and RPGs and Simonov carbines and black market Uzis and .38-caliber Smith & Wesson handguns and 66 mm LAWs and shotguns and silencers and blackjacks and bayonets and C-4 plastic explosives. Lee Strunk carried a slingshot; a weapon of last resort, he called it. Mitchell Sanders carried brass knuckles. Kiowa carried his grandfather's feathered hatchet. Every third or fourth man carried a Claymore antipersonnel mine—3.5 pounds with its firing device. They all carried fragmentation grenades— 14 ounces each. They all carried at least one M-18 colored smoke grenade—24 ounces. Some carried CS or tear gas grenades. Some carried white phosphorus grenades. They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried.

In the first week of April, before Lavender died, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross received a good-luck charm from Martha. It was a simple pebble, an ounce at most. Smooth to the touch, it was a milky white color with flecks of orange and violet, oval-shaped, like a miniature egg. In the accompanying letter, Martha wrote that she had found the pebble on the Jersey shoreline, precisely where the land touched water at high tide, where things came together but also separated. It was this separate-but-together quality, she wrote, that had inspired her to pick up the pebble and to carry it in her breast pocket for several days, where it seemed weightless, and then to send it through the mail, by air, as a token of her truest feelings for him. Lieutenant Cross found this romantic. But he wondered what her truest feelings were, exactly, and what she meant by separatebut-together. He wondered how the tides and waves had come into play on that afternoon along the Jersey shoreline when Martha saw the pebble and bent down to rescue it from geology. He imagined bare feet. Martha was a poet, with the poet's sensibilities, and her feet would be brown and bare, the toenails unpainted, the eyes chilly and somber like the ocean in March, and though it was painful, he wondered who had been with her that afternoon. He imagined a pair of shadows moving along the strip of sand where things came together but also separated. It was phantom jealousy, he knew, but he couldn't help himself. He loved her so much. On the march, through the hot days of early April, he carried the pebble in his mouth, turning it with his tongue, tasting sea salt and moisture. His mind

wandered. He had difficulty keeping his attention on the war. On occasion he would yell at his men to spread out the column, to keep their eyes open, but then he would slip away into daydreams, just pretending, walking barefoot along the Jersey shore, with Martha, carrying nothing. He would feel himself rising. Sun and waves and gentle winds, all love and lightness.

What they carried varied by mission.

When a mission took them to the mountains, they carried mosquito netting, machetes, canvas tarps, and extra bug juice.

If a mission seemed especially hazardous, or if it involved a place they knew to be bad, they carried everything they could. In certain heavily mined AOs, where the land was dense with Toe Poppers and Bouncing Betties, they took turns humping a 28-pound mine detector. With its headphones and big sensing plate, the equipment was a stress on the lower back and shoulders, awkward to handle, often useless because of the shrapnel in the earth, but they carried it anyway, partly for safety, partly for the illusion of safety.

On ambush, or other night missions, they carried peculiar little odds and ends. Kiowa always took along his New Testament and a pair of moccasins for silence. Dave Jensen carried night-sight vitamins high in carotene. Lee Strunk carried his slingshot; ammo, he claimed, would never be a problem. Rat Kiley carried brandy and M&M's candy. Until he was shot, Ted Lavender carried the starlight scope, which weighed 6.3 pounds with its aluminum

carrying case. Henry Dobbins carried his girlfriend's pantyhose wrapped around his neck as a comforter. They all carried ghosts. When dark came, they would move out single file across the meadows and paddies to their ambush coordinates, where they would quietly set up the Claymores and lie down and spend the night waiting.

Other missions were more complicated and required

special equipment. In mid-April, it was their mission to search out and destroy the elaborate tunnel complexes in the Than Khe area south of Chu Lai. To blow the tunnels. they carried one-pound blocks of pentrite high explosives, four blocks to a man, 68 pounds in all. They carried wiring, detonators, and battery-powered clackers. Dave Jensen carried earplugs. Most often, before blowing the tunnels, they were ordered by higher command to search them, which was considered bad news, but by and large they just shrugged and carried out orders. Because he was a big man, Henry Dobbins was excused from tunnel duty. The others would draw numbers. Before Lavender died there were 17 men in the platoon, and whoever drew the number 17 would strip off his gear and crawl in headfirst with a flashlight and Lieutenant Cross's .45-caliber pistol. The rest of them would fan out as security. They would sit down or kneel, not facing the hole, listening to the ground beneath them, imagining cobwebs and ghosts, whatever was down there—the tunnel walls squeezing in—how the flashlight seemed impossibly heavy in the hand and how it was tunnel vision in the very strictest sense, compression in all ways, even time, and how you had to wiggle in-ass and elbows—a swallowed-up feeling—and how you found yourself worrying about odd things: Will your flashlight go

dead? Do rats carry rabies? If you screamed, how far would the sound carry? Would your buddies hear it? Would they have the courage to drag you out? In some respects, though not many, the waiting was worse than the tunnel itself. Imagination was a killer.

On April 16, when Lee Strunk drew the number 17. he laughed and muttered something and went down quickly. The morning was hot and very still. Not good, Kiowa said. He looked at the tunnel opening, then out across a dry paddy toward the village of Than Khe. Nothing moved. No clouds or birds or people. As they waited, the men smoked and drank Kool-Aid, not talking much, feeling sympathy for Lee Strunk but also feeling the luck of the draw. You win some, you lose some, said Mitchell Sanders, and sometimes you settle for a rain check. It was a tired line and no one laughed.

Henry Dobbins ate a tropical chocolate bar. Ted Lavender popped a tranquilizer and went off to pee.

After five minutes, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross moved to the tunnel, leaned down, and examined the darkness. Trouble, he thought—a cave-in maybe. And then suddenly, without willing it, he was thinking about Martha. The stresses and fractures, the quick collapse, the two of them buried alive under all that weight. Dense, crushing love. Kneeling, watching the hole, he tried to concentrate on Lee Strunk and the war, all the dangers, but his love was too much for him, he felt paralyzed, he wanted to sleep inside her lungs and breathe her blood and be smothered. He wanted her to be a virgin and not a virgin, all at once. He wanted to know her. Intimate secrets: Why poetry? Why so sad? Why that grayness in her eyes? Why so alone? Not

The cheekbone was gone. Oh shit, Rat Kiley said, the guy's dead. The guy's dead, he kept saying, which seemed profound—the guy's dead. I mean really.

lonely, just alone—riding her bike across campus or sitting off by herself in the cafeteria—even dancing, she danced alone—and it was the aloneness that filled him with love. He remembered telling her that one evening. How she nodded and looked away. And how, later, when he kissed her, she received the kiss without returning it, her eyes wide open, not afraid, not a virgin's eyes, just flat and uninvolved.

Lieutenant Cross gazed at the tunnel. But he was not there. He was buried with Martha under the white sand at the Jersey shore. They were pressed together, and the pebble in his mouth was her tongue. He was smiling. Vaguely, he was aware of how quiet the day was, the sullen paddies, yet he could not bring himself to worry about matters of security. He was beyond that. He was just a kid at war, in love. He was twenty-four years old. He couldn't help it.

A few moments later Lee Strunk crawled out of the tunnel. He came up grinning, filthy but alive. Lieutenant Cross nodded and closed his eyes while the others clapped Strunk on the back and made jokes about rising from the dead.

Worms, Rat Kiley said. Right out of the grave. Fuckin' zombie.

The men laughed. They all felt great relief.

Spook city, said Mitchell Sanders.

Lee Strunk made a funny ghost sound, a kind of moaning, yet very happy, and right then, when Strunk made that high happy moaning sound, when he went *Ahhooooo*, right then Ted Lavender was shot in the head on his way back from peeing. He lay with his mouth open. The teeth were broken. There was a swollen black bruise under his left eye.

The things they carried were determined to some extent by superstition. Lieutenant Cross carried his good-luck pebble. Dave Jensen carried a rabbit's foot. Norman Bowker, otherwise a very gentle person, carried a thumb that had been presented to him as a gift by Mitchell Sanders. The thumb was dark brown, rubbery to the touch, and weighed 4 ounces at most. It had been cut from a VC corpse, a boy of fifteen or sixteen. They'd found him at the bottom of an irrigation ditch, badly burned, flies in his mouth and eyes. The boy wore black shorts and sandals. At the time of his death he had been carrying a pouch of rice, a rifle, and three magazines of ammunition.

You want my opinion, Mitchell Sanders said, there's a definite moral here.

He put his hand on the dead boy's wrist. He was quiet for a time, as if counting a pulse, then he patted the stomach, almost affectionately, and used Kiowa's hunting hatchet to remove the thumb.

Henry Dobbins asked what the moral was.

Moral?

You know. Moral.

Sanders wrapped the thumb in toilet paper and handed it across to Norman Bowker. There was no blood. Smiling, he kicked the boy's head, watched the flies scatter, and said, It's like with that old TV show—Paladin. Have gun, will travel.

Henry Dobbins thought about it. Yeah, well, he finally said. I don't see no moral. There it is, man. Fuck off.

They carried USO stationery and pencils and pens. They carried Sterno, safety pins, trip flares, signal flares, spools of wire, razor blades, chewing tobacco, liberated joss sticks and statuettes of the smiling Buddha, candles, grease pencils, The Stars and Stripes, fingernail clippers, Psy Ops leaflets, bush hats, bolos, and much more. Twice a week, when the resupply choppers came in, they carried hot chow in green mermite cans and large canvas bags filled with iced beer and soda pop. They carried plastic water containers, each with a 2-gallon capacity. Mitchell Sanders carried a set of starched tiger fatigues for special occasions. Henry Dobbins carried Black Flag insecticide. Dave Jensen carried empty sandbags that could be filled at night for added protection. Lee Strunk carried tanning lotion. Some things they carried in common. Taking turns, they carried the big PRC-77 scrambler radio, which weighed 30 pounds with its battery. They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often, they carried each other, the wounded or weak. They carried infections. They carried chess sets, basketballs, Vietnamese-English dictionaries, insignia of rank, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts, plastic cards imprinted with the Code of Conduct. They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the

land itself-Vietnam, the place, the soil-a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules. By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared, but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the rivers and up again and down, just humping, one step and then the next and then another, but no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was anatomy, and the war was entirely a matter of posture and carriage, the hump was everything, a kind of inertia, a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and hope and human sensibility. Their principles were in their feet. Their calculations were biological. They had no sense of strategy or mission. They searched the villages without knowing what to look for, not caring, kicking over jars of rice, frisking children and old men, blowing tunnels. sometimes setting fires and sometimes not, then forming up and moving on to the next village, then other villages. where it would always be the same. They carried their own lives. The pressures were enormous. In the heat of early afternoon, they would remove their helmets and flak jackets, walking bare, which was dangerous but which helped ease the strain. They would often discard things along the route of march. Purely for comfort, they would throw away

rations, blow their Claymores and grenades, no matter, because by nightfall the resupply choppers would arrive with more of the same, then a day or two later still more, fresh watermelons and crates of ammunition and sunglasses and woolen sweaters—the resources were stunning—sparklers for the Fourth of July, colored eggs for Easter—it was the great American war chest-the fruits of science, the smokestacks, the canneries, the arsenals at Hartford, the Minnesota forests, the machine shops, the vast fields of corn and wheat-they carried like freight trains; they carried it on their backs and shoulders-and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry.

After the chopper took Lavender away, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross led his men into the village of Than Khe. They burned everything. They shot chickens and dogs, they trashed the village well, they called in artillery and watched the wreckage, then they marched for several hours through the hot afternoon, and then at dusk, while Kiowa explained how Lavender died, Lieutenant Cross found himself trembling.

He tried not to cry. With his entrenching tool, which weighed 5 pounds, he began digging a hole in the earth.

He felt shame. He hated himself. He had loved Martha more than his men, and as a consequence Lavender was now dead, and this was something he would have to carry like a stone in his stomach for the rest of the war.

All he could do was dig. He used his entrenching tool

like an ax, slashing, feeling both love and hate, and then later, when it was full dark, he sat at the bottom of his foxhole and wept. It went on for a long while. In part, he was grieving for Ted Lavender, but mostly it was for Martha, and for himself, because she belonged to another world, which was not quite real, and because she was a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey, a poet and a virgin and uninvolved, and because he realized she did not love him and never would.

Like cement, Kiowa whispered in the dark. I swear to God-boom, down. Not a word.

I've heard this, said Norman Bowker.

A pisser, you know? Still zipping himself up. Zapped while zipping.

All right, fine. That's enough.

Yeah, but you had to see it, the guy just-

I heard, man. Cement. So why not shut the fuck up?

Kiowa shook his head sadly and glanced over at the hole where Lieutenant Jimmy Cross sat watching the night. The air was thick and wet. A warm dense fog had settled over the paddies and there was the stillness that precedes rain.

After a time Kiowa sighed.

One thing for sure, he said. The lieutenant's in some deep hurt. I mean that crying jag—the way he was carrying on—it wasn't fake or anything, it was real heavy-duty hurt. The man cares.

Sure, Norman Bowker said.

Say what you want, the man does care.

We all got problems.

Not Lavender.

No. I guess not, Bowker said. Do me a favor, though.

Shut up?

That's a smart Indian. Shut up.

Shrugging, Kiowa pulled off his boots. He wanted to say more, just to lighten up his sleep, but instead he opened his New Testament and arranged it beneath his head as a pillow. The fog made things seem hollow and unattached. He tried not to think about Ted Lavender, but then he was thinking how fast it was, no drama, down and dead, and how it was hard to feel anything except surprise. It seemed unchristian. He wished he could find some great sadness, or even anger, but the emotion wasn't there and he couldn't make it happen. Mostly he felt pleased to be alive. He liked the smell of the New Testament under his cheek, the leather and ink and paper and glue, whatever the chemicals were. He liked hearing the sounds of night. Even his fatigue, it felt fine, the stiff muscles and the prickly awareness of his own body, a floating feeling. He enjoyed not being dead. Lying there, Kiowa admired Lieutenant Jimmy Cross's capacity for grief. He wanted to share the man's pain, he wanted to care as Jimmy Cross cared. And yet when he closed his eyes, all he could think was Boom-down, and all he could feel was the pleasure of having his boots off and the fog curling in around him and the damp soil and the Bible smells and the plush comfort of night.

After a moment Norman Bowker sat up in the dark.

What the hell, he said. You want to talk, talk. Tell it to me.

Forget it.

No, man, go on. One thing I hate, it's a silent Indian.

For the most part they carried themselves with poise, a kind of dignity. Now and then, however, there were times of panic, when they squealed or wanted to squeal but couldn't, when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said Dear Jesus and flopped around on the earth and fired their weapons blindly and cringed and sobbed and begged for the noise to stop and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and to God and to their mothers and fathers, hoping not to die. In different ways, it happened to all of them. Afterward. when the firing ended, they would blink and peek up. They would touch their bodies, feeling shame, then quickly hiding it. They would force themselves to stand. As if in slow motion, frame by frame, the world would take on the old logic—absolute silence, then the wind, then sunlight, then voices. It was the burden of being alive. Awkwardly, the men would reassemble themselves, first in private, then in groups, becoming soldiers again. They would repair the leaks in their eyes. They would check for casualties, call in dustoffs, light cigarettes, try to smile, clear their throats and spit and begin cleaning their weapons. After a time someone would shake his head and say, No lie, I almost shit my pants, and someone else would laugh, which meant it was bad, yes, but the guy had obviously not shit his pants. it wasn't that bad, and in any case nobody would ever do such a thing and then go ahead and talk about it. They would squint into the dense, oppressive sunlight. For a few

moments, perhaps, they would fall silent, lighting a joint and tracking its passage from man to man, inhaling, holding in the humiliation. Scary stuff, one of them might say. But then someone else would grin or flick his eyebrows and say, Roger-dodger, almost cut me a new asshole, *almost*.

There were numerous such poses. Some carried themselves with a sort of wistful resignation, others with pride or stiff soldierly discipline or good humor or macho zeal. They were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid to show it.

They found jokes to tell.

They used a hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness. Greased they'd say. Offed, lit up, zapped while zipping. It wasn't cruelty, just stage presence. They were actors. When someone died, it wasn't quite dying, because in a curious way it seemed scripted, and because they had their lines mostly memorized, irony mixed with tragedy, and because they called it by other names, as if to encyst and destroy the reality of death itself. They kicked corpses. They cut off thumbs. They talked grunt lingo. They told stories about Ted Lavender's supply of tranquilizers, how the poor guy didn't feel a thing, how incredibly tranquil he was.

There's a moral here, said Mitchell Sanders.

They were waiting for Lavender's chopper, smoking the dead man's dope.

The moral's pretty obvious, Sanders said, and winked. Stay away from drugs. No joke, they'll ruin your day every time.

Cute, said Henry Dobbins.

Mind blower, get it? Talk about wiggy. Nothing left, just blood and brains.

They made themselves laugh.

There it is, they'd say. Over and over—there it is, my friend, there it is—as if the repetition itself were an act of poise, a balance between crazy and almost crazy, knowing without going, there it is, which meant be cool, let it ride, because Oh yeah, man, you can't change what can't be changed, there it is, there it absolutely and positively and fucking well is.

They were tough.

They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing-these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight. They carried shameful memories. They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained, the instinct to run or freeze or hide, and in many respects this was the heaviest burden of all, for it could never be put down, it required perfect balance and perfect posture. They carried their reputations. They carried the soldier's greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment. They crawled into tunnels and walked point and advanced under fire. Each morning, despite the unknowns, they made their legs move. They endured. They kept humping. They did not submit to the obvious alternative, which was simply to close the eyes and fall. So easy, really. Go limp and tumble to the ground and let the muscles unwind and not speak and not budge until your buddies picked you up and lifted you into the chopper that would roar and dip its nose and carry you off to the

world. A mere matter of falling, yet no one ever fell. It was not courage, exactly; the object was not valor. Rather, they were too frightened to be cowards.

By and large they carried these things inside, maintaining the masks of composure. They sneered at sick call. They spoke bitterly about guys who had found release by shooting off their own toes or fingers. Pussies, they'd say. Candy-asses. It was fierce, mocking talk, with only a trace of envy or awe, but even so the image played itself out behind their eyes.

They imagined the muzzle against flesh. So easy: squeeze the trigger and blow away a toe. They imagined it. They imagined the quick, sweet pain, then the evacuation to Japan, then a hospital with warm beds and cute geisha nurses.

And they dreamed of freedom birds.

At night, on guard, staring into the dark, they were carried away by jumbo jets. They felt the rush of takeoff. Gone! they yelled. And then velocity-wings and engines—a smiling stewardess—but it was more than a plane, it was a real bird, a big sleek silver bird with feathers and talons and high screeching. They were flying. The weights fell off; there was nothing to bear. They laughed and held on tight, feeling the cold slap of wind and altitude, soaring, thinking It's over, I'm gone!—they were naked, they were light and free-it was all lightness, bright and fast and buoyant, light as light, a helium buzz in the brain, a giddy bubbling in the lungs as they were taken up over the clouds and the war, beyond duty, beyond gravity and mortification and global entanglements—Sin loi! they yelled. I'm sorry, motherfuckers, but I'm out of it, I'm goofed, I'm on a

space cruise, I'm gone!—and it was a restful, unencumbered sensation, just riding the light waves, sailing that big silver freedom bird over the mountains and oceans, over America, over the farms and great sleeping cities and cemeteries and highways and the golden arches of McDonald's, it was flight, a kind of fleeing, a kind of falling, falling higher and higher, spinning off the edge of the earth and beyond the sun and through the vast, silent vacuum where there were no burdens and where everything weighed exactly nothing-Gone! they screamed. I'm sorry but I'm gone!-and so at night, not quite dreaming, they gave themselves over to lightness, they were carried, they were purely borne.

On the morning after Ted Lavender died, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross crouched at the bottom of his foxhole and burned Martha's letters. Then he burned the two photographs. There was a steady rain falling, which made it difficult, but he used heat tabs and Sterno to build a small fire, screening it with his body, holding the photographs over the tight blue flame with the tips of his fingers.

He realized it was only a gesture. Stupid, he thought. Sentimental, too, but mostly just stupid.

Lavender was dead. You couldn't burn the blame.

Besides, the letters were in his head. And even now, without photographs, Lieutenant Cross could see Martha playing volleyball in her white gym shorts and yellow T-shirt. He could see her moving in the rain.

When the fire died out, Lieutenant Cross pulled his poncho over his shoulders and ate breakfast from a can.

There was no great mystery, he decided.

In those burned letters Martha had never mentioned the war, except to say, Jimmy, take care of yourself. She wasn't involved. She signed the letters Love, but it wasn't love, and all the fine lines and technicalities did not matter. Virginity was no longer an issue. He hated her. Yes, he did. He hated her. Love, too, but it was a hard, hating kind of love.

The morning came up wet and blurry. Everything seemed part of everything else, the fog and Martha and the deepening rain.

He was a soldier, after all.

Half smiling, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross took out his maps. He shook his head hard, as if to clear it, then bent forward and began planning the day's march. In ten minutes, or maybe twenty, he would rouse the men and they would pack up and head west, where the maps showed the country to be green and inviting. They would do what they had always done. The rain might add some weight, but otherwise it would be one more day layered upon all the other days.

He was realistic about it. There was that new hardness in his stomach. He loved her but he hated her.

No more fantasies, he told himself.

Henceforth, when he thought about Martha, it would be only to think that she belonged elsewhere. He would shut down the daydreams. This was not Mount Sebastian, it was another world, where there were no pretty poems or midterm exams, a place where men died because of carelessness and gross stupidity. Kiowa was right. Boom-down, and you were dead, never partly dead.

Briefly, in the rain, Lieutenant Cross saw Martha's gray eyes gazing back at him.

He understood.

It was very sad, he thought. The things men carried inside. The things men did or felt they had to do.

He almost nodded at her, but didn't.

Instead he went back to his maps. He was now determined to perform his duties firmly and without negligence. It wouldn't help Lavender, he knew that, but from this point on he would comport himself as an officer. He would dispose of his good-luck pebble. Swallow it, maybe, or use Lee Strunk's slingshot, or just drop it along the trail. On the march he would impose strict field discipline. He would be careful to send out flank security, to prevent straggling or bunching up, to keep his troops moving at the proper pace and at the proper interval. He would insist on clean weapons. He would confiscate the remainder of Lavender's dope. Later in the day, perhaps, he would call the men together and speak to them plainly. He would accept the blame for what had happened to Ted Lavender. He would be a man about it. He would look them in the eyes, keeping his chin level, and he would issue the new SOPs in a calm, impersonal tone of voice, a lieutenant's voice, leaving no room for argument or discussion. Commencing immediately, he'd tell them, they would no longer abandon equipment along the route of march. They would police up their acts. They would get their shit together, and keep it together, and maintain it neatly and in good working order.

He would not tolerate laxity. He would show strength, distancing himself.

Among the men there would be grumbling, of course, and maybe worse, because their days would seem longer and their loads heavier, but Lieutenant Jimmy Cross reminded himself that his obligation was not to be loved but to lead. He would dispense with love; it was not now a factor. And if anyone quarreled or complained, he would simply tighten his lips and arrange his shoulders in the correct command posture. He might give a curt little nod. Or he might not. He might just shrug and say, Carry on, then they would saddle up and form into a column and move out toward the villages west of Than Khe.

## The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar

1

Henry Sugar was forty-one years old and unmarried. He was also wealthy.

He was wealthy because he had had a rich father, who was now dead. He was unmarried because he was too selfish to share any of his money with a wife.

He was six feet two inches tall, but he wasn't really as

good-looking as he thought he was.

He paid a great deal of attention to his clothes. He went to an expensive tailor for his suits, to a shirtmaker for his shirts, and to a bootmaker for his shoes.

He used a costly aftershave on his face, and he kept his hands soft with a cream that contained turtle oil.

His hairdresser trimmed his hair once every ten days, and

he always took a manicure at the same time.

His upper front teeth had been capped at incredible expense because the originals had had a rather nasty yellowish tinge. A small mole had been removed from his left cheek by a plastic surgeon.

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He drove a Ferrari car that must have cost him about the same as a country cottage.

He lived in London in the summer, but as soon as the first frosts appeared in October, he was off to the West Indies or the South of France, where he stayed with friends. All his friends were wealthy from inherited money.

Henry had never done a day's work in his life, and his personal motto, which he had invented himself, was this: It is better to incur a mild rebuke than to perform an onerous task. His friends thought this was hilarious.

Men like Henry Sugar are to be found drifting like seaweed all over the world. They can be seen especially in London, New York, Paris, Nassau, Montego Bay, Cannes and St. Tropez. They are not particularly bad men. But they are not good men either. They are of no real importance. They are simply a part of the decoration.

All of them, all wealthy people of this type, have one peculiarity in common: they have a terrific urge to make themselves still wealthier than they already are. The million is never enough. Nor is the two million. Always, they have this insatiable longing to get more money. And that is because they live in constant terror of waking up one morning and finding there's nothing in the bank.

These people all employ the same methods for trying to increase their fortunes. They buy stocks and shares, and watch them going up and down. They play roulette and blackjack for high stakes in casinos. They bet on horses. They bet on just about everything. Henry Sugar had once staked a thousand pounds on the result of a tortoise race on Lord Liverpool's tennis lawn. And he had wagered double that sum with a man called Esmond Hanbury on an even sillier bet, which was as follows: They let Henry's dog out into the garden and watched it through the window. But before the dog was let out, each man had to guess beforehand

what would be the first object the dog would lift its leg against. Would it be a wall, a post, a bush or a tree? Esmond chose a wall. Henry, who had been studying his dog's habits for days with a view to making this particular bet, chose a tree, and he won the money.

With ridiculous games such as these did Henry and his friends try to conquer the deadly boredom of being both idle and wealthy.

Henry himself, as you may have noticed, was not above cheating a little on these friends of his if he saw the chance. The bet with the dog was definitely not honest. Nor, if you want to know, was the bet on the tortoise race. Henry cheated on that one by secretly forcing a little sleeping-pill powder into the mouth of his opponent's tortoise an hour before the race.

And now that you've got a rough idea of the sort of person Henry Sugar was, I can begin my story.

