T H E B L U E B O T T L E

by

R a y B r a d b u r y

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Р.Брэдбери. Синяя бутыль. Сборник рассказов. На англ. яз. – Составление, подготовка текста и комментарии П.А. Гелева.

Сборник рассказов известного американского писателя-фантаста включает в себя рассказы из различных авторских сборников Р.Брэдбери. Это и рассказы философские: об отношении автора к техническому прогрессу, к влиянию развития науки на общество; и рассказы космические: о мужестве человека, о трудностях, с которыми он непременно столкнётся при освоении космоса. Размышляя о будущем – далёком и совсем близком, – Брэдбери предлагает читателям задуматься над злободневными проблемами общественной жизни наших дней.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ray Bradbury was born at Waukegan, Illinois, U.S.A., in 1920 and educated in American public schools. He graduated from a Los Angeles high school in 1938. His formal education ended there, but he furthered it by himself – at night in the library and by day at his typewriter. He sold newspapers on Los Angeles street corners from 1938 to 1942 – a modest beginning for a man whose name would one day be synonymous with the best in science fiction.

Ray Bradbury sold his first science fiction short story in 1941, and his early reputation is based on stories published in the budding science fiction magazines of that time.

During the war years he had numerous short stories published and some of these were included in the annual issues of *Best American Short Stories* and *O.Henry Prize Stories* in the years after the war.

His work was chosen for best American short story collections in 1946, 1948 and 1952. His awards include: The O'Henry Memorial Award, The Benjamin Franklin Award in 1954 and The Aviation-Space Writer's Association Award for best space article in an American magazine in 1967.

He has published over 300 stories, and twenty-two books including stories and novels. He has also published several plays, and written the screen-plays for *The Dreamers*, *And the Rock Cried Out*. He wrote the screen-play for John Huston's *Moby Dick* (1956), and his own novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, has been made into a motion picture by François Truffaut.

Among the books he has published are *Dark Carnival* (1947), *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *The Illustrated Man* (1951), *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953), *Fahrenheit 451* (1954), *The October Country* (1956), *Dandelion Wine* (1957), *A Medicine for Melancholy* (1959), *The Day it Rained Forever* (1959), *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962), *R is for Rocket* (1962), *The Machineries of Joy* (1964), *The Vintage Bradbury* (1965), *I Sing the Body Electric!* (1969), *The Halloween Tree* (1972), *Long After Midnight* (1976), *The Anthology: The Stories of Ray Bradbury* (1980).

His other books include: *Timeless Stories for Today and Tomorrow*, *S Is for Space*, *The Anthem Sprinters*, *Switch on the Night*, *Twice 22*, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit and Other Plays*, *When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* (poetry).

Yes, Bradbury has written poetry, plays, short stories and novels. He has written for television, radio, the theater and film, and he has been published in every major American magazine. Editions of his novels and shorter fiction span several continents and languages, and he has gained worldwide acceptance for his work.

Paul Guéléva

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THE PEDESTRIAN

To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr.Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of 2053 A.D., or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomb-like building was still open.

Mr.Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet making no noise on the lumpy walk. For long ago he had wisely changed to sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure, himself, in the early November evening.

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, toward the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction, and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

"Hello, in there," he whispered to every house on every side as he moved. "What's up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?"

The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow

moving like the shadow of a hawk in mid-country. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry river beds, the streets, for company.

"What is it now?" he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. "Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?"

Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moonwhite house? He hesitated, but went on when nothing more happened. He stumbled over a particularly uneven section of sidewalk. The cement was vanishing under flowers and grass. In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not one in all that time.

He came to a cloverleaf intersection which stood silent where two main highways crossed the town. During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, the gas stations open, a great insect rustling and a ceaseless jockeying for position as the scarab-beetles, a faint incense puttering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions. But now these highways, too, were like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance.

He turned back on a side street, circling around toward his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn toward it.

A metallic voice called to him:

"Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!"

He halted.

"Put up your hands!"

"But –" he said.

"Your hands up! Or we'll shoot!"

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing, in a city of three million, there was only *one* police car left, wasn't that correct? Ever since a year ago, 2052, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

"Your name?" said the police car in a metallic whisper.

He couldn't see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

"Leonard Mead," he said.

"Speak up!"

"Leonard Mead!"

"Business or profession?"

"I guess you'd call me a writer."

"No profession," said the police car, as if talking to itself. The light held him fixed, like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

"You might say that," said Mr.Mead. He hadn't written in years. Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomb-like houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multi-coloured lights touching their faces, but never really touching them.

"No profession," said the phonograph voice, hissing. "What are you doing out?"

"Walking," said Leonard Mead.

"Walking!"

"Just walking," he said simply, but his face felt cold.

"Walking, just walking, walking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Walking where? For what?"

"Walking for air. Walking to *see*."

"Your address!"

"Eleven South Saint James Street."

"And there is air *in* your house, you have an air *conditioner*, Mr.Mead?"

"Yes."

"And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?"

"No."

"No?" There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

"Are you married, Mr.Mead?"

"No."

"Not married," said the police voice behind the fiery beam. The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were gray and silent.

"Nobody wanted me," said Leonard Mead with a smile.

"Don't speak unless you're spoken to!"

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

"Just *walking*, Mr.Mead?"

"Yes."

"But you haven't explained for what purpose."

"I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk."

"Have you done this often?"

"Every night for years."

The police car sat in the center of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

"Well, Mr.Mead," it said.

"Is that all?" he asked politely.

"Yes," said the voice. "Here." There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide. "Get in."

"Wait a minute, I haven't done anything!"

"Get in."

"I protest!"

"Mr.Mead."

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all.

"Get in."

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

"Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi," said the iron voice. "But –"

"Where are you taking me?"

The car hesitated, or rather gave a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dropping card by punchslotted card under electric eyes. "To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies."

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud. The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead.

They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

"That's *my* house," said Leonard Mead.

No one answered him.

The car moved down the empty river-bed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty sidewalks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.