One summer weekend, Henry drove down from London to Guilford to stay with Sir William Wyndham. The house was magnificent, and so were the grounds, but when Henry arrived on that Saturday afternoon, it was already pelting with rain. Tennis was out, croquet was out. So was swimming in Sir William's outdoor pool. The host and his guests sat glumly in the drawing room, staring at the rain splashing against the windows. The very rich are enormously resentful of bad weather. It is the one discomfort that their money cannot do anything about.

Somebody in the room said, "Let's have a game of canasta for lovely high stakes."

The others thought that a splendid idea, but as there were five people in all, one would have to sit out. They cut the cards. Henry drew the lowest, the unlucky card.

The other four sat down and began to play. Henry was annoyed at being out of the game. He wandered out of the

drawing room into the great hall. He stared at the pictures for a few moments, then he walked on through the house, bored to death and having nothing to do. Finally, he mooched into the library.

Sir William's father had been a famous book collector. and all four walls of this huge room were lined with books from floor to ceiling. Henry Sugar was not impressed. He wasn't even interested. The only books he read were detective novels and thrillers. He ambled aimlessly round the room, looking to see if he could find any of the sort of books he liked. But the ones in Sir William's library were all leather-bound volumes with names on them like Balzac. Ibsen, Voltaire, Johnson and Pepys. Boring rubbish, the whole lot of it, Henry told himself. And he was just about to leave when his eye was caught and held by a book that was quite different from all the others. It was so slim he would never have noticed it if it hadn't been sticking out a little from the ones on either side. And when he pulled it from the shelf, he saw that it was actually nothing more than a cardboard-covered exercise book of the kind children use at school. The cover was dark blue, but there was nothing written on it. Henry opened the exercise book. On the first page, handprinted in ink, it said:

A REPORT ON AN INTERVIEW WITH IMHRAT KHAN,
THE MAN WHO COULD SEE WITHOUT HIS EYES
BY JOHN F. CARTWRIGHT, M.D.
BOMBAY, INDIA DECEMBER 1934

That sounds mildly interesting, Henry told himself. He turned over a page. What followed was all handwritten in black ink. The writing was clear and neat. Henry read the first two pages standing up. Suddenly, he found himself wanting to read on. This was good stuff. It was fascinating.

He carried the little book over to a leather armchair by the window and settled himself comfortably. Then he started reading again from the beginning.

2

This is what Henry read in the little blue exercise book:

I, John Cartwright, am a surgeon at Bombay General Hospital. On the morning of the second of December, 1934, I was in the doctors' rest room having a cup of tea. There were three other doctors there with me, all having a well-earned tea break. They were Dr. Marshall, Dr. Phillips and Dr. Macfarlane. There was a knock on the door. "Come in," I said.

The door opened and an Indian came in who smiled at us and said, "Excuse me, please. Could I ask you gentlemen a favor?"

The doctors' rest room was a most private place. Nobody other than a doctor was allowed to enter it except in an emergency.

"This is a private room," Dr. Macfarlane said sharply.

"Yes, yes," he answered. "I know that and I am very sorry to be bursting in like this, sirs, but I have a most interesting thing to show you."

All four of us were pretty annoyed and we didn't say anything.

"Gentlemen," he said. "I am a man who can see without using his eyes."

We still didn't invite him to go on. But we didn't kick him out either.

"You can cover my eyes in any way you wish," he said.
"You can bandage my head with fifty bandages and I will still
be able to read you a book."

He seemed perfectly serious. I felt my curiosity beginning

to stir. "Come here," I said. He came over to me. "Turn around." He turned around. I placed my hands firmly over his eyes, holding the lids closed. "Now," I said, "one of the other doctors in the room is going to hold up some fingers. Tell me how many he's holding up."

Dr. Marshall held up seven fingers.

"Seven," the Indian said.

"Once more," I said.

Dr. Marshall clenched both fists and hid all his fingers.

"No fingers," the Indian said.

I removed my hands from his eyes. "Not bad," I said.

"Hold on," Dr. Marshall said. "Let's try this." There was a doctor's white coat hanging from a peg on the door. Dr. Marshall took it down and rolled it into a sort of long scarf. He then wound it around the Indian's head and held the ends tight at the back. "Try him now," Dr. Marshall said.

I took a key from my pocket. "What is this?" I asked.

"A key," he answered.

I put the key back and held up an empty hand. "What is this object?" I asked him.

"There isn't any object," the Indian said. "Your hand is empty."

Dr. Marshall removed the covering from the man's eyes. "How do you do it?" he asked. "What's the trick?"

"There is no trick," the Indian said. "It is a genuine thing that I have managed after years of training."

"What sort of training?" I asked.

"Forgive me, sir," he said, "but that is a private matter."

"Then why did you come here?" I asked.

"I came to request a favor of you," he said.

The Indian was a tall man of about thirty with light brown skin the color of a coconut. He had a small black moustache. Also, there was a curious matting of black hair growing all

over the outsides of his ears. He wore a white cotton robe, and he had sandals on his bare feet.

"You see, gentlemen," he went on. "I am at present earning my living by working in a traveling theater, and we have just arrived here in Bombay. Tonight we give our opening performance."

"Where do you give it?" I asked.

"In the Royal Palace Hall," he answered. "In Acacia Street. I am the star performer. I am billed on the program as 'Imhrat Khan, the man who sees without his eyes.' And it is my duty to advertise the show in a big way. If we don't sell tickets, we don't eat."

"What does this have to do with us?" I asked him.

"Very interesting for you," he said. "Lots of fun. Let me explain. You see, whenever our theater arrives in a new town, I myself go straight to the largest hospital and I ask the doctors there to bandage my eyes. I ask them to do it in the most expert fashion. They must make sure my eyes are completely covered many times over. It is important that this job is done by doctors, otherwise people will think I am cheating. Then, when I am fully bandaged, I go out into the street and I do a dangerous thing."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"What I mean is that I do something that is extremely dangerous for someone who cannot see."

"What do you do?" I asked.

"It is very interesting," he said. "And you will see me do it if you will be so kind as to bandage me up first. It would be a great favor to me if you will do this little thing, sirs."

I looked at the other three doctors. Dr. Phillips said he had to go back to his patients. Dr. Macfarlane said the same. Dr. Marshall said, "Well, why not? It might be amusing. It won't take a minute."

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"I'm with you," I said. "But let's do the job properly. Let's make absolutely sure he can't peep."

"You are extremely kind," the Indian said. "Please do whatever you wish."

Dr. Phillips and Dr. Macfarlane left the room.

"Before we bandage him," I said to Dr. Marshall, "let's first of all seal down his eyelids. When we've done that, we'll fill his eye sockets with something soft and solid and sticky."

"Such as what?" Dr. Marshall asked.

"What about dough?"

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"Dough would be perfect," Dr. Marshall said.

"Right," I said. "If you will nip down to the hospital bakery and get some dough, I'll take him into the surgery and seal his lids."

I led the Indian out of the rest room and down the long hospital corridor to the surgery. "Lie down there," I said, indicating the high bed. He lay down. I took a small bottle from the cupboard. It had an eyedropper in the top. "This is something called colodion," I told him. "It will harden over your closed eyelids so that it is impossible for you to open them."

"How do I get it off afterward?" he asked me.

"Alcohol will dissolve it away quite easily," I said. "It's perfectly harmless. Close your eyes now."

The Indian closed his eyes. I applied colodion to both lids. "Keep them closed," I said. "Wait for it to harden."

In a couple of minutes, the colodion had made a hard film over the eyelids, sticking them down tight. "Try to open them," I said.

He tried but couldn't.

Dr. Marshall came in with a basin of dough. It was the ordinary white dough used for baking bread. It was nice and soft. I took a lump of the dough and plastered it over one of the Indian's eyes. I filled the whole socket and let the dough overlap onto the surrounding skin. Then I pressed the edges down hard. I did the same with the other eve.

"That isn't too uncomfortable, is it?" I asked.

"No," the Indian said. "It's fine."

"You do the bandaging," I said to Dr. Marshall. "My fingers are too sticky."

"A pleasure," Dr. Marshall said. "Watch this." He took a thick wad of cotton wool and laid it on top of the Indian's dough-filled eyes. The cotton-wool stuck to the dough and stayed in place. "Sit down, please," Dr. Marshall said.

The Indian sat on the bed.

Dr. Marshall took a roll of three-inch bandage and proceeded to wrap it round and round the man's head. The bandage held the cotton wool and the dough firmly in place. Dr. Marshall pinned the bandage. After that, he took a second bandage and began to wrap that one not only around the man's eyes but around his entire face and head.

"Please to leave my nose free for breathing," the Indian said.

"Of course," Dr. Marshall answered. He finished the job and pinned down the end of the bandage. "How's that?" he asked.

"Splendid," I said. "There's no way he can possibly see through that."

The whole of the Indian's head was now swathed in thick white bandage, and the only thing you could see was the end of the nose sticking out. He looked like a man who had had some terrible brain operation.

"How does that feel?" Dr. Marshall asked him.

"It feels good," the Indian said. "I must compliment you gentlemen on doing such a fine job."

"Off you go, then," Dr. Marshall said, grinning at me. "Show us how clever you are at seeing things now."

The Indian got off the bed and walked straight to the door. He opened the door and went out.

"Great Scott!" I said. "Did you see that? He put his hand

right on the doorknob?"

Dr. Marshall had stopped grinning. His face had suddenly gone white. "I'm going after him," he said, rushing for the door. I rushed for the door as well.

The Indian was walking quite normally along the hospital corridor. Dr. Marshall and I were about five yards behind him. And very spooky it was to watch this man with the enormous white and totally bandaged head strolling casually along the corridor just like anyone else. It was especially spooky when you knew for a certainty that his eyelids were sealed, that his eye sockets were filled with dough, and that there was a great wad of cotton wool and bandages on top of that.

I saw a native orderly coming along the corridor toward the Indian. He was pushing a food trolley. Suddenly the orderly caught sight of the man with the white head, and he froze. The bandaged Indian stepped casually to one side of the trolley and went on.

"He saw it!" I cried. "He must have seen that trolley! He walked right round it! This is absolutely unbelievable!"

Dr. Marshall didn't answer me. His cheeks were white, his whole face rigid with shocked disbelief.

The Indian came to the stairs and started to go down them. He went down with no trouble at all. He didn't even put a hand on the handrail. Several people were coming up the stairs. Each of them stopped, gasped, stared and quickly got out of the way.

At the bottom of the stairs, the Indian turned right and headed for the doors that led out into the street. Dr. Marshall and I kept close behind him.

The entrance to our hospital stands back a little from the street, and there is a rather grand series of steps leading down from the entrance into a small courtyard with acacia trees around it. Dr. Marshall and I came out into the blazing sunshine and stood at the top of the steps. Below us, in the courtyard, we saw a crowd of maybe a hundred people. At least half of them were barefoot children, and as our whiteheaded Indian walked down the steps, they all cheered and shouted and surged toward him. He greeted them by holding both hands above his head.

Suddenly I saw the bicycle. It was over to one side at the bottom of the steps, and a small boy was holding it. The bicycle itself was quite ordinary, but on the back of it, fixed somehow to the rear wheel frame, was a huge placard, about five feet square. On the placard were written the following words:

Imhrat Khan, The Man Who Sees Without His Eyes! Today my eyes have been bandaged by hospital doctors! Appearing Tonight and all this week at The Royal Palace Hall, Acacia Street, at 7 P. M. Don't miss it! You will see miracles performed!

Our Indian had reached the bottom of the steps and now he walked straight over to the bicycle. He said something to the boy, and the boy smiled. The Indian mounted the bicycle. The crowd made way for him. Then, lo and behold, this fellow with the blocked-up bandaged eyes now proceeded to ride across the courtyard and straight out into the bustling honking traffic of the street beyond! The crowd cheered louder than ever. The barefoot children ran after him, squealing and laughing. For a minute or so, we were able to keep him in sight. We saw him riding superbly down

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the busy street with cars whizzing past him and a bunch of children running in his wake. Then he turned a corner and was gone.

"I feel quite giddy," Dr. Marshall said. "I can't bring myself to believe it."

"We have to believe it," I said. "He couldn't possibly have removed the dough from under the bandages. We never let him out of our sight. And as for unsealing his eyelids, that job would take him five minutes with cotton wool and alcohol."

"Do you know what I think," Dr. Marshall said. "I think we have witnessed a miracle."

We turned and walked slowly back into the hospital.

3

For the rest of the day, I was kept busy with patients in the hospital. At six in the evening, I came off duty and drove back to my flat for a shower and a change of clothes. It was the hottest time of year in Bombay, and even after sundown the heat was like an open furnace. If you sat still in a chair and did nothing, the sweat would come seeping out of your skin. Your face glistened with dampness all day long and your shirt stuck to your chest. I took a long cool shower. I drank a whiskey and soda sitting on the veranda, with only a towel around my waist. Then I put on some clean clothes.

At ten minutes to seven, I was outside the Royal Palace Hall in Acacia Street. It was not much of a place. It was one of those smallish seedy halls that can be hired inexpensively for meetings or dances. There was a fair-sized crowd of local Indians milling around outside the ticket office, and a large poster over the entrance proclaimed that THEINTERNATIONAL THEATER COMPANY was performing every night that week. It said there would be jugglers and conjurors and acrobats and

sword swallowers and fire eaters and snake charmers and a one-act play entitled *The Rajah and the Tiger Lady*. But above all this and in by far the largest letters, it said IMHRAT KHAN, THE MIRACLE MAN WHO SEES WITHOUT HIS EYES.

I bought a ticket and went in.

The show lasted two hours. To my surprise, I thoroughly enjoyed it. All the performers were excellent. I liked the man who juggled with cooking utensils. He had a saucepan, a frying pan, a baking tray, a huge plate and a casserole pot all flying through the air at the same time. The snake charmer had a big green snake that stood almost on the tip of its tail and swayed to the music of his flute. The fire eater ate fire and the sword swallower pushed a thin-pointed rapier at least four feet down his throat and into his stomach. Last of all, to a great fanfare of trumpets, our friend Imhrat Khan came on to do his act. The bandages we had put on him at the hospital had now been removed.

Members of the audience were called onto the stage to blindfold him with sheets and scarves and turbans, and in the end there was so much material wrapped around his head he could hardly keep his balance. He was then given a revolver. A small boy came out and stood at the left of the stage. I recognized him as the one who had held the bicycle outside the hospital that morning. The boy placed a tin can on the top of his head and stood quite still. The audience became deathly silent as Imhrat Khan took aim. He fired. The bang made us all jump. The tin can flew off the boy's head and clattered to the floor. The boy picked it up and showed the bullet hole to the audience. Everyone clapped and cheered. The boy smiled.

Then the boy stood against a wooden screen and Imhrat Khan threw knives all around his body, most of them going very close indeed. This was a splendid act. Not many people could have thrown knives with such accuracy even with

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their eyes uncovered, but here he was, this extraordinary fellow, with his head so swathed in sheets it looked like a great snowball on a stick, and he was flicking the sharp knives into the screen within a hairsbreadth of the boy's head. The boy smiled all the way through the act, and when it was over the audience stamped its feet and screamed with excitement.

Imhrat Khan's last act, though not so spectacular, was even more impressive. A metal barrel was brought on stage. The audience was invited to examine it, to make sure there were no holes. There were no holes. The barrel was then placed over Imhrat Khan's already bandaged head. It came down over his shoulders and as far as his elbows, pinning the upper part of his arms to his sides. But he could still hold out his forearms and his hands. Someone put a needle in one of his hands and a length of cotton thread in the other. With no false moves, he neatly threaded the cotton through the eye of the needle. I was flabbergasted.

As soon as the show was over, I made my way backstage. I found Imhrat Khan in a small but clean dressing room, sitting quietly on a wooden stool. The little Indian boy was unwinding the mass of scarves and sheets from around his head.

"Ah," he said. "It is my friend the doctor from the hospital. Come in, sir, come in."

"I saw the show," I said.

"And what did you think?"

"I liked it very much. I thought you were wonderful."

"Thank you," he said. "That is a high compliment."

"I must congratulate your assistant as well," I said, nodding to the small boy. "He is very brave."

"He cannot speak English," the Indian said. "But I will

tell him what you said." He spoke rapidly to the boy in Hindustani, and the boy nodded solemnly but said nothing.

"Look," I said. "I did you a small favor this morning. Would you do me one in return? Would you consent to come out and have supper with me?"

All the wrappings were off his head now. He smiled at me and said, "I think you are feeling curious, doctor. Am I not right?"

"Very curious," I said. "I'd like to talk to you."

Once again, I was struck by the peculiarly thick matting of black hair growing on the outsides of his ears. I had not seen anything quite like it on another person. "I have never been questioned by a doctor before," he said. "But I have no objection. It would be a pleasure to have supper with you."

"Shall I wait in the car?"

"Yes, please," he said. "I must wash myself and get out of these dirty clothes."

I told him what my car looked like and said I would be

waiting outside.

He emerged fifteen minutes later, wearing a clean white cotton robe and the ususal sandals on his bare feet. And soon the two of us were sitting comfortably in a small restaurant that I sometimes went to because it made the best curry in the city. I drank beer with my curry. Imhrat Khan drank lemonade.

"I am not a writer," I said to him, "I am a doctor. But if you will tell me your story from the beginning, if you will explain to me how you developed this magical power of being able to see without your eyes, I will write it down as faithfully as I can. And then, perhaps, I can get it published in the *British Medical Journal* or even in some famous magazine. And because I am a doctor and not just some writer trying to sell a

story for money, people will be far more inclined to take seriously what I say. It would help you, wouldn't it, to become better known?"

"It would help me very much," he said. "But why should you want to do this?"

"Because I am madly curious," I answered. "That is the only reason."

Imhrat Khan took a mouthful of curried rice and chewed it slowly. Then he said, "Very well, my friend. I will do it."

"Splendid!" I cried. "Let's go back to my flat as soon as we've finished eating and then we can talk without anyone disturbing us."

We finished our meal. I paid the bill. Then I drove Imhrat Khan back to my flat.

4

In the living room, I got out paper and pencils so that I could make notes. I have a sort of private shorthand of my own that I use for taking down the medical history of patients, and with it I am able to record most of what a person says if he doesn't speak too quickly. I think I got just about everything Imhrat Khan said to me that evening, word for word, and here it is. I give it to you exactly as he spoke it:

"I am an Indian, a Hindu," said Imhrat Khan, "and I was born in Akhnur, in Kashmir State, in 1905. My family is poor and my father worked as a ticket inspector on the railway. When I was a small boy of thirteen, an Indian conjuror comes to our school and gives a performance. His name, I remember, is Professor Moor—all conjurors in India call themselves 'professor'—and his tricks are very good. I am tremendously impressed. I think it is real magic. I feel—how shall I call it—I feel a powerful wish to learn about this

magic myself, so two days later I run away from home determined to find and to follow my new hero, Professor Moor. I take all my savings, fourteen rupees, and only the clothes I am wearing. I am wearing a white dhoti and sandals. This is 1918 and I am thirteen years old.

"I find out that Professor Moor has gone to Lahore, two hundred miles away, so all alone, I take a ticket, third class, and I get on the train and follow him. In Lahore, I discover the Professor. He is working at his conjuring in a very cheap-type show. I tell him of my admiration and offer myself to him as assistant. He accepts me. My pay? Ah yes, my pay is eight annas a day.

"The Professor teaches me to do the linking-rings trick and my job is to stand in the street before the theater dressed in funny clothes doing the linking rings and calling to the people to come in and see the show.

"For six whole weeks this is very fine. It is much better than going to school. But then what a terrible bombshell I receive when suddenly it comes to me that there is no real magic in Professor Moor, that all is trickery and quickness of the hand. Immediately the Professor is no longer my hero. I lose every bit of interest in my job, but at the same time my whole mind becomes filled with a very strong longing. I long above all things to find out about the real magic and to discover something about the strange power which is called yoga.

"To do this, I must find a yogi who is willing to let me become his disciple. This is not going to be easy. True yogis do not grow on trees. There are very few of them in the whole of India. Also, they are fanatically religious people. Therefore, if I am to have success in finding a teacher, I too would have to pretend to be a very religious man.

"No, I am actually not religious. And because of that, I am

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what you would call a bit of a cheat. I wanted to acquire yoga powers purely for selfish reasons. I wanted to use these powers to get fame and fortune.

"Now this was something the true yogi would despise more than anything in the world. In fact, the true yogi believes that any yogi who misuses his powers will die an early and sudden death. A yogi must never perform in public. He must practice his art only in absolute privacy and as a religious service, otherwise he will be smitten to death. This I did not believe and I still don't.

"So now my search for a yogi instructor begins. I leave Professor Moor and go to a town called Amritsar in the Punjab, where I join a traveling theater company. I have to make a living while I am searching for the secret, and already I have had success in amateur acting at my school. So for three years I travel with this theater group all over the Punjab and by the end of it, when I am sixteen and a half years old, I am playing top of the bill. All the time I am saving money and now I have altogether a very great sum, two thousand rupees.

"It is at that moment that I hear news of a man called Banerjee. This Banerjee, it is said, is one of the truly great yogis of India, and he possesses extraordinary yoga powers. Above all, people are telling of how he has acquired the rare power of levitation, so that when he prays his whole body leaves the ground and becomes suspended in the air eighteen inches from the soil.

"Ah-ha, I think. This surely is the man for me. This Banerjee is the one that I must seek. So at once I take my savings and leave the theater company and make my way to Rikhikesh, on the banks of the Ganges, where rumor says that Banerjee is living.

"For six months I search for Banerjee. Where is he? Where? Where is Banerjee? Ah yes, they say in Rikhikesh,

Banerjee has certainly been in town, but that is a while ago, and even then no one saw him: And now? Now Banerjee has gone to another place. What other place? Ah well, they say, how can one know that. How indeed? How can one know about the movements of such a one as Banerjee. Does he not live a life of absolute seclusion? Does he not? And I say yes. Yes, yes, yes. Of course. That is obvious. Even to me.

"I spend all my savings trying to find this Banerjee, all except thirty-five rupees. But it is no good. However, I stay in Rikhikesh and make a living by doing ordinary conjuring tricks for small groups and suchlike. These are the tricks I have learned from Professor Moor and by nature my sleight of hand is very good.

"Then one day, there I am sitting in the small hotel in Rikhikesh and again I hear talk of the yogi Banerjee. A traveler is saying how he has heard that Banerjee is now living in the jungle, not so very far away, but in the dense jungle and all alone.

"But where?

"The traveler is not sure where. Possibly, he says, it is over there, in that direction, north of the town, and he points with his finger.

"Well, that is enough for me. I go to the market and begin to bargain for hiring a tonga, which is a horse and cart, and the transaction is just being completed with the driver when up comes a man who has been standing listening nearby and he says that he too is going in that direction. He asks can he come part of the way with me and share the cost. I answer, 'delighted, of course,' and off we go, the man and me sitting in the cart, and the driver driving the horse. Off we go along a very small path which leads right through the jungle.

"And then what truly fantastic luck should happen! I am talking to my companion and I find that he is a disciple of none other than the great Banerjee himself and that he is

going now on a visit to his master. So straight out I tell him that I too would like to become a disciple of the yogi.

"He turns and looks at me long and slow, and for perhaps three minutes he does not speak. Then he says, quietly, ' $N_0$ , that is impossible.'

"All right, I say to myself, we shall see. Then I ask if it is really true that Banerjee levitates when he prays.

"'Yes,' he says. 'That is true. But no one is allowed to observe the thing happening. No one is ever allowed to come near Banerjee when he is praying.'

"So we go on a little farther in the tonga, talking all the time about Banerjee, and I manage by very careful casual questioning to find out a number of small things about him, such as what time of day he commences with his praying. Then soon the man says, 'I will leave you here. This is where I dismount.'

"I drop him off and pretend to drive on along my journey, but around a corner I tell the driver to stop and wait. Quickly I jump down and I sneak back along the road, looking for this man, the disciple of Banerjee. He is not on the road. Already he has disappeared into the jungle. But which way? Which side of the road? I stand very still and listen.

"I hear a sort of rustling in the undergrowth. That must be him, I tell myself. If it is not him, then it is a tiger. But it is him. I see him ahead. He is going forward through thick jungle. There is not even a little path where he is walking, and he is having push his way between tall bamboos and every kind of heavy vegetation. I creep after him. I keep about one hundred yards behind him because I am frightened he may hear me. I can certainly hear him. It is impossible to proceed in silence through very thick jungle, and when I lose sight of him, which is most of the time, I am able to follow his sound.

"For about half an hour this tense game of follow-the-

leader goes on. Then suddenly, I can no longer hear the man in front of me. I stop and listen. The jungle is silent. I am terrified that I may have lost him. I creep on a little way, and all at once, through the thick undergrowth, I see before me a little clearing, and in the middle of the clearing are two huts. They are small huts built entirely of jungle leaves and branches. My heart jumps and I feel a great surging of excitement inside me because this, I know for certain, is the place of Banerjee, the yogi.

"The disciple has already disappeared. He must have gone into one of the huts. All is quiet. So now I proceed to make a most careful inspection of the trees and bushes and other things all around. There is a small waterhole beside the nearest hut, and I see a prayer mat beside it, and that, I say to myself, is where Banerjee meditates and prays. Close to this waterhole, not thirty yards away, there is a large tree, a great spreading baobab tree with beautiful thick branches which spread in such a way you can put a bed on them and lie on the bed and still not be seen from underneath. That will be my tree, I say to myself. I shall hide in that tree and wait until Banerjee comes out to pray. Then I will be able to see everything.

"But the disciple has told me that the time of prayer is not until five or six in the evening, so I have several hours to wait. Therefore I at once walk back through the jungle to the road and I speak to the tonga driver. I tell him he too must wait. For this, I have to pay him extra money, but it doesn't matter because now I am so exicted I don't care about anything for the moment, not even money.

"And all through the great noontime heat of the jungle I wait beside the tonga, and on through the heavy wet heat of the afternoon, and then, as five o'clock approaches, I make my way quietly back through the jungle to the hut, my heart beating so I can feel it shaking my whole body. I climb up my

tree and I hide among the leaves in such a way that I can see but cannot be seen. And I wait. I wait for forty-five minutes,

"A watch? Yes, I have on a wristwatch. I remember it clearly. It was a watch I won in a raffle and I was proud to own it. On the face of my watch it said the maker's name, The Islamia Watch Company, Ludhiana. And so with my watch I am careful to be timing everything that goes on because I want to get every single detail of this experience.

"I sit up in the tree, waiting.