1951

THE ONE WHO WAITS

I live in a well. I live like smoke in the well. Like vapour in a stone throat. I don't move. I don't do anything but wait. Overhead I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when I don't know? I cannot. I am simply waiting. I am mist and moonlight and memory. I am sad and I am old. Sometimes I fall like rain into the well. Spider webs are startled into forming where my rain falls fast, on the water surface. I wait in cool silence and there will be a day when I no longer wait.

Now it is morning. I hear a great thunder. I smell fire from a distance. I hear a metal crashing. I wait. I listen.

Voices. Far away.

"All right!"

One voice. An alien voice. An alien tongue I cannot know. No word is familiar. I listen.

"Send the men out!"

A crunching in crystal sands.

"Mars! So this is it!"

"Where's the flag?"

"Here, sir."

"Good, good."

The sun is high in the blue sky and its golden rays fill the well and I hang like a flower pollen, invisible and misting in the warm light.

Voices.

"In the name of the Government of Earth, I proclaim this to be the Martian Territory, to be equally divided among the member nations."

What are they saying? I turn in the sun, like a wheel, invisible and lazy, golden and tireless.

"What's over here?"

"A well!"

"No!"

"Come on. Yes!"

The approach of warmth. Three objects bend over the well mouth, and my coolness rises to the objects.

"Great!"

"Think it's good water?"

"We'll see."

"Someone get a lab test bottle and a dropline."

"I will!"

A sound of running. The return.

"Here we are."

I wait.

"Let it down. Easy."

Glass shines, above, coming down on a slow line.

The water ripples softly as the glass touches and fills. I rise in the warm air toward the well mouth.

"Here we are. You want to test this water, Regent?"

"Let's have it."

"What a beautiful well. Look at that construction. How old you think it is?"

"God knows. When we landed in that other town yesterday Smith said there hasn't been life on Mars in ten thousand years."

"Imagine."

"How is it, Regent? The water."

"Pure as silver. Have a glass."

The sound of water in the hot sunlight. Now I hover like a dust, a cinnamon, upon the soft wind.

"What's the matter, Jones?"

"I don't know. Got a terrible headache. All of a sudden."

"Did you drink the water yet?"

"No, I haven't. It's not that. I was just bending over the well and all of a sudden my head split. I feel better now."

Now I know who I am.

My name is Stephen Leonard Jones and I am twenty-five years old and I have just come in a rocket from a planet called Earth and I am standing with my good friends Regent and Shaw by an old well on the planet Mars.

I look down at my golden fingers, tan and strong. I look at my long legs and at my silver uniform and at my friends.

"What's wrong, Jones?" they say.

"Nothing," I say, looking at them. "Nothing at all."

The food is good. It has been ten thousand years since food. It touches the tongue in a fine way and the wine with the food is warming. I listen to the sound of voices. I make words that I do not understand but somehow understand. I test the air.

"What's the matter, Jones?"

I tilt this head of mine and rest my hands holding the silver utensils of eating. I feel everything.

"What do you mean?" this voice, this new thing of mine, says.

"You keep breathing funny. Coughing," says the other man.

I pronounce exactly. “Maybe a little cold coming on.”

“Check with the doc later.”

I nod my head and it is good to nod. It is good to do several things after ten thousand years. It is good to breathe the air and it is good to feel the sun in the flesh deep and going deeper and it is good to feel the structure of ivory, the fine skeleton hidden in the warming flesh, and it is good to hear sounds much clearer and more immediate than they were in the stone deepness of a well. I sit enchanted.

“Come out of it, Jones. Snap to it. We got to move!”

“Yes,” I say, hypnotized with the way the word forms like water on the tongue and falls with slow beauty out into the air.

I walk and it is good walking. I stand high and it is a long way to the ground when I look down from my eyes and my head. It is like living on a fine cliff and being happy there.

Regent stands by the stone well, looking down. The others have gone murmuring to the silver ship from which they came.

I feel the fingers of my hand and the smile of my mouth.

“It is deep,” I say.

“Yes.”

“It is called a Soul Well.”

Regent raises his head and looks at me. “How do you know that?”

“Doesn’t it look like one?”

“I never heard of a Soul Well.”

“A place where waiting things, things that once had flesh, wait and wait,” I say, touching his arm.

The sand is fire and the ship is silver fire in the hotness of the day and the heat is good to feel. The sound of my feet in the hard sand. I listen. The sound of the wind and the sun burning the valleys. I smell the smell of the rocket boiling in the noon. I stand below the port.

“Where’s Regent?” someone says.

“I saw him by the well,” I reply.

One of them runs toward the well. I am beginning to tremble. A fine shivering tremble, hidden deep, but becoming very strong. And for the first time I hear it, as if it too were hidden in a well. A voice calling deep within me, tiny and afraid. And the voice cries, *Let me go, let me go,* and there is a feeling as if something is trying to get free, a pounding of labyrinthine doors, a rushing down dark corridors and up passages, echoing and screaming.

“Regent’s in the well!”

The men are running, all five of them. I run with them but now I am sick and the trembling is violent.

"He must have fallen. Jones, you were here with him. Did you see? Jones? Well, speak up, man."

"What's wrong, Jones?"

I fall to my knees, the trembling is so bad.

"He's sick. Here, help me with him."

"The sun."

"No, not the sun," I murmur.

They stretch me out and the seizures come and go like earthquakes and the deep hidden voice in me cries, *This is Jones, this is me, that's not him, that's not him, don't believe him, let me out, let me out!* And I look up at the bent figures and my eyelids flicker. They touch my wrists.

"His heart is acting up."

I close my eyes. The screaming stops. The shivering ceases.

I rise, as in a cool well, released.

"He's dead," says someone.

"Jones is dead."

"From what?"

"Shock, it looks like."

"What kind of shock?" I say, and my name is Sessions and my lips move crisply, and I am the captain of these men. I stand among them and I am looking down at a body which lies cooling on the sands. I clap both hands to my head.

"Captain!"

"It's nothing," I say, crying out. "Just a headache. I'll be all right. There. There," I whisper. "It's all right now."

"We'd better get out of the sun, sir."

"Yes," I say, looking down at Jones. "We should never have come. Mars doesn't want us."

We carry the body back to the rocket with us, and a new voice is calling deep in me to be let out.

Help, help. Far down in the moist earthen-works of the body, *Help, help!* in red fathoms, echoing and pleading.

The trembling starts much sooner this time. The control is less steady.

"Captain, you'd better get in out of the sun, you don't look too well, sir."

"Yes," I say. "Help," I say.

"What, sir?"

"I didn't say anything."

"You said 'Help,' sir."

"Did I, Matthews, did I?"

The body is laid out in the shadow of the rocket and the voice

screams in the deep underwater catacombs of bone and crimson tide. My hands jerk. My mouth splits and is parched. My nostrils fasten wide. My eyes roll. *Help, help, oh help, don't, don't, let me out, don't, don't.*

"Don't," I say.

"What, sir?"

"Never mind," I say. "I've got to get free," I say. I clap my hand to my mouth.

"How's that, sir?" cries Matthews.

"Get inside, all of you, go back to Earth!" I shout.

A gun is in my hand. I lift it.

"Don't, sir."

An explosion. Shadows run. The screaming is cut off. There is a whistling sound of falling through space.

After ten thousand years, how good to die. How good to feel the sudden coolness, the relaxation. How good to be like a hand within a glove that stretches out and grows wonderfully cold in the hot sand. Oh, the quiet and the loveliness of gathering, darkening death. But one cannot linger on.

A crack, a snap.

"Good God, he's killed himself!" I cry, and open my eyes and there is the captain lying against the rocket, his skull split by bullet, his eyes wide, his tongue protruding between his white teeth. Blood runs from his head. I bend to him and touch him. "The fool," I say. "Why did he do that?"

The men are horrified. They stand over the two dead men and turn their heads to see the Martian sands and the distant well where Regent lies lolling in deep waters. A croaking comes out of their dry lips, a whimpering, a childish protest against this awful dream.

The men turn to me.

After a long while, one of them says, "That makes you captain, Matthews."

"I know," I say slowly.

"Only six of us left."

"Good God, it happened so quick!"

"I don't want to stay here, let's get out!"

The men clamour. I go to them and touch them now, with a confidence which almost sings in me. "Listen," I say, and touch their elbows or their arms or their hands.

We all fall silent.

We are one.

No, no, no, no, no, no! Inner voices crying, deep down and gone into prisons beneath exteriors.

We are looking at each other. We are Samuel Matthews and Raymond Moses and William Spaulding and Charles Evans and Forrest Cole and John Summers, and we say nothing but look upon each other and our white faces and shaking hands.

We turn, as one, and look at the well.

"Now," we say.

No, no, six voices scream, hidden and layered down and stored forever.

Our feet walk in the sand and it is as if a great hand with twelve fingers were moving across the hot sea bottom.

We bend to the well, looking down. From the cool depths six faces peer back up at us.

One by one we bend until our balance is gone, and one by one drop into the mouth and down through cool darkness into the cold waters.

The sun sets. The stars wheel upon the night sky. Far out, there is a wink of light. Another rocket coming, leaving red marks on space.

I live in a well. I live like smoke in a well. Like vapour in a stone throat. Overhead I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when even I don't know? I cannot.

I am simply waiting.

1964

IN A SEASON OF CALM WEATHER

George and Alice Smith detrained at Biarritz one summer noon and in an hour had run through their hotel on to the beach into the ocean and back out to bake upon the sand.

To see George Smith sprawled burning there, you'd think him only a tourist flown fresh as iced lettuce to Europe and soon to be transshipped home. But here was a man who loved art more than life itself.

"There..." George Smith sighed. Another ounce of perspiration trickled down his chest. Boil out the Ohio tap-water, he thought, then drink down the best Bordeaux. Silt your blood with rich French sediment so you'll see with native eyes!

Why? Why eat, breathe, drink everything French? So that, given time, he might really begin to understand the genius of one man.

His mouth moved, forming a name.

"George?" His wife loomed over him. "I know what you've been thinking. I can read your lips."

He lay perfectly still, waiting.

"And?"

"Picasso," she said.

He winced. Some day she would learn to pronounce that name.

"Please," she said. "Relax. I know you heard the rumour this morning, but you should see your eyes – your tic is back. All right, Picasso's here, down the coast a few miles away, visiting friends in some small fishing town. But you must forget it or our vacation's ruined."

"I wish I'd never heard the rumour," he said honestly.

"If only," she said, "you liked other painters."

Others? Yes, there were others. He could breakfast most congenially on Caravaggio still-lifes of autumn pears and midnight plums. For lunch: those fire-squirting, thick-wormed Van Gogh sunflowers, those blooms a blind man might read with one rush of scorched fingers down fiery canvas. But the great feast? The paintings he saved his palate for? There, filling the horizon, like Neptune risen, crowned with limewood, alabaster, coral, paintbrushes clenched like tridents in horn-nailed fists, and with fishtail vast enough to fluke summer showers out over all Gibraltar – who else but the creator of *Girl Before a Mirror* and *Guernica*?

"Alice," he said, patiently, "how can I explain? Coming down on the train I thought, Good Lord, it's *all* Picasso country!"

But was it really, he wondered. The sky, the land, the people, the flushed-pink bricks here, scrolled electric-blue ironwork balconies there, a mandolin ripe as a fruit in some man's thousand fingerprinting hands,

billboard tatters blowing like confetti in night winds – how much was Picasso, how much George Smith staring round the world with wild Picasso eyes? He despaired of answering. That old man had distilled turpentine and linseed oil so thoroughly through George Smith that they shaped his being, all Blue Period at twilight, all Rose Period at dawn.

"I keep thinking," he said aloud, "if we saved our money..."

"We'll never have five thousand dollars."

"I know," he said quietly. "But it's nice thinking we might bring it off some day. Wouldn't it be great to just step up to him, say 'Pablo, here's five thousand! Give us the sea, the sand, that sky, or any old thing you want, we'll be happy...."

After a moment, his wife touched his arm.

"I think you'd better go in the water now," she said.

"Yes," he said. "I'd better do just that."

White fire showered up when he cut the water.

During the afternoon George Smith came out and went into the ocean with the vast spilling motions of now warm, now cool people who at last, with the sun's decline, their bodies all lobster colours and colours of broiled squab and guinea hen, trudged for their wedding-cake hotels.