"Then, all at once, a man is coming out of the hut. The man is tall and thin. He is dressed in an orange-colored dhoti and he carries before him a tray with brass pots and incense burners. He goes over and sits down cross-legged on the mat by the waterhole, putting the tray on the ground before him, and all the movements that he makes seem somehow very calm and gentle. He leans forward and scoops a handful of water from the pool and throws it over his shoulder. He takes the incense burner and passes it back and forth across his chest, slowly, in a gentle, flowing manner. He puts his hands palm downward on his knees. He pauses. He takes a long breath through his nostrils. I can see him take a long breath and suddenly I can see his face is changing. There is a sort of brightness coming over all his face, a sort of . . . . well, a sort of brightness on his skin and I can see his face is changing.

"For fourteen minutes he remains quite still in that position, and then, as I look at him, I see, quite positively I see his body lifting slowly . . . slowly . . . slowly off the ground. He is still sitting cross-legged, the hands palm downward on the knees, and his whole body is lifting slowly off the ground, up into the air. Now I can see daylight underneath him. Twelve inches above the ground he is sitting . . . fifteen inches . . . eighteen . . . twenty . . . and soon he is at least two feet above the prayer mat.

"I stay quite still up there in the tree, watching, and I keep

saying to myself, now look carefully, make sure, be certain that you are seeing correctly. There before you, thirty yards away, is a man sitting in great serenity upon the air. Are you seeing him? Yes, I am seeing him. But are you sure there is no illusion? Are you sure there is no deception? Are you sure you are not imagining? Are you sure? Yes, I am sure, I say. I am sure. I stare at him marveling. For a long while I keep staring, and then the body is coming slowly down again toward the earth. I see it coming. I see it moving gently downward, slowly downward, lowering to the earth until again his buttocks rest upon the mat.

"Forty-six minutes by my watch it had been suspended! I timed it.

"And then, for a long, long while, for over two hours, the man remains sitting absolutely still, like a stone person, with not the slightest movement. To me, it does not seem that he is breathing. His eyes are closed, and still there is this brightness on his face and also this slightly smiling look, a thing I have not seen on any other face in all my life since then.

"At last he stirs. He moves his hands. He stands up. He bends down again. He picks up the tray and goes slowly back into the hut. I am wonderstruck. I feel exalted. I forget all caution and I climb down quickly from the tree and run straight over to the hut and rush in through the door. Banerjee is bending over, washing his feet and hands in a basin. His back is toward me, but he hears me and he turns quickly and straightens up. There is great surprise on his face and the first thing he says is, 'How long have you been here?' He says it sharply, like he is not pleased.

"At once I tell the whole truth, the whole story about being up in the tree and watching him, and at the end I tell him there is nothing I want in life except to become his disciple. Please will he let me become his disciple? "Suddenly he seems to explode. He becomes furious and he begins shouting at me. 'Get out!' he shouts. 'Get out of here! Get out! Get out! Get out!' And in his fury he picks up a small brick and flings it at me and it strikes my right leg just below the knee and tears the flesh. I have the scar still. I will show it to you. There, you see, just below the knee.

"Banerjee's anger is terrible and I am very frightened. I turn and run away. I run back through the jungle to where the tonga driver is waiting, and we drive home to Rikhiskesh. But that night I regain my courage. I make for myself a decision and it is this: that I will return every day to the hut of Banerjee, and I will keep on and on at him until at last he has to take me on as a disciple, just to get himself some peace.

"This I do. Each day I go to see him and each day his anger pours out upon me like a volcano, him shouting and yelling and me standing there frightened but also obstinate and repeating always to him my wish to become a disciple. For five days it is like this. Then, all at once, on my sixth visit, Banerjee seems to become quite calm, quite polite. He explains he cannot himself take me on as a disciple. But he will give me a note, he says, to another man, a friend, a great yogi, who lives in Hardawar. I am to go there and I will receive help and instruction."

5

Imhrat Khan paused and asked me if he might have a glass of water. I fetched it for him. He took a long, slow drink, then he went on with his story:

"This is in 1922 and I am nearly seventeen years old. So I go to Hardawar. And there I find the yogi, and because I have a letter from the great Banerjee, he consents to give me instruction.

"Now what is this instruction?

"It is, of course, the critical part of the whole thing. It is what I have been yearning for and searching for, so you can be sure I am an eager pupil.

"The first instruction, the most elementary part, consists of having to practice the most difficult physical exercises, all of them concerned with muscle control and breathing. But after some weeks of this, even the eager pupil becomes impatient. I tell the yogi that it is my mental powers I wish to develop, not my physical ones.

"He replies, 'If you will develop control of your body, then the control of your mind will be an automatic thing.' But I want both at once, and I keep asking him, and in the end he says, 'Very well, I will give you some exercises to help you to concentrate the conscious mind.'

"'Conscious mind?' I ask. 'Why do you say conscious mind?'

"'Because each man has two minds, the conscious and the subconscious. The subconscious mind is highly concentrated, but the conscious mind, the one everyone uses, is a scattered, unconcentrated thing. It is concerning itself with thousands of different items, the things you are seeing around you and the things you are thinking about. So you must learn to concentrate it in such a way that you can visualize at will *one item*, one item only, and absolutely nothing else. If you work hard at this, you should be able to concentrate your mind, your conscious mind, upon any one object you select for at least three and a half minutes. But that will take about fifteen years.'

"'Fifteen years!' I cry.

"'It may take longer,' he says, 'Fifteen years is the usual time.'

"'But I will be an old man by then!"

"'Do not despair,' the yogi says. 'The time varies with different people. Some take ten years, a few can take less,

and on extremely rare occasions a special person comes along who is able to develop the power in only one or two years. But that is one in a million.'

"'Who are those special people?' I ask. 'Do they look

different from other people?'

"'They look the same,' he says. 'A special person might be a humble roadsweeper or a factory worker. Or he might be a rajah. There is no way of telling until the training begins.'

"'Is it really so difficult,' I ask, 'to concentrate the mind

upon a single object for three and a half minutes?"

"'It is almost impossible,' he answers. 'Try it and see. Shut your eyes and think of something. Think of just one object. Visualize it. See it before you. And in a few seconds your mind will start wandering. Other little thoughts will creep in. Other visions will come to you. It is a very difficult thing.'

"Thus spoke the yogi of Hardawar.

"And so my real exercises begin. Each evening, I sit down and close my eyes and visualize the face of the person I love best, which is my brother. I concentrate upon visualizing his face. But the instant my mind begins to wander, I stop the exercise and rest for some minutes. Then I try again.

"After three years of daily practice, I am able to concentrate absolutely upon my brother's face for one and a half minutes. I am making progress. But an interesting thing happens. In doing these exercises, I lose my sense of smell absolutely. And never to this day does it come back to me.

"Then the necessity for earning my living to buy food forces me to leave Hardawar. I go to Calcutta, where there are greater opportunities, and there I soon begin to make quite good money by giving conjuring performances. But always I continue with the exercises. Every evening, wherever I am, I settle myself down in a quiet corner and practice the concentrating of the mind upon my brother's face. Occa-

sionally, I choose something not so personal, like for example an orange or a pair of spectacles, and that makes it even more difficult.

"One day, I travel from Calcutta to Dacca in East Bengal to give a conjuring show at a college there, and while in Dacca, I happen to be present at a demonstration of walking on fire. There are many people watching. There is a big trench dug at the bottom of a sloping lawn. The spectators are sitting by the hundreds upon the slopes of the lawn looking down upon the trench.

"The trench is about twenty-five feet long. It has been filled with logs and firewood and charcoal, and a lot of paraffin has been poured on it. The paraffin has been lit, and after a while the whole trench has become a smoldering hot furnace. It is so hot that the men who are stoking it are obliged to wear goggles. There is a high wind and the wind fans the charcoal almost to white heat.

"The Indian firewalker then comes forward. He is naked except for a small loincloth, and his feet are bare. The crowd becomes silent. The firewalker enters the trench and walks the whole length of it, over the white-hot charcoal. He doesn't stop. Nor does he hurry. He simply walks over the white-hot coals and comes out at the other end, and his feet are not even singed. He shows the soles of his feet to the crowd. The crowd stares in amazement.

"Then the firewalker walks the trench once more. This time he goes even slower, and as he does it, I can see on his face a look of pure and absolute concentration. This man, I tell myself, has practiced yoga. He is a yogi.

"After the performance, the firewalker calls out to the crowd, asking if there is anyone brave enough to come down and walk on the fire. There is a hush in the crowd. I feel a sudden surge of excitement in my chest. This is my chance. I must take it. I must have faith and courage. I must try it. I

have been doing my concentration exercises for over three years now and the time has come to give myself a severe test,

"While I am standing there thinking these thoughts, a volunteer comes forward from the crowd. It is a young Indian man. He announces that he would like to try the firewalk. This decides me, and I also step forward and make my announcement. The crowd gives us both a cheer.

"Now the real firewalker becomes the supervisor. He tells the other man he will go first. He makes him remove his dhoti, otherwise, he says, the hem will catch fire from the heat. And the sandals must be taken off.

"The young Indian does what he is told. But now that he is close to the trench and can feel the terrible heat coming from it, he begins to look frightened. He steps back a few paces, shielding his eyes from the heat with his hands.

"'You don't have to do it if you don't want to,' the real firewalker says.

"The crowd waits and watches, sensing a drama.

"The young man, though scared out of his wits, wishes to prove how brave he is, and he says, 'Of course I'll do it.'

"With that, he runs toward the trench. He steps into it with one foot, then the other. He gives a fearful scream and leaps out again and falls to the ground. The poor man lies there screaming in pain. The soles of his feet are badly burned and some of the skin has come right away. Two of his friends run forward and carry him off.

"'Now it is your turn," says the firewalker. 'Are you ready?'

" 'I am ready,' I say. 'But please be silent while I prepare myself.'

"A great hush has come over the crowd. They have seen one man get badly burned. Is the second one going to be mad enough to do the same thing?

"Someone in the crowd shouts, 'Don't do it! You must be

mad!' Others take up the shout, all telling me to give up. I turn and face them and raise my hands for silence. They stop shouting and stare at me. Every eye in that place is upon me now.

"I feel extraordinarily calm.

"I pull my dhoti off over my head. I take off my sandals. I stand there naked except for my underpants. I stand very still and close my eyes. I begin to concentrate my mind. I concentrate on the fire. I see nothing but the white-hot coals and I concentrate on them being not hot but cold. The coals are cold, I tell myself. They cannot burn me. It is impossible for them to burn me because there is no heat in them. I allow half a minute to go by. I know that I must not wait too long because I am only able to concentrate absolutely upon any one thing for a minute and a half.

"I keep concentrating. I concentrate so hard that I go into a sort of trance. I step out onto the coals. I walk fairly fast the whole length of the trench. And behold, I am not burned!

"The crowd goes mad. They yell and cheer. The original firewalker rushes up to me and examines the soles of my feet. He can't believe what he sees. There is not a burn mark on them.

"'Ayeee!' he cries. 'What is this? Are you a yogi?'

"'I am on the way, sir,' I answer proudly. 'I am well on the way.'

"After that, I dress and leave quickly, avoiding the crowd.

"Of course I am excited. 'It is coming to me,' I say. 'Now at last the power is beginning to come.' And all the time I am remembering something else. I am remembering a thing that the old yogi of Hardawar said to me. He said, 'Certain holy people have been known to develop so great a concentration that they could see without using their eyes.' I keep remembering that saying and I keep longing for the power to do likewise myself. And after my success with the firewalking, I

decide that I will concentrate everything upon this single aim—to see without the eyes."

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For only the second time so far, Imhrat Khan broke off his story. He took another sip of water, then he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"I am trying to get everything in the correct order," he said. "I don't want to omit anything."

"You're doing fine," I told him. "Carry on."

"Very well," he said. "So I am still in Calcutta and I have just had success with firewalking. And now I have decided to concentrate all my energy on this one thing, which is to see without the eyes.

"The time has come, therefore, to make a slight change in the exercises. Each night now I light a candle and I begin by staring at the flame. A candle flame, you know, has three separate parts, the yellow at the top, the mauve lower down, and the black right inside. I place the candle sixteen inches away from my face. The flame is absolutely level with my eyes. It must not be above or below. It must be dead level because then I do not have to make even the tiniest little adjustment of the eye muscles by looking up or down. I settle myself comfortably and I begin to stare at the black part of the flame, right in the center. All this is merely to concentrate my conscious mind, to empty it of everything around me. So I stare at the black spot in the flame until everything around me has disappeared and I can see nothing else. Then slowly I shut my eyes and begin to concentrate as usual upon one single object of my choice, which as you know is usually my brother's face.

"I do this every night before bed and by 1929, when I am twenty-four years old, I can concentrate upon an object for three minutes without any wandering of my mind. So it is now, at this time, when I am twenty-four, that I begin to become aware of a slight ability to see an object with my eyes closed. It is a very slight ability, just a queer little feeling that when I close my eyes and look at something hard, with fierce concentration, then I can see the outline of the object I am looking at.

"Slowly I am beginning to develop my inner sense of sight.

"You ask me what I mean by that. I will explain it to you exactly as the yogi of Hardawar explained it to me.

"All of us, you see, have two senses of sight, just as we have two senses of smell and taste and hearing. There is the outer sense, the highly developed one which we all use, and there is the *inner* one also. If only we could develop these inner senses of ours, then we could smell without our noses, taste without our tongues, hear without our ears and see without our eyes. Do you not understand? Do you not see that our noses and tongues and ears and eyes are only . . . how shall I say it? . . . are only instruments which assist in conveying the sensation itself to the brain.

"And so it is that I am all the time striving to develop my inner sense of sight. Each night now I perform my usual exercises with the candle flame and my brother's face. After that I rest a little while. I drink a cup of coffee. Then I blindfold myself and I sit in my chair trying to visualize, trying to see, not just to imagine, but actually to see without my eyes every object in the room.

"And gradually success begins to come.

"Soon I am working with a pack of cards. I take a card from the top of the pack and hold it before me, back to front, trying to see through it. Then, with a pencil in my other hand, I write down what I think it is. I take another card and do the same again. I go through the whole of the pack like that and when it is over I check what I have written down against the pile of cards beside me. Almost at once I have a sixty to seventy percent success.

"I do other things. I buy maps and complicated navigating charts and pin them up all around my room. I spend hours looking at them blindfold, trying to see them, trying to read the small lettering of the place names and the rivers. Every evening for the next four years, I proceed with this kind of practice.

"By the year 1933—that is only last year—when I am twenty-eight years old, I can read a book. I can cover my eves completely and I can read a book right through.

"So now at last I have it, this power. For certain I have it now, and at once, because I cannot wait with impatience, I include the blindfold act in my ordinary conjuring performance.

"The audience loves it. They applaud long and loud. But not one single person believes it to be genuine. Everyone thinks it is just another clever trick. And the fact that I am a conjuror makes them think more than ever that I am faking. Conjurors are men who trick you. They trick you with cleverness. And so no one believes me. Even the doctors who blindfold me in the most expert way refuse to believe that anyone can see without his eyes. They forget there may be other ways of sending the image to the brain."

"What other ways?" I asked him.

"Quite honestly, I don't know exactly how it is I can see without my eyes. But what I do know is this: When my eyes are bandaged, I am not using the eyes at all. The seeing is done by another part of my body."

"Which part?" I asked him.

"Any part at all as long as the skin is bare. For example, if you put a sheet of metal in front of me and put a book behind the metal, I cannot read the book. But if you allow me to put my hand around the sheet of metal so that the hand is seeing the book, then I can read it."

"Would you mind if I tested you on that?" I asked.

"Not at all," he answered.

"I don't have a sheet of metal," I said, "but the door will

do just as well."

I stood up and went to the bookshelf. I took down the first book that came to hand. It was Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. I opened the door and asked my visitor to stand behind it, out of sight. I opened the book at random and propped it on a chair the other side of the door to him. Then I stationed myself in a position where I could see both him and the book.

"Can you read that book?" I asked him.

"No," he answered. "Of course not."

"All right. You may now put your hand around the door,

but only the hand."

He slid his hand around the edge of the door until it was within sight of the book. Then I saw the fingers on the hand parting from one another, spreading wide, beginning to quiver slightly, feeling the air like the antennae of an insect. And the hand turned so that the back of it was facing the book.

"Try to read the left page from the top," I said.

There was silence for perhaps ten seconds, then smoothly, without pause, he began to read: " 'Have you guessed the riddle yet?' the Hatter said, turning to Alice again. 'No, I give it up' Alice replied. 'What's the answer?' 'I haven't the slightest idea,' said the Hatter. 'Nor I,' said the March Hare. Alice sighed wearily. 'I think you might do something better with the time,' she said, 'than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers.' "

"It's perfect!" I cried. "Now I believe you! You are a miracle!" I was enormously excited.

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"Thank you, doctor," he said gravely. "What you say gives me great pleasure."

"One question," I said. "It's about the playing cards. When you held up the reverse side of one of them, did you put your hand around the other side to help you read it?"

"You are very perceptive," he said. "No, I did not. In the case of the cards, I was actually able to see through them in some way."

"How do you explain that?" I asked.

"I don't explain it," he said. "Except perhaps that a card is such a flimsy thing, it is so thin, and not solid like metal or thick like a door. That is all the explanation I can give. There are many things in this world, doctor, that we cannot explain."

"Yes," I said. "There certainly are."

"Would you be kind enough to take me home now," he said. "I feel very tired."

I drove him home in my car.

## 7

That night I didn't go to bed. I was far too worked up to sleep. I had just witnessed a miracle. This man would have doctors all over the world turning somersaults in the air! He could change the whole course of medicine! From a doctor's point of view, he must be the most valuable man alive! We doctors must get hold of him and keep him safe. We must look after him. We mustn't let him go. We must find out exactly how it is that an image can be sent to the brain without using the eyes. And if we do that, then blind people might be able to see and deaf people might be able to hear. Above all, this incredible man must not be ignored and left to wander around India, living in cheap rooms and playing in second-rate theaters.

I got so steamed up thinking about this that after a while I grabbed a notebook and a pen and started writing down with great care everything that Imhrat Khan had told me that evening. I used the notes I had made while he was talking. I wrote for five hours without stopping. And at eight o'clock the next morning, when it was time to go to the hospital, I had finished the most important part, the pages you have just read.

At the hospital that morning, I didn't see Dr. Marshall until we met in the doctors' rest room during our tea break.

I told him as much as I could in the ten minutes we had to spare. "I'm going back to the theater tonight," I said. "I must talk to him again. I must persuade him to stay here. We mustn't lose him now."

"I'll come with you," Dr. Marshall said.

"Right," I said. "We'll watch the show first and then we'll take him out to supper."

At a quarter to seven that evening, I drove Dr. Marshall in my car to Acacia Road. I parked the car, and the two of us walked over to the Royal Palace Hall.

"There's something wrong," I said. "Where is every-body?"

There was no crowd outside the hall and the doors were closed. The poster advertising the show was still in place, but I now saw that someone had written across it in large printed letters, using black paint, the words TONIGHT'S PERFORMANCE CANCELED. There was an old gatekeeper standing by the locked doors.

"What happened?" I asked him.

"Someone died," he said.

"Who?" I asked, knowing already who it was.

"The man who sees without his eyes," the gatekeeper answered.

"How did he die?" I cried. "When? Where?"

"They say he died in his bed," the gatekeeper said. "He went to sleep and never woke up. These things happen."

We walked slowly back to the car. I felt an overhwelming sense of grief and anger. I should never have allowed this precious man to go home last night. I should have kept him. I shouldn't have let him out of my sight. Imhrat Khan was a maker of miracles. He had communicated with mysterious and dangerous forces that are beyond the reach of ordinary people. He had also broken all the rules. He had performed miracles in public. He had taken money for doing so. And, worst of all, he had told some of those secrets to an outsider—me. Now he was dead.

"So that's that," Dr. Marshall said.

"Yes," I said. "It's all over. Nobody will ever know how he did it."

This is a true and accurate report of everything that took place concerning my two meetings with Imhrat Khan.

(signed) John F. Cartwright, M.D.
Bombay, December 4, 1934

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"Well, well," said Henry Sugar. "Now that is extremely interesting."

He closed the exercise book and sat gazing at the rain splashing against the windows of the library.

"This," Henry Sugar went on, talking aloud to himself, "is a terrific piece of information. It could change my life."

The piece of information Henry was referring to was that Imhrat Khan had trained himself to read the value of a playing card from the reverse side. And Henry the gambler, the rather dishonest gambler, had realized at once that if only he could train himself to do the same thing, he could make a fortune.

For a few moments, Henry allowed his mind to dwell upon the marvelous things he would be able to do if he could read cards from the back. He would win every single time at canasta and bridge and poker. And better still, he would be able to go into any casino in the world and clean up at blackjack and all the other high-powdered card games they played!

In gambling casinos, as Henry knew very well, nearly everything depended in the end upon the turn of a single card, and if you knew beforehand what the value of that card was, then you were home and dry!

But could he do it? Could he actually train himself to do this thing?

He didn't see why not. That stuff with the candle flame didn't appear to be particularly hard work. And according to the book, that was really all there was to it—just staring into the middle of the flame and trying to concentrate upon the face of the person you loved best.

It would probably take him several years to bring it off, but then who in the world wouldn't be willing to train for a few years in order to beat the casinos every time he went in?

"By golly," he said aloud, "I'll do it! I'm going to do it!"

He sat very still in the armchair in the library, working out a plan of campaign. Above all, he would tell nobody what he was up to. He would steal the little book from the library so that none of his friends might come upon it by chance and learn the secret. He would carry the book with him wherever he went. It would be his bible. He couldn't possibly go out and find a real live yogi to instruct him, so the book would be his yogi instead. It would be his teacher.

Henry stood up and slipped the slim blue exercise book under his jacket. He walked out of the library and went straight upstairs to the bedroom they had given him for the weekend. He got out his suitcase and hid the book underneath his clothes. He then went downstairs again and found his way to the butler's pantry.

"John," he said, addressing the butler, "can you find me a candle? Just an ordinary white candle."

Butlers were trained never to ask for reasons. They simply obeyed orders. "Do you wish a candleholder as well, sir?"

"Yes. A candle and a candleholder."

"Very good, sir. Shall I bring them to your room?"

"No. I'll hang around here till you find them."

The butler soon found a candle and a candleholder. Henry said, "And now could you find me a ruler?" The butler found him a ruler. Henry thanked him and returned to his bedroom.

When he was inside the bedroom, he locked the door. He drew all the curtains so that the place was in twilight. He put the candleholder with the candle in it on the dressing table and pulled up a chair. When he sat down, he noticed with satisfaction that his eyes were exactly level with the wick of the candle. Now, using the ruler, he positioned his face sixteen inches from the candle, which again was what the book had said must be done.

That Indian fellow had visualized the face of the person he loved best, which in his case was a brother. Henry didn't have a brother. He decided instead to visualize his own face. With his cigarette lighter, he lit the wick. A yellow flame appeared and burned steadily.

Henry sat quite still and stared into the candle flame. The book had been quite right. The flame, when you looked into it closely, did have three separate parts. There was the yellow outside. Then there was the mauve inner sheath. And right in the middle was the tiny magic area of absolute blackness. He stared at the tiny black area. He focused his eyes upon it and kept staring at it, and as he did so, an extraordinary thing happened. His mind went absolutely blank, and his brain ceased fidgeting around, and all at once it felt as though he himself, his whole body, was actually encased within the flame, sitting snug and cozy within the little black area of nothingness.

With no trouble at all, Henry allowed the image of his own face to swim into sight before him. He concentrated upon the face and nothing but the face. He blocked out all other thoughts. He succeeded completely in doing this, but only for about fifteen seconds. After that, his mind began to wander and he found himself thinking about gambling casinos and how much money he was going to win. At this point, he looked away from the candle and gave himself a rest.

This was his very first effort. He was thrilled. He had done it. Admittedly he hadn't kept it up for very long. But neither had that Indian fellow on the first attempt.

After a few minutes, he tried again. It went well. He had no stopwatch to time himself with, but he sensed that this was definitely a longer go than the first one.

"It's terrific!" he cried. "I'm going to succeed! I'm going to do it!" He had never been so excited by anything in his life.

From that day on, no matter where he was or what he was doing, Henry made a point of practicing with the candle every morning and every evening. Often he practiced at midday as well. For the first time in his life he was throwing himself into something with genuine enthusiasm. And the progress he made was remarkable. After six months, he could concentrate absolutely upon his own face for no less than three minutes without a single outside thought entering his mind.

The yogi of Hardawar had told the Indian fellow that a

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man would have to practice for fifteen years to get that sort of result!

But wait! The yogi had also said something else. He had said (and here Henry eagerly consulted the little blue exercise book for the hundredth time), he had said that on extremely rare occasions a special person comes along who is able to develop the power in only one or two years.

"That's me!" Henry cried. "It must be me! I am the one-in-a-million person who is gifted with the ability to acquire yoga powers at incredible speed! Whoopee and hurray! It won't be long now before I'm breaking the bank in every casino in Europe and America!"

But Henry at this point showed unusual patience and good sense. He didn't rush to get out a pack of cards to see if he could read them from the reverse side. In fact, he kept well away from card games of all kinds. He had given up bridge and canasta and poker as soon as he had started working with the candle. What's more he had given up razzing around to parties and weekends with his rich friends. He had become dedicated to this single aim of acquiring yoga powers, and everything else would have to wait until he had succeeded.

Sometime during the tenth month, Henry became aware, just as Imhrat Khan had done before him, of a slight ability to see an object with his eyes closed. When he closed his eyes and stared at something hard, with fierce concentration, he could actually see the outline of the object he was looking at.

"It's coming to me!" he cried. "I'm doing it! It's fantastic!"

Now he worked harder than ever at his exercises with the candle, and at the end of the first year he could actually concentrate upon the image of his own face for no less than five and a half minutes!

At this point, he decided the time had come to test himself with the cards. He was in the living room of his London flat when he made this decision, and it was near midnight. He got out a pack of cards and a pencil and paper. He was shaking with excitement. He placed the pack upside down before him and concentrated on the top card.

All he could see at first was the design on the back of the card. It was a very ordinary design of thin red lines, one of the commonest playing-card designs in the world. He now shifted his concentration from the pattern itself to the other side of the card. He concentrated with great intensity upon the invisible underneath of the card, and he allowed no other single thought to creep into his mind. Thirty seconds went by.