The beach lay deserted for endless mile on mile save for two people. One was George Smith, towel over shoulder, out for a last devotional. Far along the shore another shorter, square-cut man walked alone in the tranquil weather. He was deeper tanned, his close-shaven head dyed almost mahogany by the sun, and his eyes were clear and bright as water in his face. So the shoreline stage was set, and in a few minutes the two men would meet. And once again Fate fixed the scales for shocks and surprises, arrivals and departures. And all the while these two solitary strollers did not for a moment think on coincidence, that unswum stream which lingers at man's elbow with every crowd in every town. Nor did they ponder the fact that if man dares dip into that stream he grabs a wonder in each hand. Like most they shrugged at such folly, and stayed well up the bank lest Fate should shove them in.

The stranger stood alone. Glancing about, he saw his aloneness, saw the waters of the lovely bay, saw the sun sliding down the late colours of the day, and then half-turning spied a small wooden object on the sand. It was no more than the slender stick from a lime ice-cream delicacy long since melted away. Smiling he picked the stick up. With another glance around to re-insure his solitude, the man stooped again and holding the stick gently with light sweeps of his hand began to do the one thing in all the world he knew best how to do.

He began to draw incredible figures along the sand. He sketched one figure and then moved over and still looking down, completely

focused on his work now, drew a second and a third figure, and after that a fourth and a fifth and a sixth.

George Smith, printing the shoreline with his feet, gazed here, gazed there, and then saw the man ahead. George Smith, drawing nearer, saw that the man, deeply tanned, was bending down. Neerer yet, and it was obvious what the man was up to. George Smith chuckled. Of course, of course... along on the beach this man – how old? Sixty-five? Seventy? – was scribbling and doodling away. How the sand flew! How the wild portraits flung themselves out there on the shore! How...

George Smith took one more step and stopped, very still.

The stranger was drawing and drawing and did not seem to sense that anyone stood immediately behind him and the world of his drawings in the sand. By now he was so deeply enchanted with his solitudinous creation that depth-bombs set off in the bay might not have stopped his flying hand nor turned him round.

George Smith looked down at the sand. And, after a long while, looking, he began to tremble.

For there on the flat shore were pictures of Grecian lions and Mediterranean goats and maidens with flesh of sand like powdered gold and satyrs piping on hand-carved horns and children dancing, strewing flowers along and along the beach with lambs gambolling after and musicians skipping to their harps and lyres, and unicorns racing youths towards distant meadows, woodlands, ruined temples and volcanoes. Along the shore in a never-broken line, the hand, the wooden stylus of this man bent down in fever and raining perspiration, scribbled, ribboned, looped around over and up, across, in, out, stitched, whispered, stayed, then hurried on as if this travelling bacchanal must flourish to its end before the sun was put out by the sea. Twenty, thirty yards or more the nymphs and dryads and summer founts sprang up in unravelled hieroglyphs. And the sand, in the dying light, was the colour of molten copper on which was now slashed a message that any man in any time might read and savour down the years. Everything whirled and poised in its own wind and gravity. Now wine was being crushed from under the grape-blooded feet of dancing vintners' daughters, now steaming seas gave birth to coin-sheathed monsters while flowered kites strewed scent on blowing clouds... now... now... now....

The artist stopped.

George Smith drew back and stood away.

The artist glanced up, surprised to find someone so near. Then he simply stood there, looking from George Smith to his own creations flung like idle footprints down the way. He smiled at last and shrugged as if to say, Look what I've done; see what a child? You will forgive me, won't

you? One day or another we are all fools... you, too, perhaps? So allow an old fool this, eh? Good! Good!

But George Smith could only look at the little man with the sun-dark skin and the clear sharp eyes, and say the man's name once, in a whisper, to himself.

They stood thus for perhaps another five seconds, George Smith staring at the sand-frieze, and the artist watching George Smith with amused curiosity. George Smith opened his mouth, closed it, put out his hand, took it back. He stepped towards the picture, stepped away. Then he moved along the line of figures, like a man viewing a precious series of marbles cast up from some ancient ruin on the shore. His eyes did not blink, his hand wanted to touch but did not dare to touch. He wanted to run but did not run.

He looked suddenly at the hotel. Run, yes! Run! What? Grab a shovel, dig, excavate, save a chunk of this all too crumbling sand? Find a repair-man, race him back here with plaster-of-paris to cast a mould of some small fragile part of these? No, no. Silly, silly. Or...? His eyes flicked to his hotel window. The camera! Run, get it, get back, and hurry along the shore, clicking, changing film, clicking until...

George Smith whirled to face the sun. It burned faintly on his face, his eyes were two small fires from it. The sun was half underwater and, as he watched, it sank the rest of the way in a matter of seconds.

The artist had drawn nearer and now was gazing into George Smith's face with great friendliness as if he were guessing every thought. Now he was nodding his head in a little bow. Now the ice-cream stick had fallen casually from his fingers. Now he was saying good night, good night. Now he was gone, walking back down the beach towards the south.

George Smith stood looking after him. After a full minute, he did the only thing he could possibly do. He started at the beginning of the fantastic frieze of satyrs and fauns and wine-dipped maidens and prancing unicorns and piping youths and he walked slowly along the shore. He walked a long way, looking down at e free-running bacchanal. And when he came to the end of the animals and men he turned round and started back in the other direction, just staring down as if he had lost something and did not quite know where to find it. He kept on doing this until there was no more light in the sky, or on the sand, to see by.

He sat down at the supper table.

"You're late," said his wife. "I just had to come down alone. I'm ravenous."

"That's all right," he said.

"Anything interesting happen on your walk?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"You look funny; George, you didn't swim out too far, did you, and almost drown? I can tell by your face. You did swim out too far, didn't you?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well," she said, watching him closely. "Don't ever do that again. Now – what'll you have?"

He picked up the menu and started to read it and stopped suddenly.

"What's wrong?" asked his wife.

He turned his head and shut his eyes for a moment.

"Listen."

She listened.

"I don't hear anything," she said.

"Don't you?"

"No. What is it?"

"Just the tide," he said, after a while, sitting there, his eyes still shut. "Just the tide, coming in."

1959

THE FLYING MACHINE

In the year A.D. 400, the Emperor Yuan held his throne by the Great Wall of China, and the land was green with rain, readying itself toward the harvest, at peace, the people in his dominion neither too happy nor too sad.

Early on the morning of the first day of the first week of the second month of the new year, the Emperor Yuan was sipping tea and fanning himself against a warm breeze when a servant ran across the scarlet and blue garden tiles, calling, "Oh, Emperor, Emperor, a miracle!"

"Yes," said the Emperor, "the air is sweet this morning."

"No, no, a miracle!" said the servant, bowing quickly.

"And this tea is good in my mouth, surely that is a miracle."

"No, no, Your Excellency."

"Let me guess then – the sun has risen and a new day is upon us. Or the sea is blue. *That* now is the finest of all miracles."

"Excellency, a man is flying!"

"What?" The Emperor stopped his fan.

"I saw him in the air, a man flying with wings. I heard a Voice call out of the sky, and when I looked up, there he was, a dragon in the heavens with a man in its mouth, a dragon of paper and bamboo, coloured like the sun and the grass."

"It is early," said the Emperor, "and you have just wakened from a dream."

"It is early, but I have seen what I have seen! Come, and you will see it too."

"Sit down with me here," said the Emperor. "Drink some tea. It must be a strange thing, if it is true, to see a man fly. You must have time to think of it, even as I must have time to prepare myself for the sight."

They drank tea.

"Please," said the servant at last, "or he will be gone."

The Emperor rose thoughtfully. "Now you may show me what you have seen."

They walked into a garden, across a meadow of grass, over a small bridge, through a grove of trees, and up a tiny hill.

"There!" said the servant.

The Emperor looked into the sky.

And in the sky, laughing so high that you could hardly hear him laugh, was a man; and the man was clothed in bright papers and reeds to make wings and a beautiful yellow tail, and he was soaring all about like the largest bird in a universe of birds, like a new dragon in a land of

ancient dragons.

The man called down to them from high in the cool winds of morning. “I fly, I fly!”

The servant waved to him. “Yes, *yes*!”

The Emperor Yuan did not move. Instead he looked at the Great Wall of China now taking shape out of the farthest mist in the green hills, that splendid snake of stones which writhed with majesty across the entire land. That wonderful wall which had protected them for a timeless time from enemy hordes and preserved peace for years without number. He saw the town, nestled to itself by a river and a road and a hill, beginning to waken.

“Tell me,” he said to his servant, “has anyone else seen this flying man?”

“I am the only one, Excellency,” said the servant, smiling at the sky, waving.

The Emperor watched the heavens another minute and then said, “Call him down to me.”

“Ho, come down, come down! The Emperor wishes to see you!” called the servant, hands cupped to his shouting mouth.

The Emperor glanced in all directions while the flying man soared down the morning wind. He saw a farmer, early in his fields, watching the sky, and he noted where the farmer stood.

The flying man alit with a rustle of paper and a creak of bamboo reeds. He came proudly to the Emperor, clumsy in his rig, at last bowing before the old man.

“What have you done?” demanded the Emperor.

“I have flown in the sky, Your Excellency,” replied the man.

“What *have* you done?” said the Emperor again.

“I have just told you!” cried the flier.

“You have told me nothing at all.” The Emperor reached out a thin hand to touch the pretty paper and the birdlike keel of the apparatus. It smelled cool, of the wind.

“Is it not beautiful, Excellency?”

“Yes, too beautiful.”

“It is the *only* one in the world!” smiled the man. “And I am the inventor.”

“The only one in the world?”

“I swear it!”

“Who else knows of this?”

“No one. Not even my wife, who would think me mad with the sun. She thought I was making a kite. I rose in the night and walked to the cliffs far away. And when the morning breezes blew and the sun rose, I

gathered my courage, Excellency, and leaped from the cliff. I flew! But my wife does not know of it."

"Well for her, then," said the Emperor. "Come along."

They walked back to the great house. The sun was full in the sky now, and the smell of the grass was refreshing. The Emperor, the servant, and the flier paused within the huge garden.

The Emperor clapped his hands. "Ho, guards!"

The guards came running.

"Hold this man."

The guards seized the flier.

"Call the executioner," said the Emperor.

"What's this!" cried the flier, bewildered. "What have I done?" He began to weep, so that the beautiful paper apparatus rustled.

"Here is the man who has made a certain machine," said the Emperor, "and yet asks us what he has created. He does not know himself. It is only necessary that he create, without knowing why he has done so, or what this thing will do."

The executioner came running with a sharp silver ax. He stood with his naked, large-muscled arms ready, his face covered with a serene white mask.

"One moment," said the Emperor. He turned to a near-by table upon which sat a machine that he himself had created. The Emperor took a tiny golden key from his own neck. He fitted his key to the tiny, delicate machine and wound it up. Then he set the machine going.

The machine was a garden of metal and jewels. Set in motion, the birds sang in tiny metal trees, wolves walked through miniature forests, and tiny people ran in and out of sun and shadow, fanning themselves with miniature fans, listening to tiny emerald birds, and standing by impossibly small but tinkling fountains.

"Is *it* not beautiful?" said the Emperor. "If you asked me what I have done here, I could answer you well. I have made birds sing, I have made forests murmur, I have set people to walking in this woodland, enjoying the leaves and shadows and songs. That is what I have done."

"But, oh, Emperor!" pleaded the flier, on his knees, the tears pouring down his face. "I have done a similar thing! I have found beauty. I have flown on the morning wind. I have looked down on all the sleeping houses and gardens. I have smelled the sea and even seen it, beyond the hills, from my high place. And I have soared like a bird; oh, I cannot say how beautiful it is up there, in the sky, with the wind about me, the wind blowing me here like a feather, there like a fan, the way the sky smells in the morning! And how free one feels! *That* is beautiful, Emperor, that is beautiful too!"

"Yes," said the Emperor sadly, "I know it must be true. For I felt my heart move with you in the air and I wondered: What is it like? How does it feel? How do the distant pools look from so high? And how my houses and servants? Like ants? And how the distant towns not yet awake?"