Then one minute . . .

Two minutes . . .

Three minutes . . .

Henry didn't move. His concentration was intense and absolute. He was visualizing the reverse side of the playing-card. No other thought of any kind was allowed to enter his head.

During the fourth minute, something began to happen. Slowly, magically, but very clearly, the black symbols became spades and alongside the spades appeared the figure five.

The five of spades!

Henry switched off his concentration. And now, with shaking fingers, he picked up the card and turned it over. It was the five of spades!

"I've done it!" he cried aloud, leaping up from his chair.

"I've seen through it! I'm on my way!"

After resting for a while, he tried again, and this time he used a stopwatch to see how long it took him. After three minutes and fifty-eight seconds, he read the card as the king of diamonds. He was right!

The next time he was right again and it took him three minutes and fifty-four seconds. That was four seconds less.

He was sweating with excitement and exhaustion. "That's enough for today," he told himself. He got up and poured himself an enormous drink of whiskey and sat down to rest and to gloat over his success.

His job now, he told himself, was to keep practicing and practicing with the cards until he could see through them instantly. He was convinced it could be done. Already, on the second try, he had knocked four seconds off his time. He would give up working with the candle and concentrate solely upon the cards. He would keep at it day and night.

And that is what he did. But now that he could smell real success in the offing, he became more fanatical than ever. He never left his flat except to buy food and drink. All day and often far into the night, he crouched over the cards with the stopwatch beside him, trying to reduce the time it took him to read from the reverse side.

Within a month, he was down to one and a half minutes.

And at the end of six monthes of fierce concentrated work, he could do it in twenty seconds. But even that was too long. When you are gambling in a casino and the dealer is waiting for you to say yes or no to the next card, you are not going to be allowed to stare at it for twenty seconds before making up your mind. Three or four seconds would be permissible. But no more.

Henry kept at it. But from now on, it became more and more difficult to improve his speed. To get down from twenty seconds to nineteen took him a week of very hard work. From nineteen to eighteen took him nearly two weeks. And seven more months went by before he could read through a card in ten seconds flat.

His target was four seconds. He knew that unless he could see through a card in a maximum of four seconds, he wouldn't be able to work the casinos successfully. Yet the nearer he got toward the target, the more difficult it became to reach it. It took four weeks to get his time down from ten seconds to nine, and five more weeks to get from nine to eight. But at this stage, hard work no longer bothered him. His powers of concentration had now developed to such a degree that he was able to work for twelve hours at a stretch with not trouble at all. And he knew with absolute certainty that he would get there in the end. He would not stop until he did. Day after day, night after night, he sat crouching over the cards, with his stopwatch beside him, fighting with a terrible intensity to knock those last few stubborn seconds off his time.

The last three seconds were the worst of all. To get from seven seconds down to his target of four took him exactly eleven months!

The great moment came on a Saturday evening. A card lay facedown on the table in front of him. He clicked the stopwatch and began to concentrate. At once, he saw a blob of red. The blob swiftly took shape and became a diamond. And then, almost instantaneously, a figure six appeared in the top left-hand corner. He clicked the watch again. He checked the time. It was four seconds! He turned the card over. It was the six of diamonds! He had done it! He had it in four seconds flat!

He tried again with another card. In four seconds he read it as the queen of spades. He went right through the pack, timing himself with every card. Four seconds! Four seconds! Four seconds! It was always the same! He had done it at last! It was all over! He was ready to go!

And how long had it taken him! It had taken him exactly three years and three months of concentrated work.

And now for the casinos!

When should he start?

Why not tonight?

Tonight was Saturday. All the casinos were crowded on

The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar

Saturday nights. So much the better. There'd be less chance of becoming conspicuous. He went into his bedroom to change into his dinner jacket and black tie. Saturday was a dressy night at the big London casinos.

He would go, he decided, to Lord's House. There are well over one hundred legitimate casinos in London, but none of them is open to the general public. You must become a member before you are allowed to walk in. Henry was a member of no less than ten casinos. Lord's House was his favorite. It was the finest and most exclusive in the country.

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Lord's House was a magnificent Georgian mansion in the center of London, and for over two hundred years it had been the private residence of a duke. Now it was taken over by the bookmakers, and the superb high-ceilinged rooms where the aristocracy and often royalty used to gather and play a gentle game of whist were today filled with a new kind of people who played a very different sort of game.

Henry drove to Lord's House and pulled up outside the great entrance. He got out of the car but left the engine running. Immediately, an attendant in green uniform came

forward to park it for him.

Along the curb on both sides of the street stood perhaps a dozen Rolls Royces. Only the very wealthy belonged to Lord's House.

"Why hello, Mr. Sugar!" said the man behind the desk whose job it was never to forget a face. "We haven't seen you for years!"

"I've been busy," Henry answered.

He went upstairs, up the marvelous wide staircase with its carved mahogany banisters, and entered the cashier's office. There he wrote a check for one thousand pounds. The

cashier gave him ten large pink rectangular plaques made of plastic. On each it said \$100. Henry slipped them into his pocket and spent a few minutes sauntering through the various gaming rooms to get the feel of things again after such a long absence. There was a big crowd here tonight. Well-fed women stood around the roulette wheel like plump hens around a feeding hopper. Jewels and gold were dripping over their bosoms and from their wrists. Many of them had blue hair. The men were in dinner jackets and there wasn't a tall one among them. Why, Henry wondered, did this particular kind of rich man always have short legs? Their legs all seemed to stop at the knees with no thighs above. Most of them had bellies coming out a long way, and crimson faces and cigars between their lips. Their eyes glittered with greed.

All this Henry noticed. It was the first time in his life that he had looked with distaste upon this type of wealthy gambling-casino person. Up until now, he had always regarded them as companions, as members of the same group and class as himself. Tonight they seemed vulgar.

Could it be, he wondered, that the yoga powers he had acquired over the last three years had altered him just a little bit?

He stood watching the roulette. Upon the long green table people were placing their money, trying to guess which little slot the small white ball would fall into on the next spin of the wheel. Henry looked at the wheel. And suddenly, perhaps more from habit than anything else, he found himself beginning to concentrate upon it. It was not difficult. He had been practicing the art of total concentration for so long that it had become something of a routine. In a fraction of a second, his mind had become completely and absolutely concentrated upon the wheel. Everything else in the room, the noise, the people, the lights, the smell of cigar smoke, all this was wiped out of his mind, and he saw only the round,

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polished roulette wheel with the small white numbers around the rim. The numbers went from 1 to 36, with a 0 between 1 and 36. Very quickly, all the numbers blurred and disappeared in front of his eyes, all except one, all except the number 18. The 18 was the only number he could see. At first it was slightly fuzzy and out of focus. Then the edges sharpened and the whiteness of it grew brighter, more brilliant, until it began to glow as though there was a bright light behind it. It grew bigger. It seemed to jump toward him. At that point, Henry switched off his concentration. The room swam back into vision.

"Have you all finished?" the croupier was saying.

Henry took a \$100 plaque from his pocket and placed it on the square marked 18 on the green table. Although the table was covered all over with other people's bets, his was the only one on 18.

The croupier spun the wheel. The little white ball bounced and skittered around the rim. The people watched. All eyes were on the little ball. The wheel slowed. It came to rest. The ball jiggled a few more times, hesitated, then dropped neatly into slot 18.

"Eighteen!" called the croupier.

The crowd sighed. The croupier's assistant scooped up the piles of losing plaques with a long-handled wooden scooper. But he didn't take Henry's. They paid him thirty-six to one: \$3600 for his \$100. They gave it to him in three \$1000 plaques and six \$100s.

Henry began to feel an extraordinary sense of power. He felt he could break this place if he wanted to. He could ruin this fancy high-powered expensive joint in a matter of hours. He could take a million off them and all the stony-faced sleek gentlemen who stood around watching the money rolling in would be scurrying about like panicky rats.

Should be do that?

It was a great temptation.

But it would be the end of everything. He would become famous and would never be allowed into a casino again anywhere in the world. He mustn't do it. He must be very careful not to draw attention to himself.

Henry moved casually out of the roulette room and passed into the room where they were playing blackjack. He stood in the doorway watching the action. There were four tables. They were oddly shaped, these blackjack tables, each one curved like a crescent moon, with the players sitting on high stools around the outside of the half-circle and the dealer standing inside.

The packs of cards (at Lord's House they used four packs shuffled together) lay in an open-ended box known as a shoe, and the dealer pulled the cards out of the shoe one by one with his fingers. The reverse side of the first card in the shoe was always visible, but no others.

Blackiack, as the casinos call it, is a very simple game. You and I know it by one of three other names: pontoon, twenty-one or vingt-et-un. The player tries to get his cards to add up to as near twenty-one as possible, but if he goes over twenty-one, he's bust and the dealer takes the money. In nearly every hand, the player is faced with the problem of whether to draw another card and risk being bust, or whether to stick with what he's got. But Henry would not have that problem. In four seconds, he would have "seen through" the card the dealer was offering him, and he would know whether to say yes or no. Henry could turn blackjack into a farce.

In all casinos, they have an awkward rule about blackjack betting that we do not have at home. At home, we look at our first card before we make a bet, and if it's a good one we bet high. The casinos don't allow you to do this. They insist that everyone at the table makes his bet before the first card of the hand is dealt. What's more, you are not allowed to increase your bet later on by buying a card.

None of this would disturb Henry either. So long as he sat on the dealer's immediate left, then he would always receive the first card in the shoe at the beginning of each deal. The reverse side of this card would be clearly visible to him, and he would "read through" it before he made his bet.

Now, standing quietly just inside the doorway, Henry waited for a place to become vacant on the dealer's left at any of the four tables. He had to wait twenty minutes for this to happen, but he got what he wanted in the end.

Her perched himself on the high stool and handed the dealer one of the \$1000 plaques he had won at roulette. "All

in twenty-fives, please," he said.

The dealer was a youngish man with black eyes and gray skin. He never smiled and he spoke only when necessary. His hands were exceptionally slim and there was arithmetic in his fingers. He took Henry's plaque and dropped it into a slot in the table. Rows of different-colored circular chips lay neatly in a wooden tray in front of him, chips for \$25, \$10 and \$5, maybe a hundred of each. With his thumb and forefinger, the dealer picked up a wedge of \$25 chips and placed them in a tall pile on the table. He didn't have to count them. He knew there were exactly twenty chips in the pile. Those nimble fingers could pick up with absolute accuracy any number of chips from one to twenty and never be wrong. The dealer picked up a second lot of twenty chips, making forty in all. He slid them over the table to Henry.

Henry stacked the chips in front of him, and as he did so, he glanced at the top card in the shoe. He switched on his concentration and in four seconds he read it as a ten. He pushed out eight of his chips, \$200. This was the maximum stake allowed for blackjack at Lord's House.

He was dealt the ten, and for his second card he got a nine, nineteen altogether.

Everyone sticks on nineteen. You sit tight and hope the

dealer won't get twenty or twenty-one.

So when the dealer came around again to Henry, he said,

"Nineteen," and passed on to the next player.

The dealer paused and came back to Henry. He raised his brows and looked at him with those cool black eyes. "You wish to draw to nineteen?" he asked somewhat sarcastically. He spoke with an Italian accent, and there was scorn as well as sarcasm in his voice. There were only two cards in the pack that would not bust a nineteen, the ace (counting as a one) and the two. Only an idiot would risk drawing to nineteen, especially with \$200 on the table.

The next card to be dealt lay clearly visible in the front of the shoe. At least, the reverse side of it was clearly visible.

The dealer hadn't yet touched it.

"Yes," Henry said, "I think I'll have another card."

The dealer shrugged and flipped the card out of the shoe. The two of clubs landed neatly in front of Henry, alongside the ten and the nine.

"Thank you," Henry said. "That will do nicely."

"Twenty-one," the dealer said. His black eyes glanced up again into Henry's face, and they rested there, silent, watchful, puzzled. Henry had unbalanced him. He had never in his life seen anyone draw to a nineteen. This fellow had drawn to nineteen with a calmness and a certainty that was quite staggering. And he had won.

Henry caught the look in the dealer's eyes, and he realized at once that he had made a silly mistake. He had been too clever. He had drawn attention to himself. He must never do that again. He must be very careful in the future how he used his powers. He must even make himself lose occasionally,

and every now and again he must do something a bit stupid.

The game went on. Henry's advantage was so enormous, he had difficulty keeping his winnings down to a reasonable sum. Every now and again, he would ask for a third card when he already knew it was going to bust him. And once, when he saw that his first card was going to be an ace, he put out his smallest stake, then made a great show of cursing himself aloud for not having made a bigger bet in the first place.

In an hour, he had won exactly \$3000, and there he stopped. He pocketed his chips and made his way back to the cashier's office to turn them in for real money.

He had made \$3000 from blackjack and \$3600 from roulette, \$6600 in all. It could just as easily have been \$660,000. As a matter of fact, he told himself, he was now almost certainly able to make money faster than any other man in the entire world.

The cashier received Henry's pile of chips and plaques without twitching a muscle. He wore steel spectacles, and the pale eyes behind the spectacles were not interested in Henry. They looked only at the chips on the counter. This man also had arithmetic in his fingers. But he had more than that. He had arithmetic, trigonometry and calculus and algebra and Euclidean geometry in every nerve of his body. He was a human calculating machine with a hundred thousand electric wires in his brain. It took him five seconds to count Henry's one hundred and twenty chips.

"Would you like a cheque for this, Mr. Sugar?" he asked. The cashier, like the man at the desk downstairs, knew every member by name.

"No, thank you," Henry said, "I'll take it in cash."

"As you wish," said the voice behind the spectacles, and he turned away and went to a safe at the back of the office that must have contained millions. By Lord's House standards, Henry's win was fairly small potatoes. The Arab oil boys were in London now, and they liked to gamble. So did the shady diplomats from the Far East and the Japanese businessmen and the British tax-dodging real-estate operators. Staggering sums of money were being won and lost, mostly lost, in the large London casinos every day.

The cashier returned with Henry's money and dropped the bundle of notes on the counter. Although there was enough there to buy a small house or a large automobile, the chief cashier at Lord's House was not impressed. He might just as well have been passing Henry a pack of chewing gum for all the notice he took of the money he was dishing out.

"You wait, my friend," Henry thought to himself as he pocketed the money. "You just wait." He walked away.

"Your car, sir?" said the man at the door in the green uniform.

"Not yet," Henry told him. "I think I'll take a bit of fresh air first."

He strolled away down the street. It was nearly midnight. The evening was cool and pleasant. The great city was still wide awake. Henry could feel the bulge in the inside pocket of his jacket where the big wad of money was lying. He touched the bulge with one hand. He patted it gently. It was a lot of money for an hour's work.

And what of the future?

What was the next move going to be?

He could make a million in a month.

He could make more if he wanted to.

There was no limit to what he could make.

Walking through the streets of London in the cool of the evening, Henry began to think about the next move.

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Now, had this been a made-up story instead of a true one, it would have been necessary to invent some sort of a surprising and exciting end for it. It would not be difficult to do that. Something dramatic and unusual. So before telling you what really *did* happen to Henry in real life, let us pause here for a moment to see what a competent fiction writer would have done to wrap up this story. His notes would read something like this:

1. Henry must die. Like Imhrat Khan before him, he had violated the code of the yogi and had used his powers for personal gain.

2. It will be best if he dies in some unusual and interesting manner that will surprise the reader.

3. For example, he could go home to his flat and start counting his money and gloating over it. While doing this, he might suddenly begin to feel unwell. He has a pain in his chest.

- 4. He becomes frightened. He decides to go to bed immediately and rest. He takes off his clothes. He walks naked to the closet to get his pajamas. He passes the full-length mirror that stands against the wall. He stops. He stares at the reflection of his naked self in the mirror. Automatically, from force of habit he begins to concentrate. And then
- 5. All at once, he is "seeing through" his own skin. He "sees through" it in the same way that he "saw through" those playing cards a while back. It is like an X-ray picture, only far better. An X-ray can see only the bones and the very dense areas. Henry can see everything. He sees his arteries and veins with the blood pumping

through him. He can see his liver, his kidneys, his intestines and he can see his heart beating.

- 6. He looks at the place in his chest where the pain is coming from . . . and he sees . . . or thinks he sees . . . a small dark lump inside the big vein leading into the heart on the right hand side. What could a small dark lump be doing inside the vein? It must be a blockage of some kind. It must be a clot. A blood clot!
- 7. At first, the clot seems to be stationary. Then it moves. The movement is very slight, no more than a millimeter or two. The blood inside the vein is pumping up behind the clot and pushing past it and the little clot moves again. It jerks forward about half an inch. This time, up the vein, toward the heart. Henry watches in terror. He knows, as almost everyone else in the world knows, that a blood clot that has broken free and is traveling in a vein will ultimately reach the heart. When it reaches the heart, you often die. . . .

That wouldn't be such a bad ending for a work of fiction, but this story is not fiction. It is true. The only untrue things about it are Henry's name and the name of the gambling casino. Henry's name was not Henry Sugar. His name has to be protected. It still must be protected. And for obvious reasons, one cannot call the casino by its real name. Apart from that, it is a true story.

And because it is a true story, it must have the true ending. The true one may not be quite so dramatic or spooky as a made-up one could be, but it is nonetheless interesting. Here is what actually happened.

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After walking the London streets for about an hour, Henry returned to Lord's House and collected his car. Then he drove back to his flat. He was a puzzled man. He couldn't understand why he felt so little excitement about his tremendous success. If this sort of thing had happened to him three years ago, before he'd started the yoga business, he'd have gone crazy with excitement. He'd have been dancing in the streets and rushing off to the nearest nightclub to celebrate with champagne.

The funny thing was that he didn't really feel excited at all. He felt melancholy. It had somehow all been too easy. Every time he'd made a bet, he'd been certain of winning. There was no thrill, no suspense, no danger of losing. He knew, of course, that from now on he could travel around the world and make millions. But was it going to be any fun doing it?

It was slowly beginning to dawn upon Henry that nothing is any fun if you can get as much of it as you want. Especially money.

Another thing. Was it not possible that the process he had gone through in order to acquire yoga powers had completely changed his outlook on life?

Certainly it was possible.

Henry drove home and went straight to bed.

The next morning he woke up late. But he didn't feel any more cheerful now than he had the night before. And when he got out of bed and saw the enormous bundle of money still lying on his dressing table, he felt a sudden and very acute revulsion toward it. He didn't want it. For the life of him, he couldn't explain why this was so, but the fact remained that he simply did not want any part of it.

He picked up the bundle. It was all in twenty-pound

notes, three hundred and thirty of them to be exact. He walked onto the balcony of his flat, and there he stood in his dark-red silk pajamas looking down at the street below him.

Henry's flat was in Curzon Street, which is right in the middle of London's most fashionable and expensive district, known as Mayfair. One end of Curzon Street runs into Berkeley Square, the other into Park Lane. Henry lived three floors above street level, and outside his bedroom there was a small balcony with iron railings that overhung the street.

The month was June, the morning was full of sunshine, and the time was about eleven o'clock. Although it was a Sunday, there were quite a few people strolling about on the sidewalks.

Henry peeled off a single twenty-pound note from his wad and dropped it over the balcony. A breeze took hold of it and blew it sideways in the direction of Park Lane. Henry stood watching it. It fluttered and twisted in the air and eventually came to rest on the opposite side of the street, directly in front of an old man. The old man was wearing a long, brown, shabby overcoat and a floppy hat, and he was walking slowly, all by himself. He caught sight of the note as it fluttered past his face, and he stopped and picked it up. He held it with both hands and stared at it. He turned it over. He peered closer. Then he raised his head and looked up.

"Hey there!" Henry shouted, cupping a hand to his mouth. "That's for you! It's a present!"

The old man stood quite still, holding the note in front of him and gazing up at the figure on the balcony above.

"Put it in your pocket!" Henry shouted. "Take it home!" His voice carried far along the street, and many people stopped and looked up.

Henry peeled off another note and threw it down. The watchers below him didn't move. They simply watched.

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They had no idea what was going on. A man was up there on the balcony and he had shouted something, and now he had just thrown down what looked like a piece of paper. Everyone followed the piece of paper as it went fluttering down. and this one came near to a young couple who were standing arm in arm on the sidewalk across the street. The man unlinked his arm and tried to catch the paper as it went past him. He missed it but picked it up from the ground. He examined it closely. The watchers on both sides of the street all had their eyes on the young man now. To many of them. the paper had looked very much like a banknote of some kind, and they were waiting to find out.

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"It's twenty pounds!" the man yelled, jumping up and down. "It's a twenty-pound note!"

"Keep it!" Henry shouted at him. "It's yours!"

"You mean it?" the man called back, holding the note out at arm's length. "Can I really keep it?"

Suddenly there was a rustle of excitement along both sides of the street, and everyone started moving at once. They ran out into the middle of the road and clustered underneath the balcony. They lifted their arms above their heads and started calling out, "Me! How about one for me! Drop us another one, guv'ner! Send down a few more!"

Henry peeled off another five or six notes and threw them down.

There were screams and yells as the pieces of paper fanned out in the wind and floated downward, and there was a good old-fashioned scrimmage in the streets as they reached the hands of the crowd. But it was all very good-natured. People were laughing. They thought it a fantastic joke. Here was a man standing three floors up, in his pajamas, slinging these enormously valuable notes into the air. Quite a few of those present had never even seen a twenty-pound note in their lives before this moment.

But now something else was beginning to happen.

The speed with which news will spread along the streets of a city is phenomenal. The news of what Henry was doing flashing like lightning up and down the length of Curzon Street and into the smaller and larger streets beyond. From all sides, people came running. Within a few minutes, about a thousand men and women and children were blocking the road underneath Henry's balcony. Drivers, who couldn't get through, got out of their cars and joined the crowd. And all of a sudden, there was chaos in Curzon Street.

At this point, Henry simply raised his arm and swung it out and flung the entire bundle of notes into the air. More than six thousand pounds went fluttering down toward the screaming crowd below.

The scramble that followed was really something to see. People were jumping up to catch the notes before they reached the ground, and everyone was pushing and jostling and yelling and falling over, and soon the whole place was a mass of tangled, yelling, fighting human beings.

Above the noise and behind him in his own flat, Henry suddenly heard his front-door bell ringing long and loud. He went in from the balcony and opened the door. A large policeman with a black moustache stood outside with his hands on his hips. "You!" he bellowed angrily. "You're the one! What the devil d'you think you're doing?"

"Good morning, officer," Henry said. "I'm sorry about the crowd. I didn't think it would turn out like that. I was just giving away some money."

"You are causing a nuisance!" the policeman bellowed. "You are creating an obstruction! You are inciting a riot and you are blocking the entire street!"

"I said I was sorry," Henry answered. "I won't do it again, I promise. They'll soon go away."

The policeman took one hand off his hip and from the inside of his palm he produced a twenty-pound note.

"Ah-ha!" Henry cried. "You got one yourself! I'm so glad!

I'm so happy for you!"

"Now you just stop that larking about!" the policeman said, "because I have a few serious questions to ask you about these here twenty-pound notes." He took a notebook from his breast pocket. "In the first place," he went on, "where exactly did you get them from?"

"I won them," Henry said. "I had a lucky night." He went on to give the name of the club where he had won the money, and the policeman wrote it down in his little book. "Check it up," Henry added. "They'll tell you it's true."

The policeman lowered the notebook and looked Henry in the eye. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I believe your story. I think you're telling the truth. But that doesn't excuse what you did one little bit."

"I didn't do anything wrong," Henry said.

"You're a blithering young idiot!" the policeman shouted, beginning to work himself up all over again. "You're an ass and an imbecile! If you've been lucky enough to win yourself a tremendous big sum of money like that and you want to give it away, you don't throw it out the window!"

"Why not?" Henry asked, grinning. "It's as good a way of

getting rid of it as any."

"It's a damned stupid silly way of getting rid of it!" the policeman cried. "Why didn't you give it where it would do some good? To a hospital, for instance? Or an orphanage? There's orphanages all over the country that hardly have enough money to buy the kids a present even for Christmas! And then along comes a little twit like you who's never even known what it's like to be hard up and you throw the stuff out into the street! It makes me mad, it really does!"

"An orphanage?" Henry said.

"Yes, an orphanage!" the policeman cried. "I was brought up in one so I ought to know what it's like!" With that, the policeman turned away and went quickly down the stairs toward the street.

Henry didn't move. The policeman's words, and more especially the genuine fury with which they had been spo-

ken, smacked our hero right between the eyes. "An orphanage?" he cried aloud. "That's quite a thought.

But why only one orphanage? Why not lots of them?" And now, very quickly, there began to come to him the great and

marvelous idea that was to change everything.

Henry shut the front door and went back into his flat. All at once, he felt a powerful excitement stirring in his belly. He started pacing up and down, ticking off the points that would make his marvelous idea possible.

"One," he said, "I can get hold of a very large sum of

money each day of my life.

"Two. I must not go to the same casino more than once

every twelve months.

"Three. I must not win too much from any one casino or somebody will get suspicious. I suggest I keep it down to twenty thousand pounds a night.

"Four. Twenty thousand pounds a night for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year comes to how much?"

Henry took a pencil and paper and worked this one out.

"It comes to seven million, three hundred thousand

pounds," he said aloud.

"Very well. Point number five. I shall have to keep moving. No more than two or three nights at a stretch in any one city or the word will get around. Go from London to Monte Carlo, Then to Cannes. To Biarritz. To Deauville. To Las Vegas. To Mexico City. To Buenos Aires. To Nassau. And so on.

"Six. With the money I make, I will set up an absolutely

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first-class orphanage in every country I visit. I will become a Robin Hood. I will take money from the bookmakers and the gambling proprietors and give it to the children. Does that sound corny and sentimental? As a dream, it does. But as a reality, if I can really make it work, it won't be corny at all, or sentimental. It would be rather tremendous.

"Seven. I will need somebody to help me, a man who will sit at home and take care of all that money and buy the houses and organize the whole thing. A money man. Someone I can trust. What about John Winston?"

### 11

John Winston was Henry's accountant. He handled his income-tax affairs, his investments and all other problems that had to do with money. Henry had known him for eighteen years, and a friendship had developed between the two men. Remember though, that up until now, John Winston had known Henry only as the wealthy idle playboy who had never done a day's work in his life.