"Then spare me!"

"But there are times," said the Emperor, more sadly still, "when one must lose a little beauty if one is to keep what little beauty one already has. I do not fear you, yourself, but I fear another man."

"What man?"

"Some other man who, seeing you, will build a thing of bright papers and bamboo like this. But the other man will have an evil face and an evil heart, and the beauty will be gone. It is this man I fear."

"Why? Why?"

"Who is to say that someday just such a man, in just such an apparatus of paper and reed, might not fly in the sky and drop huge stones upon the Great Wall of China?" said the Emperor.

No one moved or said a word.

"Off with his head," said the Emperor.

The executioner whirled his silver ax.

"Burn the kite and the inventor's body and bury their ashes together," said the Emperor.

The servants retreated to obey.

The Emperor turned to his hand-servant, who had seen the man flying. "Hold your tongue. It was all a dream, a most sorrowful and beautiful dream. And that farmer in the distant field who also saw, tell him it would pay him to consider it only a vision. If ever the word passes around, you and the farmer die within the hour."

"You are merciful, Emperor."

"No, not merciful," said the old man. Beyond the garden wall he saw the guards burning the beautiful machine of paper and reeds that smelled of the morning wind. He saw he dark smoke climb into the sky. "No, only very much bewildered and afraid." He saw the guards digging a tiny pit wherein to bury the ashes. "What is the life of one man against those of a million others? I must take solace from that thought."

He took the key from its chain about his neck and once more wound up the beautiful miniature garden. He stood looking out across the land at the Great Wall, the peaceful town, the green fields, the rivers and streams. He sighed. The tiny garden whirred its hidden and delicate machinery and set itself in motion; tiny people walked in forests, tiny faces loped through sun-speckled glades in beautiful shining pelts, and among the tiny trees flew little bits of high song and bright blue and

yellow colour, flying, flying, flying in that small sky.

"Oh," said the Emperor, closing his eyes, "look at the birds, look at the birds!"

1953

THE DRAGON

The night blew in the short grass on the moor; there was no other motion. It had been years since a single bird had flown by in the great blind shell of sky. Long ago a few small stones had simulated life when they crumbled and fell into dust. Now only the night moved in the souls of the two men bent by their lonely fire in the wilderness; darkness pumped quietly in their veins and ticked silently in their temples and their wrists.

Firelight fled up and down their wild faces and welled in their eyes in orange tatters. They listened to each other's faint, cool breathing and the lizard blink of their eyelids. At last, one man poked the fire with his sword.

"Don't, idiot; you'll give us away!"

"No matter," said the second man. "The dragon can smell us miles off, anyway. God's breath, it's cold. I wish I was back at the castle.'

"It's death, not sleep, we're after...."

"Why? Why? The dragon never sets foot in the town!"

"Quiet, fool! He eats men travelling alone from our town to the next!"

"Let them be eaten and let us get home!"

"Wait now; listen!"

The two men froze.

They waited a long time, but there was only the shake of their horses' nervous skin like black velvet tambourines jingling the silver stirrup buckles, softly, softly.

"Ah." The second man sighed. "What a land of nightmares. Everything happens here. Someone blows out the sun; it's night. And then, and then, oh, God, listen! This dragon, they say his eyes are fire. His breath a white gas; you can see him burn across the dark lands. He runs with sulphur and thunder and kindles the grass. Sheep panic and die insane. Women deliver forth monsters. The dragon's fury is such that tower walls shake back to dust. His victims, at sunrise, are strewn hither and thither on the hills. How many knights, I ask, have gone for this monster and failed, even as we shall fail?"

"Enough of that!"

"More than enough! Out here in this desolation I cannot tell what year this is!"

"Nine hundred years since the Nativity."

"No, no," whispered the second man, eyes shut. "On this moor is no Time, is only Forever. I feel if I ran back on the road the town would be gone, the people yet unborn, things changed, the castles unquarried from

the rocks, the timbers still uncut from the forests; don't ask how I know, the moor knows, and tells me. And here we sit alone in the land of the fire dragon, God save us!"

"Be you afraid, then gird on your armour!"

"What use? The dragon runs from nowhere; we cannot guess its home. It vanishes in fog, we know not where it goes. Aye, on with our armour, we'll die well-dressed."

Half into his silver corselet, the second man stopped again and turned his head.

Across the dim country, full of night and nothingness from the heart of the moor itself, the wind sprang full of dust from clocks that used dust for telling time. There were black suns burning in the heart of this new wind and a million burnt leaves shaken from some autumn tree beyond the horizon. This wind melted landscapes, lengthened bones like white wax, made the blood roil and thicken to a muddy deposit in the brain. The wind was a thousand souls dying and all time confused and in transit. It was a fog inside of a mist inside of a darkness, and this place was no man's place and there was no year or hour at all, but only these men in a faceless emptiness of sudden frost, storm, and white thunder which moved behind the great falling pane of green glass that was the lightning. A squall of rain drenched the turf, all faded away until there was unbreathing hush and the two men waiting alone with their warmth in a cool season.

"There," whispered the first man. "Oh, *there*...."

Miles off, rushing with a great chant and a roar – the dragon.

In silence, the men buckled on their armour and mounted their horses. The midnight wilderness was split by a monstrous gushing as the dragon roared nearer, nearer; its flashing yellow glare spurted above a hill and then, fold on fold of dark body, distantly seen, therefore indistinct, flowed over that hill and plunged vanishing into a valley.

"Quick!"

They spurred their horses forward to a small hollow.

"This is where it passes!"

They seized their lances with mailed fists, and blinded their horses by flipping the visors down over their eyes.

"Lord!"

"Yes, let us use His name."

On the instant, the dragon rounded a hill. Its monstrous amber eye fed on them, fired their armour in red glints and glitters. With a terrible wailing cry and a grinding rush it flung itself forward.

"Mercy, God!'

The lance struck under the unlidded yellow eye, buckled, tossed the

man through the air. The dragon hit, spilled him over, down, ground him under. Passing, the black brunt of its shoulder smashed the remaining horse and rider a hundred feet against the side of a boulder, wailing, wailing, the dragon shrieking, the fire all about, around, under it, a pink, yellow, orange sun-fire with great soft plumes of blinding smoke.