"You must be mad," John Winston said when Henry told him his plan. "Nobody has ever devised a system for beating the casinos."

From his pocket, Henry produced a brand-new unopened pack of cards. "Come on," he said. "We'll play a little blackjack. You're the dealer. And don't tell me those cards are marked. It's a new pack."

Solemnly, for nearly an hour, sitting in Winston's office whose windows looked out over Berkeley Square, the two men played blackjack. They used matchsticks as counters, each match being worth twenty-five pounds. After fifty minutes, Henry was no less than thirty-four thousand pounds ahead!

John Winston couldn't believe it. "How do you do it?" he said.

"Put the pack on the table," Henry said. "Face down."

Winston obeyed.

Henry concentrated on the top card for four seconds. "That's a knave of hearts," he said. It was.

"The next one is . . . a three of hearts." It was. He went

right through the entire pack, naming every card.

"Go on," John Winston said. "Tell me how you do it." This usually calm and mathematical man was leaning forward over his desk, staring at Henry with eyes as big and bright as two stars. "You do realize you are doing something completely impossible?" he said.

"It's not impossible," Henry said. "It is only very difficult.

I am the one man in the world who can do it."

The telephone rang on John Winston's desk. He lifted the receiver and said to his secretary, "No more calls please, Susan, until I tell you. Not even my wife." He looked up, waiting for Henry to go on.

Henry then proceeded to explain to John Winston exactly how he had acquired the power. He told him how he had found the notebook and about Imhrat Khan and then he described how he had been working nonstop for the past three years, training his mind to concentrate.

When he had finished, John Winston said, "Have you tried walking on fire?"

"No," Henry said, "and I'm not going to."

"What makes you think you'll be able to do this thing with the cards in a casino?"

Henry then told him about his visit to Lord's House the night before.

"Six thousand, six hundred pounds!" John Winston cried. "Did you honestly win that much in real money!"

"Listen," Henry said. "I just won thirty-four thousand from you in less than an hour!"

"So you did."

"Six thousand was the very least I could win," Henry said. "It was a terrific effort not to win more."

"You will be the richest man on earth."

"I don't want to be the richest man on earth," Henry said. "Not anymore." He then told him about his plan for orphanages.

When he had finished, he said, "Will you join me, John? Will you be my money man, my banker, my administrator and everything else? There will be millions coming in every year."

John Winston, a cautious and prudent accountant, would not agree to anything at all on the spur of the moment. "I want to see you in action first," he said.

So that night, they went together to the Ritz Club on Curzon Street. "Can't go to Lord's House again now for some time," Henry said.

On the first spin of the roulette wheel, Henry staked \$100 on number 27. It came up. The second time he put it on number 4; that came up too. A total of \$7200 profit.

An Arab standing next to Henry said, "I have just lost fifty-five thousand pounds. How do you do it?"

"Luck," Henry said. "Just luck."

They moved into the blackjack room and there, in half an hour, Henry won a further \$10,000. Then he stopped.

Outside in the street, John Winston said, "I believe you now. I'll come with you."

"We start tomorrow," Henry said.

"Do you really intend to do this every single night?"

"Yes," Henry said. "I shall move very fast from place to place, from country to country. And every day, I shall send the profits back to you through the banks."

"Do you realize how much it will add up to in a year?"
"Millions," Henry said cheerfully. "About seven million a

year."

"In that case, I can't operate out of this country," John Winston said. "The taxman will have it all."

"Go anywhere you like," Henry said. "It makes no difference to me. I trust you completely."

"I shall go to Switzerland," John Winston said. "But not, tomorrow. I can't just pull up and fly away. I'm not an unattached bachelor like you with no responsibilities. I must talk to my wife and children. I must give notice to my partners in the firm. I must sell my house. I must find another house in Switzerland. I must take the kids out of school. My dear man, these things take time!"

Henry drew from his pocket the \$17,500 he had just won and handed them to the other man. "Here's some petty cash to tide you over until you get settled," he said. "But do hurry up. I want to get cracking."

Within a week, John Winston was in Lausanne, with an office high up on the lovely hillside above Lake Geneva. His family would follow him as soon as possible.

And Henry went to work in the casinos.

### 12

One year later, he had sent a little over eight million pounds to John Winston in Lausanne. The money was sent five days a week to a Swiss company called ORPHANAGES S.A. Nobody except John Winston and Henry knew where the money came from or what was going to happen to it. As for the Swiss authorities, they never want to know where money comes from. Henry sent the money through the banks. The Monday remittance was always the biggest because it included Henry's take for Friday, Saturday and Sunday, when the

banks were closed. He moved with astonishing speed, and often the only clue that John Winston had to his whereabouts was the address of the bank that had sent the money on a particular day. One day it would come perhaps from a bank in Manila. The next day from Bangkok. It came from Las Vegas, from Curaçao, from Freeport, from Grand Cayman, from San Juan, from Nassau, from London, from Biarritz. It came from anywhere and everywhere as long as there was a big casino in the city.

### 13

For seven years, all went well. Nearly fifty million pounds had arrived in Lausanne and had been safely banked away. Already, John Winston had got three orphanages established, one in France, one in England, and one in the United States. Five more were on the way.

Then came a bit of trouble. There is a grapevine among casino owners, and although Henry was always extraordinarily careful not to take too much from any one place on any one night, the news was bound to spread in the end.

They got wise to him one night in Las Vegas when Henry rather imprudently took one hundred thousand dollars from each of three separate casinos that all happened to be owned by the same mob.

What happened was this. The morning after, when Henry was in his hotel room packing to leave for the airport, there was a knock on his door. A bellhop came in and whispered to Henry that two men were waiting for him in the lobby. Other men, the bellhop said, were guarding the rear exit. These were very hard men, the bellhop said, and he did not give much for Henry's chances of survival if he were to go downstairs at this moment.

"Why do you come and tell me?" Henry asked him. "Why are you on my side?"

"I'm not on anyone's side," the bellhop said. "But we all know you won a lot of money last night and I figured you might give me a nice present for tipping you off."

"Thanks," Henry said. "But how do I get away? I'll give you a thousand dollars if you can get me out of here."

"That's easy," the bellhop said. "Take your own clothes off and put on my uniform. Then walk out through the lobby with your suitcase. But tie me up before you leave. I've gotta by lying here on the floor tied up hand and foot so they won't think I helped you. I'll say you had a gun and I couldn't do nothing."

"Where's the cord to tie you up with?" Henry asked.

"Right here in my pocket," the bellhop said, grinning.

Henry put on the bellhop's gold and green uniform, which wasn't too bad a fit. Then he tied the man up good and proper with the cord and stuffed a handkerchief in his mouth. Finally, he pushed ten one-hundred-dollar bills under the carpet for the bell hop to collect later.

Down in the lobby, two short, thick, black-haired thugs were watching the people as they came out of the elevators. But they hardly glanced at the man in the green and gold bellhop's uniform who came out carrying a suitcase and who walked smartly across the lobby and out through the revolving doors that led to the street.

At the airport, Henry changed his flight and took the next plane to Los Angeles. Things were not going to be quite so easy from now on, he told himself. But that bellhop had given him an idea.

In Los Angeles, and in nearby Hollywood and Beverly Hills, where all the film people live, Henry sought out the very best makeup man in the business. This was Max Engelman. Henry called on him. He liked him immediately.

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"How much do you earn?" Henry asked him.

"Oh, about forty thousand dollars a year," Max told him.

"I'll give you a hundred thousand," Henry said, "if you will come with me and be my makeup artist."

"What's the big idea?" Max asked him. "I'll tell you," Henry said. And he did.

Max was only the second person Henry had told. John Winston was the first. And when Henry showed Max how he could read the cards, Max was flabbergasted.

"Great heavens, man!" he cried. "You could make a fortune!"

"I already have," Henry told him. "I've made ten fortunes. But I want to make ten more." He told Max about the orphanages. With John Winston's help, he had already set up seven of them in seven different countries.

Max was a small dark-skinned man who had escaped from Vienna when the Nazis went in. He had never married. He had no ties. He became wildly enthusiastic. "It's crazy!" he cried. "It's the craziest thing I've heard in my life! I'll join you, man! Let's go!"

From then on, Max Engelman traveled everywhere with Henry and carried with him in a trunk such an assortment of wigs, false beards, sideburns, moustaches and makeup materials as you have never seen. He could turn his master into any one of thirty of forty unrecognizable people, and the casino managers, who were all watching for Henry now, never once saw him again as Mr. Henry Sugar. As a matter of fact, only a year after the Las Vegas episode, Henry and Max actually went back to that dangerous city, and on a warm starry night Henry took a cool eighty thousand dollars from the first of the big casinos he had visited before. He went disguised as an elderly Brazilian diplomat, and they never knew what hit them.

Now that Henry no longer appeared as himself in the

casinos, there were, of course, a number of other details that had to be taken care of, such as false identity cards and passports. In Monte Carlo, for example, a visitor must always show his passport before being allowed to enter the casino. Henry visited Monte Carlo eleven more times with Max's assistance, every time with a different passport and in a different disguise.

Max adored the work. He loved creating new characters for Henry. "I have an entirely fresh one for you today!" he would announce. "Just wait till you see it! Today you will be an Arab sheik from Kuwait!"

"Do we have an Arab passport?" Henry would ask. "And Arab papers?"

"We have everything," Max would answer. "John Winston has sent me a lovely passport in the name of His Royal Highness Sheik Abu Bin Bey!"

And so it went on. Over the years, Max and Henry became as brothers. They were crusading brothers, two men who moved swiftly through the skies, milking the casinos of the world and sending the money straight back to John Winston in Switzerland, where the company known as ORPHANAGES S.A. grew richer and richer.

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Henry died last year, at the age of sixty-three, his work completed. He had been at it for just on twenty years.

His personal reference book listed three hundred and seventy-one major casinos in twenty-one different countries or islands. He had visited them all many times, and he had never lost.

According to John Winston's accounts, he had made altogether \$144 million.

He left twenty-one well-established, well-run orphanages

scattered about the world, one in each country he visited. All these were administered and financed from Lausanne by John and his staff.

But how do I, who am neither Max Engelman nor John Winston, happen to know all this? And how did I come to write the story in the first place?

I will tell you.

Soon after Henry's death, John Winston telephoned me from Switzerland. He introduced himself simply as the head of a company calling itself ORPHANAGES S.A., and asked me if I would come out to Lausanne to see him with a view to writing a brief history of the organization. I don't know how he got hold of my name. He probably had a list of writers and stuck a pin into it. He would pay me well, he said. And he added, "A remarkable man has died recently. His name was Henry Sugar. I think people ought to know a bit about what he has done."

In my ignorance, I asked whether the story was really intersting enough to merit being put on paper.

"All right," said the man who now controlled \$144 million. "Forget it, I'll ask someone else. There are plenty of writers around."

That needled me. "No," I said. "Wait. Could you at least tell me who this Henry Sugar was and what he did? I've never even heard of him."

In five minutes on the phone, John Winston told me something about Henry Sugar's secret career. It was secret no longer. Henry was dead and would never gamble again. I listened, enthralled.

"I'll be on the next plane," I said.

"Thank you," John Winston said. "I would appreciate that."

In Lausanne, I met John Winston, now over seventy, and also Max Engleman, who was about the same age. They were both still shattered by Henry's death, Max even more so than John Winston, for Max had been beside him constantly for over thirteen years. "I loved him," Max said, a shadow falling over his face. "He was a great man. He never thought about himself. He never kept a penny of the money he won, except what he needed to travel and to eat. Listen, once were were in Biarritz and he had just been to the bank and given them half a million francs to send home to John. It was lunchtime. We went to a place and had a simple lunch, an omelete and bottle of wine, and when the bill came, Henry hadn't got anything to pay it with. I hadn't either. He was a lovely man."

John Winston told me everything he knew. He showed me the original dark-blue notebook written by Dr. John Cartwright in Bombay in 1934 about Imhrat Khan, and I copied it out word for word.

"Henry always carried it with him," John Winston said. "In the end, he knew the whole thing by heart."

He showed me the account books of ORPHANAGES S.A. with Henry's winnings recorded in them day by day over twenty years, and a truly staggering sight they were.

When he had finished, I said to him, "There's a big gap in this story, Mr. Winston. You've told me almost nothing about Henry's travels and about his adventures in the casinos of the world."

"That's Max's story," John Winston said. "Max knows all about that because he was with him. But he says he wants to have a shot at writing it himself. He's already started."

"Then why not let Max write the whole thing?" I asked.

"He doesn't want to," John Winston said. "He only wants to write about Henry and Max. It should be a fantastic story if he ever gets it finished. But he is old now, like me, and I doubt he will manage it."

"One last question," I said. "You keep calling him Henry

Sugar. And yet you tell me that wasn't his name. Don't you want me to say who he really was when I do the story?"

"No," John Winston said. "Max and I promised never to reveal it. Oh, it'll probably leak out sooner or later. After all, he was from a fairly well known English family. But I'd appreciate it if you don't try to find out. Just call him plain Mr. Henry Sugar."

And that is what I have done.



# HOMMAGE À

BOURNONVILLE

The height of artistry is to conceal mechanical action and effort behind harmonious serenity.

— AUGUST ANTOINE BOURNONVILLE,
My Life in the Theater

IT WAS MARCH 19, 1929, the beginning of the twenty-sixth night of Ramadan, the night on which Allah sent the Koran from heaven to earth, and in Lisbon harbor, just down from the Alfama district, two young men had, in all respects, reached the end of the road.

They were sitting on the deck of a small sailboat of a kind known south of the Horn of Africa as a *meli*, a craft that has no business in Lisbon, its sails being designed for another sort of wind and its hull for another type of swell. Moreover, this one leaked slightly and sagged at its moorings as though drunk on the saltwater it had taken in or as though sinking to the bottom in despair over the two who sailed it.

They were lit by a small charcoal fire that glowed on a metal sheet set between them. They had gone without food for a long time and one of them, sitting straight-backed and cross-legged, was by now so emaciated that his naked torso seemed to consist solely of the levers of its bones and the fine cords of muscle that allow these to move. He wore a turban of white wool and in his face African and Oriental features and a number of individually mordant and volatile qualities blended into a harmonious whole. His name was Rumi and he was a monk of the Islamic Mawlawiyah order.

His traveling companion had clearly been strong at one time, but starvation had also taken its toll on him, so that even when,

as now, he reclined at his ease, he frequently had to shift position to take the weight off his own protruding bones. His name was Jakob Natten and he had once been a dancer at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen.

There was something natural about the tranquillity of the two men; an observer might easily have overlooked the dilapidated barque, imagining that here were two mariners enjoying some peace and quiet, with time on their hands and obvious reasons for being where they were. While the truth of the matter was, neither of the two was capable of setting sail or plotting a course; both knew that on this night they were living on borrowed time and so amazed were they by the fact of their own existence that they had no idea—not even the Mohammedan—whether they had wound up in Lisbon because it was in their own and the world's best interest or whether somewhere in the universe an angel had mislaid their particular papers.

They had met six months earlier on Sardinia, in Oloroso. When the Fascist Italian carabinieri descended on that town they could have taken to the maquis with the Resistance but instead they chose to sail on. It was at this point that they had been struck by the thought that they might be displaced not in space but in time. That they perhaps belonged in a century other than that into which they had been born. Together, since then, they had traveled so far out onto the fringes of society that they had now reached the point where life leaves off and something else begins. But even here it was apparent that they had once been at the center of things: over their emaciation both wore the same flaking dignity; no one could have doubted that what the glow of the embers played upon were two down-and-out child prodigies.

Accounts of Rumi and his childhood and youth are still subject to exaggeration, even though, then as now, the truth more than suffices. He was raised in Turkey, in Konya, capital of the Mawlawiyah order. By the age of five he knew the Koran by heart. He was taken to Mecca, where, in the square in front of the Kaaba, for five days and five nights he recited the Holy Book to the faithful twice running, with nothing but a very short break for something to drink, and by the age of twenty he had attained such a degree of contact with Allah in the holy whirling dance that he

was expecting to be raised up to paradise any day. Two years later Atatürk banned the order and closed the monastery, and Rumi was east into a sort of insecurity of which he had heard but which he had never really imagined possible. By then he had for some time been something of a celebrity and, like other homeless religious leaders of the day, he would undoubtedly have found a welcome in some European capital, there to be given a foretaste of that paradise of which Allah promises in the Koran (in the seventy-sixth sura) that we shall all sit on soft cushions in the shade of the trees. But this Rumi would not have. The Mawlawiyah call themselves "dervishes," a Persian word meaning poor, and they have dedicated their lives to seeking Allah through faith, poverty, dancing, and music, and not in Paris. This unwavering conviction had first led Rumi to take to the road and later it had caused him to sin ever so slightly against the Koran when, in order to stay alive, somewhere near Port Said he stole a boat. It had then swept him across the Mediterranean to Sardinia, where he had met Jakob, and from there it had carried him as far as Lisbon.

Rumi knew nothing of Jakob Natten other than that he had once been a ballet dancer and that he was possessed of an obstinacy that would likely be the death of him. Rumi had once asked his traveling companion what had prompted him to leave his dancing and his native land and all Jakob had said in reply was that circumstances had taken such a turn that, had he gone on dancing in Denmark, it would have been in prison.

They both knew that this evening a hunt was on for them. Somewhere, a detachment of gendarmes was methodically combing the docks, and now and again the baying of the dogs carried across the water to the two on the deck. One of the harbor police's low, dark launches moved slowly—almost drifting—downriver, scanning the anchored vessels.

Neither of the two now questioned what they were wanted for. The day before, in a bar, a man in uniform had asked to see their passports and Jakob had butted him in the face, not for any political reason—so hazy were Jakob's ideas on politics that they could never have been the cause of his hurting anyone—but out of the panic and paranoia that build up inside those who are sinking to the bottom. They had managed to shake off their pursuers somewhere in Lisbon's maze of narrow streets and squares, but only by the skin of their teeth, and both of them had sensed the end approaching, because behind this bid for escape lay the memory of all the other times they had fled from places where they had stolen things or from the harbor police or customs officers, and although neither of them (or even both of them together) had any extensive knowledge of society, they were beginning to understand that for someone without a passport or papers or an occupation, someone who has not been married or at least engaged or has run off to join the Foreign Legion, simply staying alive, staying afloat and at liberty for any length of time, is an impossible task.

So now they were waiting for the conclusion, and perhaps it denotes some act of mercy on the part of nature that, when exhaustion is so great that one must stop and turn to face one's pursuers, one can do so with the sort of composure that comes from knowing that one has no choice. It was this composure that moved these two men to make themselves comfortable on the brink of the abyss.

Now, when they had ceased to expect anything of the world, their surroundings granted them everything. The sun had gone down; it was that hour when the importance of friendship and love, punishment and reward, thirst and justice fades and disappears, because Allah reveals that he is blue. The Tagus was a mirror of congealed silver, against the purple hillsides the houses of the city showed as delicate boxes of white marble, and the last light of the setting sun was a sliver of flame fired gold against the blue-black clouds in the west.

Occasionally the two men drank milk spiced with cinnamon from a kettle set on the coals, the scalding liquid sending a mildly delirious exhilaration coursing through their veins. Though no words passed between them, their thoughts turned onto the same path and fell into step. They reflected on the art of survival, on the squares where they had thieved and the houses at which they had begged, and on the fact that they, who had once danced for Allah and the patrons of the Royal Theater, now danced for passersby. Only at that point did their thoughts elect each to go their own ways and only then did speech become necessary.

"Rumi," said Jakob, "have you considered that until not long before we met I believed that I was going to dance my way into everlasting, or at any rate long-lasting, fame? And you were under the impression that you were going to dance your way into paradise. In a sense we had the idea that we were moving, in time with the music, toward eternal life. And now it turns out that the place for which we were headed was a Lisbon jail." "That will be no more than a transition," said Rumi. "It could end up lasting a lifetime," said Jakob, and in a flash of despondency he saw the face of the Portuguese dictator pass before his eyes. "Even then it will be but a transition," said Rumi, "and there is no guarantee that it will last that long." "Do you never think, Rumi, that you might have ended up somewhere other than where you now find yourself?" asked Jakob. "The Koran commands us to consider each day how we shall spend eternity," the Mohammedan replied. "But what about where we will be tomorrow?" Jakob persisted. "I laugh at tomorrow," said Rumi. "But you never laugh," objected Jakob. "I laugh to myself. Since coming to Europe I laugh only to myself," answered the Mohammedan. "You Europeans could put up a gateway at Gibraltar inscribed with the words: 'Only those who are absolutely serious may enter here.' Because the countries of Europe are the most serious places I have ever seen." "The Arabic songs you sing are like one long lament," said Jakob. "We Mohammedans," said Rumi, "yearn for paradise, realize that we cannot attain it, and weep and wail. And then we laugh. You Europeans yearn like us and weep like us. But then you whine, hoping that perhaps you might still be able to move your God to put an end to all earthly suffering. I have no desire to be anywhere but where I find myself. I am not about to plague Allah with my whining." "I don't ask anyone for help," said Jakob earnestly. "But shortly before I met you someone asked me something and the question has been ringing in my ears ever since. It is the question of whether we should stay or run away." "That is for Allah to decide," said the Mohammedan serenely. "That may be," said Jakob, "but I have the feeling that he would like to hear-in passing, as it were-my thoughts on the matter. Would you care to hear," he continued, "how the question of staying or fleeing came into my life?" And without waiting for a reply he

with a metaphor. And you're right, the God metaphor is no good. More than for any other reason we worked because we ourselves wanted to. In Denmark everyone agrees that the greatest mystery is that of diversity. In our society the incomprehensible individuals are those who are out of step, who keep tripping over their own feet, or who have raced on ahead because they feel something burning at their backs, or who cannot catch up with the rest of us because they happen to have a wooden leg or to weigh three hundred pounds. Trying to understand these people has become an art. For me, Rumi, it's different. Or at least it has become different. For me, the great secret is why so many stay in line; my mystery is the mystery of discipline.

"I'm no longer sure how things stand regarding suffering in the world. Having seen that one can be in need of almost everything and still be as happy as a clam, I tend to think twice before identifying people as suffering. But this much I will say: most people had a hard time of it at the theater. And it may not even have been the one or two students in each class who were thrown out each year because they weren't good enough who were the most unhappy.

"They were always telling us that the ballet school had flourished like a plant. It had been a seed and a tender but promising
shoot, and then, in the last century, it had been taken over by a
great gardener and ballet master, a born general who danced a
military polka by his father's deathbed and who swore that he
would construct his theater like a barracks and train his dancers
like soldiers. During his time the school and the dancing produced
a large rose that has been blooming ever since, and the reason it
has succeeded in lasting so long is that it is made of stucco. In
those days, for a while at least, the dancing must have been soft,
and then it was molded to imitate life, after which it hardened,
like the plants adorning the theater itself, into a stiff, white, and
everlasting instruction to posterity as to how to envisage the living.

"Maybe that's why we did as we were told; maybe the theater explained itself, as it were. Maybe we put up with the pain because everything around us vouched for the fact that, now and forevermore, there would never be any real life but this.

"For a long while my friend Andreas was a vital component in this machine.

"If he were sitting across from you this evening you would be thinking to yourself that he, like me, was ready to be turned into glue; like me he would remind you of something that was to be carted off this very night by garbagemen. But until not that long ago his body constituted the perfect instrument for a god who bows his violin with a switch. And I use the word body deliberately. I know there are those who believe there is no way we can dissociate the soul from the body but that is because they have never seen what Andreas and I saw. He and I, we know now that it is possible to dance without your soul and with your head under your arm and still persuade the world at large that dead things live.

"Our hours are numbered, Rumi, and they are too few for modesty on others' behalf. When Andreas danced, the audience out there in the darkness saw their dreams come true. I don't know how such things come about. Perhaps it was his technique. His pirouettes, his cool-headed preparation, his centering, and his sharp yet perfectly poised turns. Or his slightly premature takeoff in the jumps, the culmination of his leap just before the first beat and the way he hung there until, just when everyone expected him to land, to come back down to earth and the rest of us, he would stretch out and continue to soar. And at that moment those of us in the wings and the two thousand people in the house would hold our breaths, unable to tell if it was the angel of life or the angel of death that had blown on the backs of our necks. "That is how Andreas danced, so effortless in his below in the source."

"That is how Andreas danced, so effortless in his balancing feats that he might simply have been taking a stroll. And yet that was not the key factor; his technique is no more than incidental to this story. The important thing here, and for everyone else who will remember and understand Andreas, was his way of becoming one with the dances he performed, the way he could mingle with the rest of us, smiling and hardworking and of his time and yet like something forgotten and left behind in the theater a century ago. The way he, more than any dancer before him, embodied the stucco of which the ballet is formed.

"The master's ballets deal with many things. With how right and proper it is that there should be a difference between rich and poor and with how wonderful it is to be out in the countryside. But above all they are about love, about love's being all around us and being overwhelmingly beautiful or overwhelmingly sad but always something to do with over, with above, and never anything to do with below and most definitely never, ever anything below the waist.

"These dances quite naturally lent a distinct character to our collective madness, and naturally we all went around, even on the way home from the theater, with our toes turned out and a swagger in our step and traces of greasepaint on our faces to show people that love clung to us, that in each of us there resided something of a prince, a princess, a peasant girl, or a devil—that in us, at any rate, the precious metals were to be found.

"But with Andreas it was different; with him it was not powder and paint. He did not play a prince, he was a prince. Offstage, of course, I mainly saw him practicing, always with the wild intensity that stems from knowing one is doing the only right thing in this life, for the suspicion harbored by some of our number that the theater was actually a side track that ran off at a tangent, this never occurred to Andreas. He was convinced that every glissade brought him closer to the essence of life. But when he was not practicing I think that his life revolved around women; indeed I am certain that it revolved around women. Not around any one woman in particular, though—more like the opposite: it revolved around women as an ideal. I recall him as being chivalrous; when I call my image of him to mind I see him holding doors for the ballerinas and carrying their bags and helping them with technical problems, but above all I see him dancing with them, not as a dancer playing the part of a romantic hero but as the romantic hero himself, like some balletically brilliant and thoroughly compelling relic of the last century.