"Did you *see* it?" cried a voice. "Just like I told you!"

"The same! The same! A knight in armour, by the Lord, Harry! We *hit* him!"

"You goin' to stop?"

"Did once; found nothing. Don't like to stop on this moor. I get the willies. Got a *feel*, it has."

"But we hit *something*!"

"Gave him plenty of whistle; chap wouldn't budge."

A steaming blast cut the mist aside.

"We'll make Stokely on time. More coal, eh, Fred?"

Another whistle shook dew from the empty sky. The night train, in fire and fury, shot through a gully, up a rise, and vanished over cold earth, towards the north, leaving black smoke and steam to dissolve in the numbed air minutes after it had passed and gone for ever.

1959

THE LITTLE MICE

"They're very odd," I said. "The little Mexican couple."

"How do you mean?" asked my wife.

"Never a sound," I said. "Listen."

Ours was a house deep back in among tenements, to which another half-house had been added. When my wife and I purchased the house, we rented the additional quarter which lay walled up against one side of our parlour. Now, listening at this particular wall, we heard our hearts beat.

"I know they're home," I whispered. "But in the three years they've lived here I've never heard a dropped pan, a spoken word, or the sound of a light switch. Good God, what are they doing in there?"

"I'd never thought," said my wife. "It is peculiar."

"Only one light on, that same dim little blue 25-watt bulb they burn in the parlour. If you walk by and peer in their front door, there he is, sitting in his armchair, not saying a word, his hands in his lap. There she is, sitting in the other armchair, looking at him, saying nothing. They don't move."

"At first glance I always think they're not home," said my wife. "Their parlour's so dark. But if you stare long enough, your eyes get used to it and you can make them out, sitting there."

"Some day," I said, "I'm going to run in, turn on their lights, and yell! My God, if I can't stand their silence, how can they? They can talk, can't they?"

"When he pays the rent each month, he says hello."

"What else?"

"Good-bye."

I shook my head. "When we meet in the alley he smiles and runs."

My wife and I sat down for an evening of reading, the radio, and talk. "Do they have a radio?"

"No radio, television, telephone. Not a book, magazine, or paper in their house."

"Ridiculous!"

"Don't get so excited."

"I know, but you can't sit in a dark room two or three years and not speak, not listen to a radio, not read or even eat, can you? I've never smelled a steak, or an egg frying. Damn it, I don't believe I've ever heard them go to bed!"

"They're doing it to mystify us, dear."

"They're succeeding!"

I went for a walk around the block. It was a nice summer evening.

Returning I glanced idly in their front door. The dark silence was there, and the heavy shapes, sitting, and the little blue light burning. I stood a long time, finishing my cigarette. It was only in turning to go that I saw him in the doorway, looking out with his bland, plump face. He didn't move. He just stood there, watching me.

"Evening," I said.

Silence. After a moment, he turned, moving away into the dark room.

In the morning, the little Mexican left the house at seven o'clock alone, hurrying down the alley, observing the same silence he kept in his rooms. She followed at eight o'clock, walking carefully, all lumpy under her dark coat, a black hat balanced on her frizzy, beauty parlour hair. They had gone to work this way, remote and silent, for years.

"Where do they work?" I asked, at breakfast.

"He's a blast furnaceman at U.S. Steel here. She sews in a dress loft somewhere.'

"That's hard work."

I typed a few pages of my novel, read, idled, typed some more. At five in the afternoon I saw the little Mexican woman come home, unlock her door, hurry inside, hook the screen, and lock the door tight.

He arrived at six sharp, in a rush. Once on their back porch, however, he became infinitely patient. Quietly, raking his hand over the screen, lightly, like a fat mouse scrabbling, he waited. At last she let him in. I did not see their mouths move.

Not a sound during supper time. No frying. No rattle of dishes. Nothing.

I saw the small blue lamp go on.

"That's how he is," said my wife, "when he pays the rent. Raps so quietly I don't hear. I just happen to glance out of the window and there he is. God knows how long he's waited, standing, sort of 'nibbling' at the door."

Two nights later, on a beautiful July evening the little Mexican man came out on the back porch and looked at me, working in the garden and said, "You're crazy!" He turned to my wife. "You're crazy, too!" He waved his plump hand, quietly. "I don't like you. Too much noise. I don't like you. You're crazy."

He went back into his little house.

August, September, October, November. The 'mice', as we now

referred to them, lay quietly in their dark nest. Once, my wife gave him some old magazines with his rent receipt. He accepted these politely, with a smile and a bow, but no word. An hour later she saw him put the magazines in the yard incinerator and strike a match.

The next day he paid the rent three months in advance, no doubt figuring that he would only have to see us up close once every twelve weeks. When I saw him on the street, he crossed quickly to the other side to greet an imaginary friend. She, similarly, ran by me, smiling wildly, bewildered, nodding. I never got nearer than twenty yards to her. If there was plumbing to be fixed in their house, they went silently forth on their own, not telling us, and brought back a plumber who worked, it seemed, with a flashlight.

"God damnedest thing," he told me when I saw him in the alley. "Damn fool place there hasn't got any light bulbs in the sockets. When I asked where they all were, damn it, they just smiled at me!"

I lay at night thinking about the little mice. Where were they from? Mexico, yes. What part? A farm, a small village, somewhere by a river? Certainly no city or town. But a place where there were stars and the normal lights and darknesses, the goings and comings of the moon and the sun they had known the better part of their lives. Yet here they were, far far away from home, in an impossible city, he sweating out the hell of blast furnaces all day, she bent to jittering needles in a sewing loft. They came home then to this block, through a loud city, avoided clanging street-cars and saloons that screamed like red parrots along their way. Through a million shriekings they ran back to their parlour, their blue light, their comfortable chairs, and their silence. I often thought of this. Late at night I felt if I put out my hand, in the dark of my own bedroom, I might feel adobe, and hear a cricket, and a river running by under the moon, and someone singing, softly, to a faint guitar.