"Who could ever understand it who has not seen it with their own eyes? Suffice to say that when he suffered agonies on stage his pain reached out into the house, so that people wept. And when he strode round a woodland lake of painted cardboard I would have sworn I heard nightingales sing. There were times when he would raise his dagger to commit an implausible histrionic suicide and a female member of the audience would rush onto the stage and stay his arm, and everyone in the theater believed—even I, who knew all about the cardboard knife and

the other illusions, even I believed, some evenings, at any rate—they were about to see someone die. Let me put it this way: Andreas's romanticism was such that it was perfect, apart from the fact that it was a hundred years out of date. At the time I thought: He's never going to have any sort of ordinary life; there'll never be a woman or a family or an old age for him; he is only capable of coming alive on the stage and so there he will have to live forever. In fact, it was not inconceivable that he, who broke the law of gravity every evening, might go on dancing forever. And if he cannot, I thought, then he will just have to die onstage, at the height of his career.

"I got it all wrong, Rumi, which is just as it should be. When one sleeps and dreams that something here on Earth is going to last forever, I think one ought to be woken and set straight.

"I was there when he laid eyes on the girl for the first time and so I know what took place, as far as one can understand something one witnesses but is not actually a part of.

"There had been a gathering somewhere in Copenhagen, in an apartment high above the city, and now the party was over. I seem to remember there were people slumped in chairs and on sofas, sound asleep. Only two were awake, Andreas and I. I don't know why he was still there—he was usually one of the first to leave—but that night, or it might have been early morning, he was still around. Perhaps he cherished some hope, perhaps he had been seized by a longing for something or other and now felt that, if only he waited, the world would draw him to its bosom and free him of some of the stucco inside him.

"I am not one of those who think there's much to be gained by waiting and hoping, so I woke the violinist. He was a small youth with a clubfoot and coarse hands, a country bumpkin who had played at dances in village halls until someone discovered that with his violin he drew the music through the air like a flawless silver thread. Andreas and I were very young but he must have been even younger, so in a way he, too, Rumi, was a talented child of great promise. But, still and all, a runty shepherd boy, a cowherd—that there was no denying—and yet we took him everywhere with us. When I walk, behind my own steps I can still hear the lopsided, lumbering thud of his shoe. We didn't have

much time for ugly people at the theater—the last thing we wanted to be reminded of was wretchedness. As far as we were concerned, cripples, and especially cripples from the provinces, were an affront to the grand and sacred delicacy of the theater. Nevertheless, we took the boy with us wherever we went and this we did because of his music. For, from the first time one heard him play, one knew that half of this boy's soul had been left with the gods of music while the other half rested with the composers of today, from whence it whispered its burning inspiration to him. Added to which, he was happy. How do I know he was happy? I cannot say. I can't recall ever speaking to him. I don't even remember ever having seen him smile. And yet I know that he was happy. He-a cripple, a person who seemed to us born not even to tragedy but to the most abject misery—he glowed, when he played and when he dragged his foot after us, with an unnatural zest for life. And I have an idea that we took him around with us much as one walks around with an unanswered question that will not leave one alone.

"So I woke him. We had given him wine, I remember; it was the first time he'd ever had anything to drink and the alcohol had had an extremely stimulating and, later, a brutally stupefying effect on him. But now he played anyway—a song, a disjointed, stuttering, gleeful, plaintive, and yet cool refrain. I heard it for the first time that night; I now know it by heart. It was written by a man named Stravinsky and then, as now, the music acted as a provocation. I have since learned that it tells of a young man who plays the violin and who sells his violin to the devil, but even then I had the feeling I was listening to something drawn from the abyss.

"Then the girl danced. I don't know where she appeared from, I hadn't noticed her earlier, but suddenly there she was on the vast bare floor. She danced barefoot and she lifted the gimp and me out of our alcoholic haze and into a wild and quiet rapture. And she lifted Andreas into a mad infatuation.

"Eventually she stopped, then disappeared, and after that I went home. When I left the room, Andreas was sitting stock-still in a chair, as if poleaxed, gazing at the spot where the soles of her feet had kissed the floor. I said not a word to him, partly

because I was loath to spoil the moment and partly because, as I'm sure you will agree, one should never speak to anyone into whose brain the Lord has, as it were, injected an extra dose of oxygen.

"Something like six months must have passed before we saw her again, and though we never spoke of her it was not because we had forgotten her but because we knew, of course, that somehow she was waiting just around the corner. And one morning there she was in class, standing at the barre working along with everyone else as if that were her rightful place. I have no idea how she got in, normally there would have been no question of the theater's taking on an unknown nineteen-year-old, but even a mausoleum finds it hard to say no to a thing of wonder. And it may be that at first they rejected her—how should I know—but she was the type who, even if the door to a vault were being slammed in her face, would stop it with her foot and slip through the gap as if she had been begged to enter.

"So now I had the chance to see her dance, to see not only her own indefinable movements but the eternal, meticulously fixed steps of classical ballet. I have been in the same room as her and on the same stage more times than I can count and I have never so much as come close to understanding how she could possibly have learned so fast and danced so beautifully. I tried guessing her past from her movements and the most I can say of what I observed then is that she had definitely, quite definitely spent a lot of time out playing with boys.

"In fact, I was well aware that it was not so much her that I understood when I watched her dance as God. To be quite honest, I don't know what to think about the existence of God—I make no bones about that, even to you, Rumi—but if he does exist and did create the earth, then, having seen that girl, I can see why he created the fish and the birds and the wild animals before he created man. Because, I said to myself, obviously he had to practice, obviously he had to train himself to the point where he was capable of combining the suppleness of the eel, the streamlined precision of the sparrow hawk, and the pantherlike spring of the cat in a human being such as this girl.

"When she left her first morning class at the theater Andreas

was holding the door for her; he had been standing there waiting for quite a while, wanting to be ready, and when she had gone he stayed, leaning against the door handle and staring at the empty space in the air that she had left in her wake and I was glad. It was good, I thought, to see a statue come down from its pedestal to stand swaying sheepishly in its adoration, particularly when the statue happened to be one's friend.

"Right from the outset I hoped that she would pick him up and dust him off, and when she had been at the theater for a year and danced with him for the first time I felt quite sure that she would. And in that expectation I was proved both right and wrong.

"What I am now about to tell you I learned from Andreas. I saw what went on from a distance only, but what happened was that his chivalry was stretched to the limit. As a couple, onstage, they made everyone believe that love is undying and that it is possible to love the soul without lusting after the body. Offstage they were the best of friends, but no more than that. The one time I was bold enough to ask Andreas about their relationship, he smiled coyly and politely and told me how much he respected her and how women were superior beings. But I saw right through his smile and into the ice-cold loneliness out of which he knew only the girl could raise him.

"Until one particular day Andreas bit back his feelings, then swallowed them, lest they attract the notice of, and intimidate, the superior being who lay in his arms every evening in the sight of two thousand people. But on that day he abandoned discretion and told her how things stood.

"I'm almost thankful that I did not personally have to hear his explanation. Andreas was a dancer, words did not exactly trip off his tongue, and it is difficult to be in love in Denmark—things that ought to fall beautifully on the ear can so easily end up sounding as if they have been dredged up from a different age, as if they have been buried underground. Nevertheless, he managed it and he told me that it had come as a relief. At one point as he was talking and confessing everything, something had seemed to give way and he had dropped on one knee and kissed her hand and out of him there had poured a hodgepodge of stage directions from ballets in which he had danced, along with huge chunks of stucco and clichés he had picked up as a child, and something else, too-a stream of pure gold.

"He told me that the girl heard him out without interrupting. Then, after a moment's deliberation, she told him who she really was.

"She began by saying that, since he felt as he did, she would have to tell him the truth. And this she did, matter-of-factly, almost as if she were reading a newspaper report, as if it were all something she stood outside of.

"She was born in Germany not long before the war to a mother who for some reason was Danish, in a town whose name she did not care to recall but which had been engulfed by the front line. Her mother worked in one of the brothels in the town, establishments that were later appropriated by the state and handed over to the army. She was the only child living in the place and she had no idea how her mother contrived to hold onto her; she told Andreas that she had no explanations to give, nor did she seek any-all she knew was that ever since she had been old enough to remember what she saw, her mother had been a skinny, hardworking little whore feared by all, even her customers. She had entangled the long succession of men who passed through her door each day in long garlands of brazen behavior. The girl told Andreas that somewhere inside themselves men always hate a whore and that her mother was hated more than any other, and that she knew that all of the countless men who returned to her -until they were sent away and never returned to anyone ever again—came in the hope that the sperm they squirted into her would somehow make her shut up.

"By now Andreas was already begging to be spared hearing more, but the girl stuck her foot in the gap and asked whether he hadn't just asked for her trust, and then she continued.

"From when the girl was very small her mother had had tuberculosis and the girl had always felt that this woman, her mainstay in life, ought actually to have been dead. 'Children can sense these things,' she told Andreas. 'Children know when someone is living at odds with the natural order of things. I had this picture of death as a man with a scythe,' she went on, 'and I imagined that the reason he did not show up was that he was scared of what would come out when Mother saw him and opened her mouth.'

"From the age of four, the girl had washed the soldiers' penises over a tin basin bearing, beneath the imperial eagle, the legend 'Pure in faith.'

"Again here Andreas begged to be let off. 'But that's life,' the girl said

"'Then I don't want to go on living,' said Andreas.

" 'That's what they all say,' said the girl. That's what the soldiers had said, what her mother had said, what she herself had said. But just look at the soldiers whom she washed. They were shells. The insides of every one of them were drained of all humanity and filled with the same abysmal horror and misery, which never left them. Even when they took off all their clothes they held onto their rifles, placing them on the floor next to the bed, within arm's reach; and even when they came, squinting, inside her mother, it was the rifle they were squinting at. Yet even such shells as these struggled to stay alive, though they said they couldn't care less whether they died or not. Even they visited the girl's mother to have the chance, for a moment, to despise a woman and to obtain a kind of picture, a postcard of sorts, of a tenderness that might have been, if not for the war.

"The girl thought she must have been nine years old when her mother judged her old enough to sleep with a man. Nine was of course rather young, but she did not blame her mother. Her mother was dying, so for both of them it was a matter of life and death, and when it comes down to life and death there isn't a great deal to be said, so there's no point blaming one another. And it hadn't hurt as much as one might have thought. She was not even angry at the men any longer, she said. Them she had forgiven.

"'When did it stop?' Andreas asked, meaning, of course, when was she going to stop telling him all this and spare him this unwished-for encounter with reality, and heard himself ask in a hoarse, unrecognizable voice, the voice of a stranger, the stranger he had become in the short time it had taken her to tell her story.

"Then one day her mother was dead, and shortly afterward, on what she thought must have been her fourteenth birthday, a man

had tried to harm her. She had lain beneath him and felt her body being hurt and thought, No, I will live. And then she had clamped down on his penis so he could not pull out and had cut him loose with a razor blade, and it was at that moment that she ceased to hate men, at that moment she saw what the army chaplain had been getting at. She had laid her hand on this man's head and sent him out into the desert to atone for what the others had done to her mother and herself.

"What happened thereafter was not something she told Andreas about on that occasion. Instead she revealed it a little at a time, and it was a story of surviving on the street, of crossing borders to get back to her mother's homeland, of finding foster parents, and at long last stepping into the sunlight.

"What she told Andreas at the time was that he was not to look at her like that—she was happy now, she was strong and healthy, she never thought about those days now. She had told him about it only so that he would understand. Understand that never again could any man touch her in that way.

"'But I touch you, onstage,' Andreas said.

"Yes,' she replied, 'onstage, when the lights are lit and the theater is packed with people and we are dancing exactly as we know we are supposed to dance, I can rest assured that nothing unexpected is going to happen, so it's perfectly all right for us to show love for each other up there. When the men wanted to turn off the lamp my mother kept next to her bed she would say no. I want it left on, she would say, because I'm a lamplight whore. And that's just how it is with me, Andreas, I'm a lamplight whore—it is only possible when the stage is lit."

Here Jakob took a momentary pause from his storytelling to sip from the kettle. Night had fallen. Somewhere in space, one could tell, the moon was waiting, but as yet the sky was overcast, as if the world (that is to say, Allah the learned, the wise, the merciful) would draw a veil over the two men and their tale.

"I wonder, Rumi," said Jakob, "what I can give you by telling you this story."

"A journey," the Mohammedan solemnly replied. "Right now, I am with you on the stage of which you speak."

"But how can I be sure that it is the same stage?" asked Jakob.

"Let us not expend our energies on questions to which there is no answer," said the Mohammedan, "especially when we are in the middle of a story."

"You're right," said Jakob. "And that is what I told myself, wondering back then whether Andreas had actually grasped what she had told him. But as time went on, he proved to have a better, more profound grasp of it than anyone else could have had.

"One of the best-loved ballets in Denmark is *La Sylphide*. It was also one of those pieces that Danish audiences flocked to see because it presented them with *all four* pillars of faith at once. It is a ballet about a man in love with a woman he cannot touch, because she is an angel of sorts who stands to lose both her life and her wings should any man attempt to make inroads upon her person.

"It is the quintessential ballet and Andreas was tailor-made for the part of the young hero. La Sylphide was a hundred years old, but when he danced anyone could see that it had been choreographed for him. There was only one thing wrong with it: its age. Even when they tarted it up and presented it as something fresh and topical, still there was something hopelessly old-fashioned about it; it was obvious that it had had its day. When the girl entered our and Andreas's lives, the years evaporated from this piece like mist before the sun, because the girl was just such an ethereal creature, lithe as a cat, benign as an angel, pure as the Virgin Mary, and, above all, totally unapproachable.

"From then on, Andreas danced only for her. When you, Rumi, tell me that it is possible to live without women, I believe you, I know you are right. But only because I saw Andreas and the girl dance.

"I wouldn't say that up until then I'd had much knowledge of love, but if nothing else, I was quite convinced that at some point a fusion of the two sexes would have to occur, that one way or another, sooner or later, they would have to sleep together. As the years went by I realized that I was mistaken and I am grateful for having been set straight. As time went by, Andreas and the girl explored, for themselves and for the rest of us, including myself, the love that flourishes in the space between two people who are never joined.

"Now, it so happens that in his ballets the master had availed himself of set pieces and stereotypes from foreign lands. Andreas and the girl filled these empty landscapes with genuine emotions. Seeing them dance, I understood the Catholic stringency of the Spanish flamenco, which threatens at any minute to seethe with blood, and the blithe chastity of the Italian tarantella, which is only waiting for the first unguarded moment before throwing itself into the mire. Of course it was all a performance, to an extent that was beyond my ken at the time and that became clear to me only later; and in a way it was all an act, all faked. I can say only how it seemed to me back then: I watched them dance and I understood the nature of love. And not only that between two young lovers. Because when the music softened, becoming slow and mournful, Andreas's steps grew more ponderous, dragging him earthwards, until I could see suffering like a huge stack of years on his shoulders, and then he danced out of time and into that which was to come; then he showed us old age. And when the girl glided into his arms, when he supported her with a serene composure that has seen and endured everything, what I saw were two people who have borne their love over an endless succession of years and who are now fearlessly staring death in the face. And until I saw them wiping off the greasepaint in their dressing rooms, I could have sworn that that evening must have given them gray hairs.

"At the time I did ask myself whether we have the right to ask more of love than this, and I have yet to come up with a definitive answer to that question.

"She was promoted to prima ballerina, then the theater created a special position just for her; within a few years she had become the first dancer ever in the company to have everything exactly as she pleased. I'm sure everyone felt that the entire theater was bound up in her person. She had presented herself and stepped into the light, never again to forsake it.

"Anyone else would have excited a great deal of envy. But not she, who won praise from everyone, and never anything but praise. It had something to do with the fact that the story of her past had become common knowledge. I didn't understand then how this could have come about, since Andreas was in such a state of stunned panic and loved her too much for any word of it to have escaped his lips. And my lips were sealed. But that was how it was in the theater: from the day the girl started rising through the ranks and being given solo roles and attracting attention, everyone knew she was a lost soul.

"Why was she lost? How can I explain our way of thinking, particularly to someone like yourself, Rumi, who has opted for a life without women? Maybe there will never be any explaining it, perhaps I should stop trying, but what I will say is that for usfor us dancers, from the youngest pupils in the school to the oldest members of the company, now retired, who roamed the corridors, acting as the corps de ballet's memory and helping with the job of reproducing the master's ballets down to the merest crook of a finger-for all of us, physical love represented the sixth pillar of duty, if you take my meaning, and as far as we were concerned anyone who could never sleep with a fellow human being was beyond saving.

"Envy requires some sort of affinity. For us to have envied the girl her dancing and her roles and her fame we would have had to have felt somehow connected to her. But one doesn't envy a cat its spring, does one? One doesn't envy a statue for being beautifully constructed. And no one would dream of envying Jesus his fine words on the cross, would they? And that is, of course, because in a way neither the cat nor the statue nor the Savior is of this world; each in their own way are in fact tragically unrealthe cat because it lacks insight into the way of the world, the statue because it is inanimate, and the Savior because he had to endure so much as God's soloist that no one could seriously envy him his role.

"Now, looking back on it, I can see that the girl's life fused with the theater. Her dancing could bring tears to one's eyes: out of sheer joy and confusion at the very fact of her existence, while at the same time one had the feeling that her tragic fate extended beyond her to take in all of us: that she danced to heal an incurable wound of the soul. In so doing she gave the master's ballets the ring of truth; she revived the last century. Up on the stage she smiled and all the stucco rose from the grave and advanced, weeping, upon us; we grew dizzy; we sensed the way in which

the theater became filled with meaning and with the Holy Spirit, sensed that one true, all-embracing art did indeed exist and that the girl was its prophet.

"Prophets are above envy, paying as they do a terrible price for their exalted state. I gazed upon the girl with tear-filled eyes, I might as well admit; I wept and caught myself observing her own resemblance to a desecrated temple, a sort of divine ruin.

"There were so many evenings when I stayed behind in the theater to watch them rehearse. Around me, the dark, empty house. On the stage, light and three figures. The girl, Andreas, and the boy with the clubfoot, whom she had lifted out of the orchestra pit and into life. What did they have in common? I asked myself. Dancing and music, the world replied, and that's probably right. But I sensed that there was something else, too, and sitting out there in the darkness I realized what it was: imperfection. They shared the knowledge of what it is to live as damaged goods among sound human beings.

"The boy also had a talent for sculpting. Often he could be found working with a lump of clay on a wooden board rather than with his violin, making models of her. At one point a number of these little statuettes were fired and put on display in one of the corridors off the main hall, but even here they drew the audiences to them during the intermissions, and after a while they were taken down because they were thought to lower the tone. Of course at the time everyone at the theater looked on the girl as some ethereal creature. But in the gimp's statuettes I caught a glimpse of something else, the quality that occasioned their being taken down, a distant memory of the time when she had danced barefoot high above Copenhagen.

"But chiefly he plays. He plays, and the girl and Andreas dance or they rehearse a tricky lift from the long pas de deux in The Corsair over and over again, with a patience that knows no bounds, until the maneuver is as effortless and natural as-how shall I put it?—a caress. They are in what seems to be a cavern of light, a warm pool of light and art and goodwill. No one gives any thought to time, no one knows what hour of the day it is, time no longer exists, there is only the music and these two dancing as proof that there is a place beyond war, desire, resentment,

everyday life—a place where art and dancing rear up like the promise of a pure, an unbesmirched eternity.

"And I sit there in the house, my body in darkness. But in  $m_y$  heart the theater lights are lit and I am very happy.

"I don't need to tell you, Rumi, how rare a thing it is for God to breathe on us when we dance. And you and I both know the cost of longing to be breathed on, of begging for it and being ignored, of having to bide one's time. But let's not talk of that misery this evening. You have said that we must not whine. So instead I will tell you about the last time God breathed on Andreas.

"Of the experience itself there isn't a great deal to be said. It is, after all, divine and hence inexplicable. But the theater was celebrating the centenary of the first ballet created by the master in his capacity as director of the company. Naturally, Andreas and the girl performed *La Sylphide*, that quintessential ballet on the impossibility and necessity of love, and God breathed on them, and when Andreas came off into the wings after the last curtain call, he stopped in front of me, clasped his hands, and said, as slowly and fervently as if he were praying: 'May it always be thus,' and at that moment neither he nor I doubted that his prayer would be answered.

"We sat and talked while the theater emptied, until the dancers, too, had gone home and the footsteps of the last watchman had faded away, and then it was that I asked him what it was like to love someone from afar as he did, whether it was enough. Andreas eyed me gravely for a second before saying: 'It is heavenly, and shouldn't the heavenly be enough?'

"At that moment we understood one another perfectly; we both knew that he was sacrificing his life and romantic happiness for art and for the dance and for this girl, and I was filled with quiet joy for being able to be with him this evening and listen to him and support him as he bore his cross. In silence we walked side by side through the theater, across the deserted stage and along darkened corridors, and that we eventually found ourselves approaching the girl's dressing room was due, we sensed, to the tendency of the female sex to draw us to itself even in its absence.

Even while still some way off we could hear her singing, an

exquisite chant that we both took to be a psalm. Quietly, cautiously, we moved closer, irresistibly drawn by the divine service we expected to come upon. Never before had we heard her sing, and yet it seemed clear that we would peep through the keyhole and find her engrossed in some form of prayer.

"The keyhole proved not to be necessary, because the door was open. We peered around it reverently, fearful of committing sacrilege.

"On the dressing table a candle had all but burned away, the wick embedded in the wax, its light a mere spark that failed to penetrate the darkness of the room. In this darkness all we could make out was something snow-white coming into view, then vanishing, coming into view, then vanishing. Andreas seized my hand and squeezed it hard, and I sensed what he was thinking and that his thoughts echoed my own. For one staggering instant we were convinced that the girl had shed her human form and now, in the darkness, was unfolding a pair of immense angel's wings. In all its mad improbability this notion was perfectly beautiful and perfectly dreadful—beautiful inasmuch as it was so right that she should dance straight into heaven and dreadful inasmuch as she was about to leave us.

"Just then a draft caused the light to gutter, the wick broke free of the wax and flared up, and a ray of light was cast from the dressing table onto the big, tilted wardrobe mirror and back onto the girl's face. Her head was thrown back, hanging over the back of a large armchair, and its being the wrong way up in relation to ourselves gave it an enigmatic expression. But the divine whiteness now stood out sharply. Not angel's wings but the clubfooted violinist's white backside rising and falling, coming into view, then vanishing, as it pumped up and down above the girl's upward tilted pelvis. And as we stood there, frozen to the spot, her expression became quite clear, even to Andreas. It was distorted by the desire both to press on and to hold back."

At this point Jakob took a lengthy break and gazed out into the night as if watching the images of that other night roll past his eyes. After a while Rumi said: "I know the next part of this story. Outside the door God breathed on you and filled you with divine fury. You presented your friend with a flame-wreathed sword, and

with a strength increased sevenfold by rage he kicked down the door, charged into the room, and nailed the girl and her whoremaster to the chair as one would stick a pin through two insects mating. Then you both sat by the double corpse until dawn, talking of life and death."

"That," said Jakob, "would have been a very un-Danish ending. We have to respect the fact that this story takes place in Denmark."

"True enough," said Rumi. "And as it is written in sura 42, verse 37, 'Though we be provoked, we must try to forgive.' So did your friend forgive the whoremaster?"

"Not that either," said Jakob, "for that, too, would have been very un-Danish. The next part of this story involves a conversation between the girl and Andreas, a conversation that I did not hear but that he told me about. I don't know exactly when it took place, but I imagine that it must have been that same evening. I think Andreas must have waited. Even though he must have known that between him and the girl there now gaped a black hole that no one could bridge, I think he probably waited."

"Where were you, Jakob?" Rumi enquired.

"Sometimes," said Jakob, "the cross of life is so hard to bear that one cannot even help one's best friend.

"At some point the girl was left alone and Andreas went in to her and she looked him straight in the eye for a long time. And then she said: 'I just felt like it.' I see,' said Andreas. 'So it wasn't true, what you told me before?' 'No,' said the girl, 'not much of it was true.' 'Then why did you tell me all that?' he asked. 'I don't know,' she said, 'I just felt like it. Afterward not a day went by when I did not want to tell you the truth.' 'So why didn't you?' asked Andreas. 'Because I saw how beautifully you danced,' she said, 'and I realized that my falsehood had been a great work of art. That I had told you what you needed to hear in order to dance your very best.' 'I think,' said Andreas, 'that back then I would rather have heard more of the truth.'

"Then the girl sat back, as if withdrawing into another world, and perhaps, thought Andreas, that was exactly what she was doing. From there she said: 'The world is not geared for the truth, Andreas dear, and nor are you, and even though you probably

cannot understand it, nonetheless I will try to explain it to you. The people in this world, and especially those in this theater, must suffer, and this they must do because they spend every second of their lives pulling in two opposing directions. When you dance, Andreas, you create an image of effortlessness. Evening after evening, audiences watch you dance across the green meadow as the carefree young prince or the bird catcher or the nobleman under obligation to no one and with not a worry in the world. You are the living image of carefree freedom. But you and I and the audience know that in order to form this image of freedom you have willingly cloistered yourself and dedicated your life to the toughest, most monotonous work the world has ever known. Each evening in the theater you demonstrate that, in the universe, obligation and freedom are kept poles apart.

"'Each evening, onstage, you dance the role of the virtuous, chivalrous young man who goes out of his way not to offend womanly modesty, and you dance the part of the saint in trousers so tight that everyone in the hall can see what you have between your legs, and that is one reason they come to the theater. Each evening, onstage, you show that, in the universe, lust and virtue are kept poles apart.'

"'I don't want to hear any more,' said Andreas.

"'No,' said the girl. 'Of course you don't want to hear any more. Each evening on the stage you offer glimpses of happiness. You show the world that happiness is wine and women and the countryside and being able to do whatever comes into your head, while everyone knows very well that your life does not allow for alcohol or women or freedom of choice, that only by turning your back on such temptations can you create this image. You do not wish to hear the truth, and that you shall be spared. What you need is a tale such as the one I have told you, the tale of a tragic soul in a beautiful body. Do you know the story of Moses parting the waters so that his people could walk across dry-shod?'

"'Yes,' said Andreas.

"'You are Moses,' said the girl. You hold two opposing forces in abeyance so that the audience can cross dry-shod and find their way home.'

"'If I am Moses,' he said, 'who are you?'

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"The girl took but a second to consider this.  $^{\prime}$ I,  $^{\prime}$  she said,  $^{\prime}$ am God."

"Andreas regarded the slender chignoned figure in the tulle skirt. That's not how God looks,' he said softly.

"'It was brought home to me,' the girl said, as if talking to herself—and perhaps she was, thought Andreas—'when I resisted the temptation to tell you the truth. I understood then that I was standing on the outside. And that is how one can know God—by the fact that he stands on the outside.'

"'For Christ's sake,' Andreas groaned, 'you're a human being just like the rest of us.'

"'In one way, Andreas,' said the girl, 'I am just like all of you, but in another way I am different, alone. And that's what it's like to be God. You understand everything, but you are always alone, and so you are free to do what has to be done.'

"'And what is it that has to be done?' he asked.

"There has to be dancing, here, in this theater,' said the girl.

"'Even if, as you say, the truth about this theater amounts to two lies held in abeyance?' he asked.

"'In that case,' she said, 'it is more important than ever that you all feel you are working for something that is greater and more in tune than yourselves.'

"'And what about you?' Andreas inquired, 'What are you working for?'

"Ten years from now,' she said, 'I will be ballet master, the first woman ever to become ballet master at this theater. And people will say of me, She was once a great dancer; now she is a great ballet master. When that day comes I will be rich, I will be famed throughout Europe, and the dancers of this company will fear me in a way they could never dream of today.'

"'I believe I have some inkling of it,' said Andreas.

"'And yet,' she continued, 'the power, the money, the acclaim will be merely incidental; the real reason will be something quite different. You all do your best, you all work like horses. But the one who gives Moses the strength to part the waters and keep them apart, even though she knows that in so doing she must set herself above the truth, she more than anyone else must be capable of acting under the pressure of both the deluge and the

falsehoods. Acting under pressure is what is known as doing one's duty, and that is what I do. And that is what the master was doing when he created his ballets.'

"By now she was out of her chair, her face right up against Andreas's, and he saw that she was no longer far away and that at that moment she was as honest as he had seen her only twice before: when she had danced alone in that room high above the city and when her head had been hanging over the back of that chair.

"'I do my duty. I do it for the only thing that is greater than I am, greater than all of us put together,' she said. 'I do it for the dance, to ensure that here, at our feet, the dancing will be of the finest.'

"That was as much of this conversation as Andreas could recall, or as much as he chose to tell me," said Jakob. "And there are now two possible endings to this story.

"The next day we did not see Andreas. But the day after that, there was a message at the theater from his parents saying that their son, whom they had expected to provide them with their entreé into life had instead taken them with him to hell by bracing a hunting rifle against the floor, putting its two barrels in his mouth, and stepping on the trigger.

"I cannot say how we reacted to this. For my part, all I can remember is the picture that came to my mind just as the news hit me, as I hung there, numb and weightless, waiting for grief to wash over me: Andreas stood before me, hunched over the black holes of the barrel as if in the act of calling down to the underworld that he was on his way, and I thought to myself what a terribly messy way of dying he had chosen and that his fine feeling for beauty certainly seemed to have failed him at the last—he who could have made such a beautiful corpse.

"Much later I came to see that suicide had been the only dignified way to end it. Because time would of course have caught up with him; he, too, would of course have grown old. Instead he had now entered upon that eternal youth in which the memory of the theater and its audiences would preserve him. His had been the perfect end, turning his life, as it did, into a romantic ballet.

"That, Rumi, is one possible ending."

For a while they sat there saying nothing.

Then, "No," said Rumi, "it is not a perfect end, because it does not provide any explanation for how you come to be sitting here tonight telling this story. There should always be some explanation of the storyteller's part in the tale. In Arabic this night is known as *alilet*, the fateful night, the night on which Mohammed recites the Koran. But only because Allah passed this tale to him through the Archangel Gabriel. So in the Koran the storyteller's role is clearly defined. Which is how it should be."

"Why?" asked Jakob.

"So we can be sure that what we are hearing is the honest truth," said the Mohammedan. "A story may be untrue. But together the story and its narrator are always truthful."

"You're right," said Jakob. "What this story needs is a sequel. And in a way this sequel is Andreas's funeral, because on the evening of the day on which he was to be buried, we gave a performance of *La Sylphide* in his memory.

"It was the girl's idea. I see now that for some time she must have wielded a much greater influence at the theater than any of us dancers realized, and now here she was, wanting to dance this ballet as a memorial to her partner. Everyone else felt that such enterprise was to her credit. I don't really know what I felt. But I do remember thinking that she could even make use of death to impart life to the dance.

"I am at a loss to know why she wanted me to dance the young man's—Andreas's—role. She may, by then, have been working on another story, a dance of death designed to turn me into a new Andreas. But I think not. I believe she chose me in order to bind me more closely to herself. I believe she already sensed that I knew something, that I was already standing slightly on the outside. Naturally I tried to get out of it, saying that I was in mourning, but she stepped right up to me and said that the dance was bigger than the grief of the individual, said it in such a way that —even had I not known what I knew about her—I would have sensed that this was no human being but the theater itself that addressed me.

"I cannot claim to have been seeing very clearly that evening. But I'm sure I remember there being a very beautiful atmosphere in the theater, because his suicide had been such a consummate act. I said earlier that I did not know what to make of the audiences. But that evening I did in fact gain some glimmer of understanding. And what I perceived was that all of them must occasionally have wished that real life could be like the life portrayed on the stage. And that in some inexplicable way they knew the story the girl had told Andreas, that she had managed to leak this tragic lie about her life to the public, so that the audience now knew that Andreas, when he stepped on the trigger and the buckshot vaporized his head, wedded life with art.

"The young man in *La Sylphide* dies of grief over the death of the untouchable sylph. As a ballet it represents a cry to the gods about the beauty and the tragedy of purely spiritual love, and now they all sat there in the theater, knowing that this was the cry that Andreas had yelled down the rifle barrels.

"In the minutes remaining before the curtain went up I tried to empty my mind of sorrow and anger, to leave these feelings behind in the dressing room, but to no avail. I danced the first act of the ballet, but I danced it with feet that seemed glued to the boards, and during the short break I had while the girl danced her grand, languorous solo, I walked past all the people standing weeping with emotion in the wings and retreated to my dressing room, wanting a brief moment of peace and quiet.

"When I leaned forward and gazed in the mirror at my vacant eyes, a white face loomed up behind me in the darkness. Even before I turned around I knew it was Andreas, and for one cold, cold instant I thought that he had come down from heaven to Earth to take me to task for being weak. But then I remembered the gimp's white ass in the darkened room and decided that there had been more than enough bloody angels. Besides which, I could see that the reason Andreas's face was white was because he was in makeup. Made up and dressed to dance my, or rather his, role.

"What did I say to him? 'So you're not dead then?' 'No,' he said, 'she has taught me that it can be a great and essential art to lie. But now I am going on in your place.' 'Is that a good idea?' I asked. 'Do you think you can deny a friend the chance to take part in his own funeral?' he replied and then he was gone.

"I watched their meeting from the wings. She was quite sure that he was me. Until he touched her, she was bursting with tearstained, peacockish triumph, but the minute he put out a hand "Frozen inside though she was, the most stupendous force of habit drove her on, so that for a time I was the only one who saw. Saw how Andreas supported her, confidently, casually, considerately, while all the time speaking to her in a whisper. I can guess what he was saying: "The dance is greater than the individual, greater even than you, and if you do not carry on, if you do not see this ballet through to the end with me, I will lead you down to the footlights and tell everyone the truth about the two of us. After all, it's not as if I have anything to lose, I'm as good as dead, if you see what I mean, and the dead stand on the outside, and for those who stand on the outside certain very special rules do, of course, apply."

"I cannot say how long they danced, perhaps a few minutes, and during those few minutes he exerted a terrible power over her, during those minutes he held her transfixed in a vacuum, and if there is any justice in this world, then in that vacuum she came face-to-face with the difference between truth and lies.

"Then her legs gave way and someone behind the scenes must have recognized Andreas because they brought down the curtain. But before it could drop as far as the stage he ducked underneath it to stand alone before the audience. They tried to get me to go on and take him off but I wouldn't do it. I just stood there and listened.

"'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'I really am Andreas, the Andreas whom you believed to be dead, and indeed I was dead, but I have now been resurrected, and if you will open your eyes and die and, in a small way, be resurrected together with me, then I promise you that this evening you will be with me in paradise.'

"At that point they dragged him away and threw him in the slammer for a short term. Then they let him out, whereupon he promptly disappeared. I had no chance to talk to him, I never saw him again. But after the events I have recounted I found it very hard to stay on at the theater. I no longer felt comfortable there and one day I left. That, Rumi, is how I come to be telling you this story."

They sat in silence for a long time, watching the moon break through to shine down on the sleeping city.

"You," said Rumi with conviction, "are Andreas."

"It's a far cry," the other replied, "from the Andreas who danced in Copenhagen to the Jakob sitting opposite you now."

"But," said Rumi, "it's quite possible that somewhere in the world Andreas, too, is sitting on the deck of a boat, looking at the moon."

"Yes," replied Jakob. "It's possible."

"Did anyone learn anything from Andreas's fate?" asked the Mohammedan. "Did any members of the audience follow him to paradise?"

"No," said Jakob, "he made that journey alone."

"So who did learn something from it?" asked Rumi.

"I did," said Jakob. "I learned that it may be necessary to stand on the outside if one is to see things clearly. But I cannot say which of the characters in this story taught me this.

"Recently it has occurred to me that I also learned something else. These past weeks there have been times when I have ceased to be upset, when I have viewed the theater and the girl and Andreas without anger, as if I have become capable of seeing it all through someone else's eyes, as if there might still be a chance of being on the inside."

"Whose eyes?" asked Rumi.

"The gimp's," replied Jakob. "And at those moments, I forgive them all."

"Forgiveness is a beautiful thing," said Rumi. And in a hushed but clear and powerful voice, a voice that had been created for and accustomed to a large audience, he recited:

To those who have faith
You must say
That they must forgive those
Who long not for the kingdom of Allah.
Allah alone will reward
With goodness and with evil
The deeds that man performs.

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Slowly, Jakob got to his feet, stretched, and leaned back against the rigging. The moonlight filtered through the checkered pattern of the ropes and cast an imaginary harlequin suit over his torso. The two men gazed pensively into the night, and without a word's passing between them, their thoughts turned onto the same path and fell into step, as they pondered how their own story now had two possible endings. At that moment there was no way of telling whether they would stay where they were and wait for whatever would happen or whether they would shove off, hoist the sail, and endeavor to transport their mutual obstinacy downriver and out to sea.

## Teddy

I'll exquisite day you, buddy, if you don't get down off that bag this minute. And I mean it," Mr. McArdle said. He was speaking from the inside twin bed — the bed farther away from the porthole. Viciously, with more of a whimper than a sigh, he foot-pushed his top sheet clear of his ankles, as though any kind of coverlet was suddenly too much for his sunburned, debilitated-looking body to bear. He was lying supine, in just the trousers of his pajamas, a lighted cigarette in his right hand. His head was propped up just enough to rest uncomfortably, almost masochistically, against the very base of the headboard. His pillow and ashtray were both on the floor, between his and Mrs. McArdle's bed. Without raising his

body, he reached out a nude, inflamed-pink, right arm and flicked his ashes in the general direction of the night table. "October, for God's sake," he said. "If this is October weather, gimme August." He turned his head to the right again, toward Teddy, looking for trouble. "C'mon," he said. "What the hell do you think I'm talking for? My health? Get down off there, please."

Teddy was standing on the broadside of a newlooking cowhide Gladstone, the better to see out of his parents' open porthole. He was wearing extremely dirty, white ankle-sneakers, no socks, seersucker shorts that were both too long for him and at least a size too large in the seat, an overly laundered T shirt that had a hole the size of a dime in the right shoulder, and an incongruously handsome, black alligator belt. He needed a haircut - especially at the nape of the neck - the worst way, as only a small boy with an almost fullgrown head and a reedlike neck can need one.

"Teddy, did you hear me?"

Teddy was not leaning out of the porthole quite so far or so precariously as small boys are apt to lean out of open portholes - both his feet, in fact, Teddu

were flat on the surface of the Gladstone - but neither was he just conservatively well-tipped; his face was considerably more outside than inside the cabin. Nonetheless, he was well within hearing of his father's voice — his father's voice, that is, most singularly. Mr. McArdle played leading roles on no fewer than three daytime radio serials when he was in New York, and he had what might be called a third-class leading man's speaking voice: narcissistically deep and resonant functionally prepared at a moment's notice to out-male anyone in the same room with it, if necessary even a small boy. When it was on vacation from its professional chores, it fell, as a rule, alternately in love with sheer volume and a theatrical brand of quietnesssteadiness. Right now, volume was in order.

"Teddy. God damn it - did you hear me?"

Teddy turned around at the waist, without changing the vigilant position of his feet on the Gladstone, and gave his father a look of inquiry, whole and pure. His eyes, which were pale brown in color, and not at all large, were slightly crossed - the left eye more than the right. They were not crossed enough to be disfiguring, or even to be necessarily noticeable at first glance. They were crossed just enough to be mentioned, and only in context with the fact that one might have thought long and seriously before wishing them straighter, or deeper, or browner, or wider set. His face, just as it was, carried the impact, however oblique and slow-travelling, of real beauty.

"I want you to get down off that bag, now. How many times do you want me to tell you?" Mr. McArdle said.

"Stay exactly where you are, darling," said Mrs. McArdle, who evidently had a little trouble with her sinuses early in the morning. Her eyes were open, but only just. "Don't move the tiniest part of an inch." She was lying on her right side, her face, on the pillow, turned left, toward Teddy and the porthole, her back to her husband. Her second sheet was drawn tight over her very probably nude body, enclosing her, arms and all, up to the chin. "Jump up and down," she said, and closed her eyes. "Crush Daddy's bag."

"That's a Jesus-brilliant thing to say," Mr. McArdle said quietly-steadily, addressing the back of his wife's head. "I pay twenty-two pounds for

a bag, and I ask the boy civilly not to stand on it, and you tell him to jump up and down on it. What's that supposed to be? Funny?"

"If that bag can't support a ten-year-old boy, who's thirteen pounds underweight for his age, I don't want it in my cabin," Mrs. McArdle said, without opening her eyes.

"You know what I'd like to do?" Mr. McArdle said. "I'd like to kick your goddam head open."

"Why don't you?"

Mr. McArdle abruptly propped himself up on one elbow and squashed out his cigarette stub on the glass top of the night table. "One of these days —" be began grimly.

"One of these days, you're going to have a tragic, tragic heart attack," Mrs. McArdle said, with a minimum of energy. Without bringing her arms into the open, she drew her top sheet more tightly around and under her body. "There'll be a small, tasteful funeral, and everybody's going to ask who that attractive woman in the red dress is, sitting there in the first row, flirting with the organist and making a holy—"

"You're so goddam funny it isn't even funny,"

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During this little exchange, Teddy had faced around and resumed looking out of the porthole. "We passed the *Queen Mary* at three-thirty-two this morning, going the other way, if anybody's interested," he said slowly. "Which I doubt." His voice was oddly and beautifully rough cut, as some small boys' voices are. Each of his phrasings was rather like a little ancient island, inundated by a miniature sea of whiskey. "That deck steward Booper despises had it on his blackboard."

"I'll Queen Mary you, buddy, if you don't get off that bag this minute," his father said. He turned his head toward Teddy. "Get down from there, now. Go get yourself a haircut or something." He looked at the back of his wife's head again. "He looks precocious, for God's sake."

"I haven't any money," Teddy said. He placed his hands more securely on the sill of the porthole, and lowered his chin onto the backs of his fingers. "Mother. You know that man who sits right next to us in the dining room? Not the very thin one. The other one, at the same table. Right next to where our waiter puts his tray down."

"Mm-hmm," Mrs. McArdle said. "Teddy. Darling. Let Mother sleep just five minutes more, like a sweet boy."

"Wait just a second. This is quite interesting," Teddy said, without raising his chin from its resting place and without taking his eyes off the ocean. "He was in the gym a little while ago, while Sven was weighing me. He came up and started talking to me. He heard that last tape I made. Not the one in April. The one in May. He was at a party in Boston just before he went to Europe, and somebody at the party knew somebody in the Leidekker examining group — he didn't say who — and they borrowed that last tape I made and played it at the party. He seems very interested in it. He's a friend of Professor Babcock's. Apparently he's a teacher himself. He said he was at Trinity College, in Dublin, all summer."

"Oh?" said Mrs. McArdle. "At a party they played it?" She lay gazing sleepily at the backs of Teddy's legs.

"I guess so," Teddy said. "He told Sven quite a

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bit about me, right while I was standing there. It was rather embarrassing."

"Why should it be embarrassing?"

Teddy hesitated. "I said 'rather' embarrassing. I qualified it."

"I'll qualify you, buddy, if you don't get the hell off that bag," Mr. McArdle said. He had just lit a fresh cigarette. "I'm going to count three. One, God damn it . . . Two . . . "

"What time is it?" Mrs. McArdle suddenly asked the backs of Teddy's legs. "Don't you and Booper have a swimming lesson at ten-thirty?"

"We have time," Teddy said. "- Vloom!" He suddenly thrust his whole head out of the porthole, kept it there a few seconds, then brought it in just long enough to report, "Someone just dumped a whole garbage can of orange peels out the window."

"Out the window. Out the window," Mr. McArdle said sarcastically, flicking his ashes. "Out the porthole, buddy, out the porthole." He glanced over at his wife. "Call Boston. Quick, get the Leidekker examining group on the phone."

"Oh, you're such a brilliant wit," Mrs. McArdle said. "Why do you try?"

Teddy took in most of his head. "They float very nicely," he said without turning around. "That's interesting."

"Teddy. For the last time. I'm going to count three, and then I'm -"

"I don't mean it's interesting that they float," Teddy said. "It's interesting that I know about them being there. If I hadn't seen them, then I wouldn't know they were there, and if I didn't know they were there, I wouldn't be able to say that they even exist. That's a very nice, perfect example of the way -"

"Teddy," Mrs. McArdle interrupted, without visibly stirring under her top sheet. "Go find Booper for me. Where is she? I don't want her lolling around in that sun again today, with that burn."

"She's adequately covered. I made her wear her dungarees," Teddy said. "Some of them are starting to sink now. In a few minutes, the only place they'll still be floating will be inside my mind. That's quite interesting, because if you look at it "Where is she now?" Mrs. McArdle asked. "Look at Mother a minute, Teddy."

Teddy turned and looked at his mother. "What?" he said.

"Where's Booper now? I don't want her meandering all around the deck chairs again, bothering people. If that awful man—"

"She's all right. I gave her the camera."

Mr. McArdle lurched up on one arm. "You gave her the *cameral*" he said. "What the hell's the idea? My goddam Leica! I'm not going to have a six-year-old child gallivanting all over —"

"I showed her how to hold it so she won't drop it," Teddy said. "And I took the film out, naturally."

"I want that camera, Teddy. You hear me? I want you to get down off that bag this minute, and I want that camera back in this room in *five minutes*—or there's going to be one little genius among the missing. Is that clear?"

Teddy

Teddy turned his feet around on the Gladstone, and stepped down. He bent over and tied the lace of his left sneaker while his father, still raised up on one elbow, watched him like a monitor.

"Tell Booper I want her," Mrs. McArdle said.
"And give Mother a kiss."

Finished tying his sneaker lace, Teddy perfunctorily gave his mother a kiss on the cheek. She in turn brought her left arm out from under the sheet, as if bent on encircling Teddy's waist with it, but by the time she had got it out from under, Teddy had moved on. He had come around the other side and entered the space between the two beds. He stooped, and stood up with his father's pillow under his left arm and the glass ashtray that belonged on the night table in his right hand. Switching the ashtray over to his left hand, he went up to the night table and, with the edge of his right hand, swept his father's cigarette stubs and ashes into the ashtray. Then, before putting the ashtray back where it belonged, he used the under side of his forearm to wipe off the filmy wake of ashes from the glass top of the table. He wiped off his forearm on his seersucker shorts. Then he placed the ashtray on the glass top, with a world of care. as if he believed an ashtray should be dead-centered on the surface of a night table or not placed at all. At that point, his father, who had been watching him, abruptly gave up watching him. "Don't you want your pillow?" Teddy asked him.

"I want that camera, young man."

"You can't be very comfortable in that position. It isn't possible," Teddy said. "I'll leave it right here." He placed the pillow on the foot of the bed, clear of his father's feet. He started out of the cabin.

"Teddy," his mother said, without turning over. "Tell Booper I want to see her before her swimming lesson."

"Why don't you leave the kid alone?" Mr. McArdle asked. "You seem to resent her having a few lousy minutes' freedom. You know how you treat her? I'll tell you exactly how you treat her. You treat her like a bloomin' criminal."

"Bloomin'! Oh, that's cute! You're getting so English, lover."

Teddy lingered for a moment at the door, reflectively experimenting with the door handle,

turning it slowly left and right. "After I go out this door, I may only exist in the minds of all my acquaintances," he said. "I may be an orange peel."

"What, darling?" Mrs. McArdle asked from across the cabin, still lying on her right side.

"Let's get on the ball, buddy. Let's get that Leica down here."

"Come give Mother a kiss. A nice, big one."

"Not right now," Teddy said absently. "I'm tired." He closed the door behind him.

The ship's daily newspaper lay just outside the doorsill. It was a single sheet of glossy paper, with printing on just one side. Teddy picked it up and began to read it as he started slowly aft down the long passageway. From the opposite end, a huge, blond woman in a starched white uniform was coming toward him, carrying a vase of longstemmed, red roses. As she passed Teddy, she put out her left hand and grazed the top of his head with it, saying, "Somebody needs a haircut!" Teddy passively looked up from his newspaper, but the woman had passed, and he didn't look back. He went on reading. At the end of the passageway, before an enormous mural of Saint George and the Dragon over the staircase landing, he folded the ship's newspaper into quarters and put it into his left hip pocket. He then climbed the broad, shallow, carpeted steps up to Main Deck, one flight up. He took two steps at a time, but slowly, holding onto the banister, putting his whole body into it, as if the act of climbing a flight of stairs was for him, as it is for many children, a moderately pleasurable end in itself. At the Main Deck landing, he went directly over to the Purser's desk, where a good-looking girl in naval uniform was presiding at the moment. She was stapling some mimeographed sheets of paper together.

"Can you tell me what time that game starts today, please?" Teddy asked her.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Can you tell me what time that game starts today?"

The girl gave him a lipsticky smile. "What game, honey?" she asked.

"You know. That word game they had yesterday and the day before, where you're supposed to supply the missing words. It's mostly that you have to put everything in context."

The girl held off fitting three sheets of paper between the planes of her stapler. "Oh," she said. "Not till late afternoon, I believe. I believe it's around four o'clock. Isn't that a little over your head, dear?"

"No, it isn't . . . Thank you," Teddy said, and started to leave.

"Wait a minute, honey! What's your name?"

"Theodore McArdle," Teddy said. "What's yours?"

"My name?" said the girl, smiling. "My name's Ensign Mathewson."

Teddy watched her press down on her stapler. "I knew you were an ensign," he said. "I'm not sure, but I believe when somebody asks your name you're supposed to say your whole name. Jane Mathewson, or Phyllis Mathewson, or whatever the case may be."

"Oh, really?"

"As I say, I think so," Teddy said. "I'm not sure, though. It may be different if you're in uniform. Anyway, thank you for the information. Good-

He found Booper, after some extensive looking, high up on the Sports Deck. She was in a sunny clearing - a glade, almost - between two decktennis courts that were not in use. In a squatting position, with the sun at her back and a light breeze riffling her silky, blond hair, she was busily piling twelve or fourteen shuffleboard discs into two tangent stacks, one for the black discs, one for the red. A very small boy, in a cotton sun suit, was standing close by, on her right, purely in an observer's capacity. "Look!" Booper said commandingly to her brother as he approached. She sprawled forward and surrounded the two stacks of shuffleboard discs with her arms to show off her accomplishment, to isolate it from whatever else was aboard ship. "Myron," she said hostilely, addressing her companion, "you're making it all shadowy, so my brother can't see. Move your carcass." She shut her eyes and waited, with a crossbearing grimace, till Myron moved.

Teddy stood over the two stacks of discs and

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## Teddy

looked down appraisingly at them. "That's very nice," he said. "Very symmetrical."

"This guy," Booper said, indicating Myron, "never even heard of backgammon. They don't even have one."

Teddy glanced briefly, objectively, at Myron. "Listen," he said to Booper. "Where's the camera? Daddy wants it right away."

"He doesn't even live in New York," Booper informed Teddy. "And his father's dead. He was killed in Korea." She turned to Myron. "Wasn't he?" she demanded, but without waiting for a response. "Now if his mother dies, he'll be an orphan. He didn't even know that." She looked at Myron. "Did you?"

Myron, non-committal, folded his arms.

"You're the stupidest person I ever met," Booper said to him. "You're the stupidest person in this ocean. Did you know that?"

"He is not," Teddy said. "You are not, Myron." He addressed his sister: "Give me your attention a second. Where's the camera? I have to have it 'immediately. Where is it?"

"Over there," Booper said, indicating no direc-

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tion at all. She drew her two stacks of shuffleboard discs in closer to her. "All I need now is two giants," she said. "They could play backgammon till they got all tired and then they could climb up on that smokestack and throw these at everybody and kill them." She looked at Myron. "They could kill your perents," she said to him knowledgeably. "And if that didn't kill them, you know what you could do? You could put some poison on some marshmellows and make them eat it."

The Leica was about ten feet away, next to the white railing that surrounded the Sports Deck. It lay in the drain gully, on its side. Teddy went over and picked it up by its strap and hung it around his neck. Then, immediately, he took it off. He took it over to Booper. "Booper, do me a favor. You take it down, please," he said. "It's ten o'clock. I have to write in my diary."

"I'm busy."

"Mother wants to see you right away, anyway," Teddy said.

"You're a liar."

"I'm not a liar. She does," Teddy said. "So please

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### Teddy

take this down with you when you go . . . C'mon, Booper."

"What's she want to see me for?" Booper demanded. "I don't want to see her." She suddenly struck Myron's hand, which was in the act of picking off the top shuffleboard disc from the red stack. "Hands off," she said.

Teddy hung the strap attached to the Leica around her neck. "I'm serious, now. Take this down to Daddy right away, and then I'll see you at the pool later on," he said. "I'll meet you right at the pool at ten-thirty. Or right outside that place where you change your clothes. Be on time, now. It's way down on E Deck, don't forget, so leave yourself plenty of time." He turned, and left.

"I hate you! I hate everybody in this ocean!" Booper called after him.

Below the Sports Deck, on the broad, after end of the Sun Deck, uncompromisingly alfresco, were some seventy-five or more deck chairs, set up and aligned seven or eight rows deep, with aisles just wide enough for the deck steward to use without unavoidably tripping over the sunning passengers'

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paraphernalia - knitting bags, dust-jacketed novels, bottles of sun-tan lotion, cameras. The area was crowded when Teddy arrived. He started at the rearmost row and moved methodically, from row to row, stopping at each chair, whether or not it was occupied, to read the name placard on its arm. Only one or two of the reclining passengers spoke to him - that is, made any of the commonplace pleasantries adults are sometimes prone to make to a ten-year-old boy who is singlemindedly looking for the chair that belongs to him. His youngness and single-mindedness were obvious enough, but perhaps his general demeanor altogether lacked, or had too little of, that sort of cute solemnity that many adults readily speak up, or down, to. His clothes may have had something to do with it, too. The hole in the shoulder of his T shirt was not a cute hole. The excess material in the seat of his seersucker shorts, the excess length of the shorts themselves, were not cute excesses.

The McArdles' four deck chairs, cushioned and ready for occupancy, were situated in the middle of the second row from the front. Teddy sat down in one of them so that — whether or not it was his intention — no one was sitting directly on either side of him. He stretched out his bare, unsuntanned legs, feet together, on the leg rest, and, almost simultaneously, took a small, ten-cent notebook out of his right hip pocket. Then, with instantly one-pointed concentration, as if only he and the notebook existed — no sunshine, no fellow passengers, no ship — he began to turn the pages.

With the exception of a very few pencil notations, the entries in the notebook had apparently all been made with a ball-point pen. The handwriting itself was manuscript style, such as is currently being taught in American schools, instead of the old, Palmer method. It was legible without being pretty-pretty. The flow was what was remarkable about the handwriting. In no sense—no mechanical sense, at any rate—did the words and sentences look as though they had been written by a child.

Teddy gave considerable reading time to what looked like his most recent entry. It covered a little more than three pages:

Diary for October 27, 1952 Property of Theodore McArdle 412 A Deck

Appropriate and pleasant reward if finder promptly returns to Theodore McArdle.

See if you can find daddy's army dog tags and wear them whenever possible. It won't kill you and he will like it.

Answer Professor Mandell's letter when you get a chance and the patience. Ask him not to send me any more poetry books. I already have enough for I year anyway. I am quite sick of it anyway. A man walks along the beach and unfortunately gets hit in the head by a cocoanut. His head unfortunately cracks open in two halves. Then his wife comes along the beach singing a song and sees the 2 halves and recognizes them and picks them up. She gets very sad of course and cries heart breakingly. That is exactly where I am tired of poetry. Supposing the lady just picks up the 2 halves and shouts into them very angrily "Stop that! Do not mention this when you answer his letter, however. It is quite controversial and Mrs. Mandell is a poet besides.

Get Sven's address in Elizabeth, New Jersey. It

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# Teddy

would be interesting to meet his wife, also his dog Lindy. However, I would not like to own a dog myself.

Write condolence letter to Dr. Wokawara about his nephritis. Get his new address from mother.

Try the sports deck for meditation tomorrow morning before breakfast but do not lose consciousness. Also do not lose consciousness in the dining room if that waiter drops that big spoon again. Daddy was quite furious.

Words and expressions to look up in library tomorrow when you return the books —

nephritis myriad gift horse cunning triumvirate

Be nicer to librarian. Discuss some general things with him when he gets kittenish.

Teddy abruptly took out a small, bullet-shaped, ball-point pen from the side pocket of his shorts, uncapped it, and began to write. He used his right thigh as a deck, instead of the chair arm.

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### Teddy

Diary for October 28, 1952 Same address and reward as written on October 26 and 27, 1952.

I wrote letters to the following persons after meditation this morning.

Dr. Wokawara
Professor Mandell
Professor Peet
Burgess Hake, Jr.
Roberta Hake
Sanford Hake
Grandma Hake
Mr. Graham
Professor Walton

I could have asked mother where daddy's dog tags are but she would probably say I don't have to wear them. I know he has them with him because I saw him pack them.

Life is a gift horse in my opinion.

I think it is very tasteless of Professor Walton to criticize my parents. He wants people to be a certain way.

It will either happen today or February 14, 1958

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#### Teddy

when I am sixteen. It is ridiculous to mention even.

After making this last entry, Teddy continued to keep his attention on the page and his ball-point pen poised, as though there were more to come.

He apparently was unaware that he had a lone interested observer. About fifteen feet forwardship from the first row of deck chairs, and eighteen or twenty rather sun-blinding feet overhead, a young man was steadily watching him from the Sports Deck railing. This had been going on for some ten minutes. It was evident that the young man was now reaching some sort of decision, for he abruptly took his foot down from the railing. He stood for a moment, still looking in Teddy's direction, then walked away, out of sight. Not a minute later, though, he turned up, obtrusively vertical, among the deck-chair ranks. He was about thirty, or younger. He directly started to make his way down-aisle toward Teddy's chair, casting distracting little shadows over the pages of people's novels and stepping rather uninhibitedly (considering that his was the only standing, moving figure

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in sight) over knitting bags and other personal effects.

Teddy seemed oblivious of the fact that someone was standing at the foot of his chair — or, for that matter, casting a shadow over his notebook. A few people in the row or two behind him, however, were more distractible. They looked up at the young man as, perhaps, only people in deck chairs can look up at someone. The young man had a kind of poise about him, though, that looked as though it might hold up indefinitely, with the very small proviso that he keep at least one hand in one pocket. "Hello, there!" he said to Teddy.

Teddy looked up. "Hello," he said. He partly closed his notebook, partly let it close by itself.

"Mind if I sit down a minute?" the young man asked, with what seemed to be unlimited cordiality. "This anybody's chair?"

"Well, these four chairs belong to my family," Teddy said. "But my parents aren't up yet."

"Not up? On a day like this," the young man said. He had already lowered himself into the chair at Teddy's right. The chairs were placed so close together that the arms touched. "That's sac-

rilege," he said. "Absolute sacrilege." He stretched out his legs, which were unusually heavy at the thighs, almost like human bodies in themselves. He was dressed, for the most part, in Eastern seaboard regimentals: a turf haircut on top, run-down brogues on the bottom, with a somewhat mixed uniform in between - buff-colored woolen socks, charcoal-gray trousers, a button-down-collar shirt, no necktie, and a herringbone jacket that looked as though it had been properly aged in some of the more popular postgraduate seminars at Yale, or Harvard, or Princeton. "Oh, God, what a divine day," he said appreciatively, squinting up at the sun. "I'm an absolute pawn when it comes to the weather." He crossed his heavy legs, at the ankles. "As a matter of fact, I've been known to take a perfectly normal rainy day as a personal insult. So this is absolute manna to me." Though his speaking voice was, in the usual connotation, well bred, it carried considerably more than adequately, as though he had some sort of understanding with himself that anything he had to say would sound pretty much all right - intelligent, literate, even amusing or stimulating - either from Teddy's

"I don't take it too personal, if that's what you mean," Teddy said.

The young man laughed, letting his head go back. "Wonderful," he said. "My name, incidentally, is Bob Nicholson. I don't know if we quite got around to that in the gym. I know your name, of course."

Teddy shifted his weight over to one hip and stashed his notebook in the side pocket of his shorts.

"I was watching you write — from way up there," Nicholson said, narratively, pointing. "Good Lord. You were working away like a little Trojan."

Teddy looked at him. "I was writing something in my notebook."

# Teddy

Nicholson nodded, smiling. "How was Europe?" he asked conversationally. "Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes, very much, thank you."

"Where all did you go?"

Teddy suddenly reached forward and scratched the calf of his leg. "Well, it would take me too much time to name all the places, because we took our car and drove fairly great distances." He sat back. "My mother and I were mostly in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Oxford, England, though. I think I told you in the gym I had to be interviewed at both those places. Mostly the University of Edinburgh."

"No, I don't believe you did," Nicholson said.
"I was wondering if you'd done anything like that.
How'd it go? They grill you?"

"I beg your pardon?" Teddy said.

"How'd it go? Was it interesting?"

"At times, yes. At times, no," Teddy said. "We stayed a little bit too long. My father wanted to get back to New York a little sooner than this ship.

But some people were coming over from Stockholm, Sweden, and Innsbruck, Austria to meet me, and we had to wait around."

Teddy looked at him directly for the first time. "Are you a poet?" he asked.

"A poet?" Nicholson said. "Lord, no. Alas, no. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. Poets are always taking the weather so personally. They're always sticking their emotions in things that have no emotions."

Nicholson, smiling, reached into his jacket pocket and took out cigarettes and matches. "I rather thought that was their stock in trade," he said. "Aren't emotions what poets are primarily concerned with?"

Teddy apparently didn't hear him, or wasn't listening. He was looking abstractedly toward, or over, the twin smokestacks up on the Sports Deck.

Nicholson got his cigarette lit, with some difficulty, for there was a light breeze blowing from the north. He sat back, and said, "I understand you left a pretty disturbed bunch —"

"'Nothing in the voice of the cicada intimates how soon it will die,'" Teddy said suddenly. "'Along this road goes no one, this autumn eve.'"

"What was that?" Nicholson asked, smiling. "Say that again."

"Those are two Japanese poems. They're not full of a lot of emotional stuff," Teddy said. He sat forward abruptly, tilted his head to the right, and gave his right ear a light clap with his hand. "I still have some water in my ear from my swimming lesson yesterday," he said. He gave his ear another couple of claps, then sat back, putting his arms up on both armrests. It was, of course, a normal, adult-size deck chair, and he looked distinctly small in it, but at the same time, he looked perfectly relaxed, even serene.

"I understand you left a pretty disturbed bunch of pedants up at Boston," Nicholson said, watching him. "After that last little set-to. The whole Leidekker examining group, more or less, the way I understand it. I believe I told you I had rather a long chat with Al Babcock last June. Same night, as a matter of fact, I heard your tape played off."

"Yes, you did. You told me."

"I understand they were a pretty disturbed bunch," Nicholson pressed. "From what Al told me, you all had quite a little lethal bull session "I wish I knew why people think it's so important to be emotional," Teddy said. "My mother and father don't think a person's human unless he thinks a lot of things are very sad or very annoying or very — very unjust, sort of. My father gets very emotional even when he reads the newspaper. He thinks I'm inhuman."

Nicholson flicked his cigarette ash off to one side. "I take it you have no emotions?" he said.

Teddy reflected before answering. "If I do, I don't remember when I ever used them," he said. "I don't see what they're good for."

"You love God, don't you?" Nicholson asked, with a little excess of quietness. "Isn't that your forte, so to speak? From what I heard on that tape and from what Al Babcock—"

"Yes, sure, I love Him. But I don't love Him sentimentally. He never said anybody had to love Him sentimentally," Teddy said. "If I were God,

I certainly wouldn't want people to love me sentimentally. It's too unreliable."

"You love your parents, don't you?"

"Yes, I do — very much," Teddy said, "but you want to make me use that word to mean what you want it to mean — I can tell."

"All right. In what sense do you want to use it?" Teddy thought it over. "You know what the word 'affinity' means?" he asked, turning to Nicholson.

"I have a rough idea," Nicholson said dryly.

"I have a very strong affinity for them. They're my parents, I mean, and we're all part of each other's harmony and everything," Teddy said. "I want them to have a nice time while they're alive, because they like having a nice time . . . But they don't love me and Booper — that's my sister — that way. I mean they don't seem able to love us just the way we are. They don't seem able to love us unless they can keep changing us a little bit. They love their reasons for loving us almost as much as they love us, and most of the time more. It's not so good, that way." He turned toward Nicholson again, sitting slightly forward. "Do you

have the time, please?" he asked. "I have a swimming lesson at ten-thirty."

"You have time," Nicholson said without first looking at his wrist watch. He pushed back his cuff. "It's just ten after ten," he said.

"Thank you," Teddy said, and sat back. "We can enjoy our conversation for about ten more minutes."

Nicholson let one leg drop over the side of the deck chair, leaned forward, and stepped on his cigarette end. "As I understand it," he said, sitting back, "you hold pretty firmly to the Vedantic theory of reincarnation."

"It isn't a theory, it's as much a part —"

"All right," Nicholson said quickly. He smiled, and gently raised the flats of his hands, in a sort of ironic benediction. "We won't argue that point, for the moment. Let me finish." He crossed his heavy, outstretched legs again. "From what I gather, you've acquired certain information, through meditation, that's given you some conviction that in your last incarnation you were a holy man in India, but more or less fell from Grace—"

"I wasn't a holy man," Teddy said. "I was just a person making very nice spiritual advancement."

"All right — whatever it was," Nicholson said. "But the point is you feel that in your last incarnation you more or less fell from Grace before final Illumination. Is that right, or am I —"

"That's right," Teddy said. "I met a lady, and I sort of stopped meditating." He took his arms down from the armrests, and tucked his hands, as if to keep them warm, under his thighs. "I would have had to take another body and come back to earth again anyway - I mean I wasn't so spiritually advanced that I could have died, if I hadn't met that lady, and then gone straight to Brahma and never again have to come back to earth. But I wouldn't have had to get incarnated in an American body if I hadn't met that lady. I mean it's very hard to meditate and live a spiritual life in America. People think you're a freak if you try to. My father thinks I'm a freak, in a way. And my mother - well, she doesn't think it's good for me to think about God all the time. She thinks it's bad for my health."

Nicholson was looking at him, studying him. "I

"I was six when I saw that everything was God, and my hair stood up, and all that," Teddy said. "It was on a Sunday, I remember. My sister was only a very tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that she was God and the milk was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean."

Nicholson didn't say anything.

"But I could get out of the finite dimensions fairly often when I was four," Teddy said, as an afterthought. "Not continuously or anything, but fairly often."

Nicholson nodded. "You did?" he said. "You could?"

"Yes," Teddy said. "That was on the tape . . . Or maybe it was on the one I made last April. I'm not sure."

Nicholson took out his cigarettes again, but without taking his eyes off Teddy. "How does one get out of the finite dimensions?" he asked, and gave a short laugh. "I mean, to begin very basically, a block of wood is a block of wood, for example. It has length, width—"

"It hasn't. That's where you're wrong," Teddy said. "Everybody just thinks things keep stopping off somewhere. They don't. That's what I was trying to tell Professor Peet." He shifted in his seat and took out an eyesore of a handkerchief—a gray, wadded entity—and blew his nose. "The reason things seem to stop off somewhere is because that's the only way most people know how to look at things," he said. "But that doesn't mean they do." He put away his handkerchief, and looked at Nicholson. "Would you hold up your arm a second, please?" he asked.

"My arm? Why?"

"Just do it. Just do it a second."

Nicholson raised his forearm an inch or two above the level of the armrest. "This one?" he asked.

Teddy nodded. "What do you call that?" he asked.

"What do you mean? It's my arm. It's an arm."
"How do you know it is?" Teddy asked. "You

know it's called an arm, but how do you know it is one? Do you have any proof that it's an arm?"

Nicholson took a cigarette out of his pack, and lit it. "I think that smacks of the worst kind of sophistry, frankly," he said, exhaling smoke. "It's an arm, for heaven's sake, because it's an arm. In the first place, it has to have a name to distinguish it from other objects. I mean you can't simply—"

"You're just being logical," Teddy said to him impassively.

"I'm just being what?" Nicholson asked, with a little excess of politeness.

"Logical. You're just giving me a regular, intelligent answer," Teddy said. "I was trying to help you. You asked me how I get out of the finite dimensions when I feel like it. I certainly don't use logic when I do it. Logic's the first thing you have to get rid of."

Nicholson removed a flake of tobacco from his tongue with his fingers.

"You know Adam?" Teddy asked him.

"Do I know who?"

"Adam. In the Bible."

Nicholson smiled. "Not personally," he said dryly.

Teddy hesitated "Don't be angry with me" he

Teddy hesitated. "Don't be angry with me," he said. "You asked me a question, and I'm —"

"I'm not angry with you, for heaven's sake."

"Okay," Teddy said. He was sitting back in his chair, but his head was turned toward Nicholson. "You know that apple Adam ate in the Garden of Eden, referred to in the Bible?" he asked. "You know what was in that apple? Logic. Logic and intellectual stuff. That was all that was in it. So—this is my point—what you have to do is vomit it up if you want to see things as they really are. I mean if you vomit it up, then you won't have any more trouble with blocks of wood and stuff. You won't see everything stopping off all the time. And you'll know what your arm really is, if you're interested. Do you know what I mean? Do you follow me?"

"I follow you," Nicholson said, rather shortly.

"The trouble is," Teddy said, "most people don't
want to see things the way they are. They don't
even want to stop getting born and dying all the
time. They just want new bodies all the time, in-

stead of stopping and staying with God, where it's really nice." He reflected. "I never saw such a bunch of apple-eaters," he said. He shook his head.

At that moment, a white-coated deck steward, who was making his rounds within the area, stopped in front of Teddy and Nicholson and asked them if they would care to have morning broth. Nicholson didn't respond to the question at all. Teddy said, "No, thank you," and the deck steward passed them by.

"If you'd rather not discuss this, you don't have to," Nicholson said abruptly, and rather brusquely. He flicked his cigarette ash. "But is it true, or isn't it, that you informed the whole Leidekker examining bunch — Walton, Peet, Larsen, Samuels, and that bunch — when and where and how they would eventually die? Is that true, or isn't it? You don't have to discuss it if you don't want to, but the way the rumor around Boston —"

"No, it is not true," Teddy said with emphasis.
"I told them places, and *times*, when they should be very, very careful. And I told them certain

Teddy

things it might be a good idea for them to  $do \dots$ But I didn't say anything like that. I didn't say anything was inevitable, that way." He took out his handkerchief again and used it. Nicholson waited, watching him. "And I didn't tell Professor Peet anything like that at all. Firstly, he wasn't one of the ones who were kidding around and asking me a bunch of questions. I mean all I told Professor Peet was that he shouldn't be a teacher any more after January - that's all I told him." Teddy, sitting back, was silent a moment. "All those other professors, they practically forced me to tell them all that stuff. It was after we were all finished with the interview and making that tape, and it was quite late, and they all kept sitting around smoking cigarettes and getting very kittenish."

"But you didn't tell Walton, or Larsen, for example, when or where or how death would eventually come?" Nicholson pressed.

"No. I did not," Teddy said firmly. "I wouldn't have told them any of that stuff, but they kept talking about it. Professor Walton sort of started it. He said he really wished he knew when he was

going to die, because then he'd know what work he should do and what work he shouldn't do, and how to use his time to his best advantage, and all like that. And then they all said that . . . So I told them a little bit."

Nicholson didn't say anything.

"I didn't tell them when they were actually going to die, though. That's a very false rumor," Teddy said. "I could have, but I knew that in their hearts they really didn't want to know. I mean I knew that even though they teach Religion and Philosophy and all, they're still pretty afraid to die." Teddy sat, or reclined, in silence for a minute. "It's so silly," he said. "All you do is get the heck out of your body when you die. My gosh, everybody's done it thousands and thousands of times. Just because they don't remember it doesn't mean they haven't done it. It's so silly."

"That may be. That may be," Nicholson said. "But the logical fact remains that no matter how intelligently - "

"It's so silly," Teddy said again. "For example, I have a swimming lesson in about five minutes. I could go downstairs to the pool, and there might

not be any water in it. This might be the day they change the water or something. What might happen, though, I might walk up to the edge of it, just to have a look at the bottom, for instance, and my sister might come up and sort of push me in. I could fracture my skull and die instantaneously." Teddy looked at Nicholson. "That could happen," he said. "My sister's only six, and she hasn't been a human being for very many lives, and she doesn't like me very much. That could happen, all right. What would be so tragic about it, though? What's there to be afraid of, I mean? I'd just be doing what I was supposed to do, that's all, wouldn't I?"

Nicholson snorted mildly. "It might not be a tragedy from your point of view, but it would certainly be a sad event for your mother and dad." he said. "Ever consider that?"

"Yes, of course, I have," Teddy said. "But that's only because they have names and emotions for everything that happens." He had been keeping his hands tucked under his legs again. He took them out now, put his arms up on the armrests, and looked at Nicholson. "You know Sven? The

man that takes care of the gym?" he asked. He waited till he got a nod from Nicholson. "Well, if Sven dreamed tonight that his dog died, he'd have a very, very bad night's sleep, because he's very fond of that dog. But when he woke up in the morning, everything would be all right. He'd know it was only a dream."

Nicholson nodded. "What's the point, exactly?" "The point is if his dog really died, it would be exactly the same thing. Only, he wouldn't know it. I mean he wouldn't wake up till he died himself."

Nicholson, looking detached, was using his right hand to give himself a slow, sensuous massage at the back of the neck. His left hand, motionless on the armrest, with a fresh, unlighted cigarette between the fingers, looked oddly white and inorganic in the brilliant sunlight.

Teddy suddenly got up. "I really have to go now, I'm afraid," he said. He sat down, tentatively, on the extended leg attachment of his chair, facing Nicholson, and tucked in his T shirt. "I have about one and a half minutes, I guess, to get

to my swimming lesson," he said. "It's all the way down on E Deck."

"May I ask why you told Professor Peet he should stop teaching after the first of the year?" Nicholson asked, rather bluntly. "I know Bob Peet. That's why I ask."

Teddy tightened his alligator belt. "Only because he's quite spiritual, and he's teaching a lot of stuff right now that isn't very good for him if he wants to make any real spiritual advancement. It stimulates him too much. It's time for him to take everything out of his head, instead of putting more stuff in. He could get rid of a lot of the apple in just this one life if he wanted to. He's very good at meditating." Teddy got up. "I better go now. I don't want to be too late."

Nicholson looked up at him, and sustained the look — detaining him. "What would you do if you could change the educational system?" he asked ambiguously. "Ever think about that at all?"

"I really have to go," Teddy said.

"Just answer that one question," Nicholson said. "Education's my baby, actually — that's what I teach. That's why I ask."

"Well . . . I'm not too sure what I'd do," Teddy said. "I know I'm pretty sure I wouldn't start with the things schools usually start with." He folded his arms, and reflected briefly. "I think I'd first just assemble all the children together and show them how to meditate. I'd try to show them how to find out who they are, not just what their names are and things like that . . . I guess, even before that, I'd get them to empty out everything their parents and everybody ever told them. I mean even if their parents just told them an elephant's big, I'd make them empty that out. An elephant's only big when it's next to something else — a dog or a lady, for example." Teddy thought another moment. "I wouldn't even tell them an elephant has a trunk. I might show them an elephant, if I had one handy, but I'd let them just walk up to the elephant not knowing anything more about it than the elephant knew about them. The same thing with grass, and other things. I wouldn't even tell them grass is green. Colors are only names. I mean if you tell them the grass is green, it makes them start expecting the grass to look a certain way - your way - instead of some other way

Teddu

that may be just as good, and maybe much better . . . I don't know. I'd just make them vomit up every bit of the apple their parents and everybody made them take a bite out of."

"There's no risk you'd be raising a little generation of ignoramuses?"

"Why? They wouldn't any more be ignoramuses than an elephant is. Or a bird is. Or a tree is," Teddy said. "Just because something is a certain way, instead of just behaves a certain way, doesn't mean it's an ignoramus."

"No?"

"No!" Teddy said. "Besides, if they wanted to learn all that other stuff - names and colors and things - they could do it, if they felt like it, later on when they were older. But I'd want them to begin with all the real ways of looking at things, not just the way all the other apple-eaters look at things - that's what I mean." He came closer to Nicholson, and extended his hand down to him. "I have to go now. Honestly. I've enjoyed -- "

"Just one second — sit down a minute," Nicholson said. "Ever think you might like to do something in research when you grow up? Medical reTeddy answered, but without sitting down. "I thought about that once, a couple of years ago," he said. "I've talked to quite a few doctors." He shook his head. "That wouldn't interest me very much. Doctors stay too right on the surface. They're always talking about cells and things."

"Oh? You don't attach any importance to cell structure?"

"Yes, sure, I do. But doctors talk about cells as if they had such unlimited importance all by themselves. As if they didn't really belong to the person that has them." Teddy brushed back his hair from his forehead with one hand. "I grew my own body," he said. "Nobody else did it for me. So if I grew it, I must have known how to grow it. Unconsciously, at least. I may have lost the conscious knowledge of how to grow it sometime in the last few hundred thousand years, but the knowledge is still there, because — obviously — I've used it. . . . It would take quite a lot of meditation and emptying out to get the whole thing back — I mean the conscious knowledge — but

you could do it if you wanted to. If you opened up wide enough." He suddenly reached down and picked up Nicholson's right hand from the armrest. He shook it just once, cordially, and said, "Goodbye. I have to go." And this time, Nicholson wasn't able to detain him, he started so quickly to make his way through the aisle.

Nicholson sat motionless for some few minutes after he left, his hands on the armrests of the chair, his unlighted cigarette still between the fingers of his left hand. Finally, he raised his right hand and used it as if to check whether his collar was still open. Then he lit his cigarette, and sat quite still again.

He smoked the cigarette down to its end, then abruptly let one foot over the side of the chair, stepped on the cigarette, got to his feet, and made his way, rather quickly, out of the aisle.

Using the forwardship stairway, he descended fairly briskly to the Promenade Deck. Without stopping there, he continued on down, still quite rapidly, to Main Deck. Then to A Deck. Then to B Deck. Then to C Deck. Then to D Deck.

At D Deck the forwardship stairway ended, and

# Teddy

Nicholson stood for a moment, apparently at some loss for direction. However, he spotted someone who looked able to guide him. Halfway down the passageway, a stewardness was sitting on a chair outside a galleyway, reading a magazine and smoking a cigarette. Nicholson went down to her, consulted her briefly, thanked her, then took a few additional steps forwardship and opened a heavy metal door that read: TO THE POOL. It opened onto a narrow, uncarpeted staircase.

He was little more than halfway down the staircase when he heard an all-piercing, sustained scream — clearly coming from a small, female child. It was highly acoustical, as though it were reverberating within four tiled walls.