Late one December evening the next door tenement burned. Flames roared at the sky, bricks fell in avalanches, and sparks littered the roof where the quiet mice lived.

I pounded their door.

"Fire!" I cried. "Fire!"

They sat motionless, in their blue-lighted room.

I pounded violently. "You hear? Fire!"

The fire engines arrived. They gushed water into the tenement. More bricks fell. Four of them smashed holes in the little house. I climbed to the roof, extinguished the small fires there and scrambled down, my face dirty and my hands cut. The door to the little house opened. The quiet

little Mexican and his wife stood in the doorway, solid and unmoved.

"Let me in!" I cried. "There's a hole in your roof; some sparks may have fallen in your bedroom!"

I pulled the door wide, pushed past them.

"No!" the little man grunted.

"Ah!" the little woman ran in a circle like a broken toy.

I was inside with a flashlight. The little man seized my arm.

I smelled his breath.

And then my flashlight shot through the rooms of their house. Light sparkled on a hundred wine bottles standing in the hall, two hundred bottles shelved in the kitchen, six dozen along the parlour wall-boards, more of the same on bedroom bureaus and in closets. I do not know if I was more impressed with the hole in the bedroom ceiling or the endless glitter of so many bottles. I lost count. It was like an invasion of gigantic shining beetles, struck dead, deposited, and left by some ancient disease.

In the bedroom, I felt the little man and woman behind me in the doorway. I heard their loud breathing and I could feel their eyes. I raised the beam of my flashlight away from the glittering bottles, I focused it, carefully, and for the rest of my visit, on the hole in the yellow ceiling.

The little woman began to cry. She cried softly. Nobody moved.

The next morning they left.

Before we even knew they were going, they were half down the alley at six a.m. carrying their luggage, which was light enough to be entirely empty. I tried to stop them. I talked to them. They were old friends, I said. Nothing had changed, I said. They had nothing to do with the fire, I said, or the roof. They were innocent bystanders, I insisted! I would fix the roof myself, no charge, no charge to them! But they did not look at me. They looked at the house and at the open end of the alley, ahead of them, while I talked. Then, when I stopped they nodded to the alley as if agreeing that it was time to go, and walked off, and then began to run, it seemed, away from me, towards the street where there were street-cars and buses and automobiles and many loud avenues stretching in a maze. They hurried proudly, though, heads up, not looking back.

It was only by accident I ever met them again. At Christmastime, one evening, I saw the little man running quietly along the twilight street ahead of me. On a personal whim, I followed. When he turned, I turned. At last, five blocks away from our old neighbourhood, he scratched quietly at the door of a little white house. I saw the door open, shut, and lock him in. As night settled over the tenement city, a small light burned like blue mist in the tiny living-room as I passed. I thought I saw, but probably imagined, two silhouettes there, he on his side of the room in his own particular chair, and she on her side of the room, sitting, sitting in the dark,

and one or two bottles beginning to collect on the floor behind the chairs, and not a sound, not a sound between them. Only the silence.

I did not go up and knock. I strolled by. I walked on along the avenue, listening to the parrot cafés scream. I bought a newspaper, a magazine, and a quarter-edition book. Then I went home to where all the lights were lit and there was warm food upon the table.

1959

TYRANNOSAURUS REX

He opened a door on darkness. A voice cried, "Shut it!" It was like a blow in the face. He jumped through. The door banged. He cursed himself quietly. The voice, with dreadful patience, intoned, "Jesus. You Terwilliger?"

"Yes," said Terwilliger. A faint ghost of screen haunted the dark theatre wall to his right. To his left, a cigarette wove fiery arcs in the air as someone's lips talked swiftly around it.

"You're five minutes late!"

Don't make it sound like five years, thought Terwilliger.

"Shove your film in the projection room door. Let's *move*."

Terwilliger squinted.

He made out five vast loge seats that exhaled, breathed heavily as amplitudes of executive life shifted, leaning toward the middle loge where, almost in darkness, a little boy sat smoking.

No, thought Terwilliger, not a boy. That's him. Joe Clarence, Clarence the Great.

For now the tiny mouth snapped like a puppet's, blowing smoke. "Well?"

Terwilliger stumbled back to hand the film to the projectionist, who made a lewd gesture toward the loges, winked at Terwilliger and slammed the booth door.

"Jesus," sighed the tiny voice. A buzzer buzzed. "Roll it, projection!"

Terwilliger probed the nearest loge, struck flesh, pulled back and stood biting his lips.

Music leaped from the screen. His film appeared in a storm of drums:

TYRANNOSAURUS REX: The Thunder Lizard.

Photographed in stop-motion animation with miniatures created by John Terwilliger. A study in life-forms on Earth one billion years before Christ.

Faint ironic applause came softly patting from the baby hands in the middle loge.

Terwilliger shut his eyes. New music jerked him alert. The last titles faded into a world of primeval sun, mist, poisonous rain and lush wilderness. Morning fogs were strewn along eternal seacoast where

immense flying dreams and dreams of nightmare scythed the wind. Huge triangles of bone and rancid skin, of diamond eye and crusted tooth, pterodactyls, the kites of destruction, plunged, struck prey, and skimmed away, meat and screams in their scissor mouths.

Terwilliger gazed, fascinated.

In the jungle foliage now, shiverings, creepings, insect jitterings, antennae twitchings, slime locked in oily fatted slime, armour skinned to armour, in sun glade and shadow moved the reptilian inhabitors of Terwilliger's mad remembrance of vengeance given flesh and panic taking wing.

Brontosaur, stegosaur, triceratops. How easily the clumsy tonnages of name fell from one's lips.

The great brutes swung like ugly machineries of war and dissolution through moss ravines, crushing a thousand flowers at one footfall, snouting the mist, ripping the sky in half with one shriek.

My beauties, thought Terwilliger, my little lovelies. All liquid latex, rubber sponge, ball-socketed steel articulature; all night-dreamed, clay-molded, warped and welded, riveted and slapped to life by hand. No bigger than my fist, half of them; the rest no larger than this head they sprang from.

"Good Lord," said a soft admiring voice in the dark.

Step by step, frame by frame of film, stop motion by stop motion, he, Terwilliger, had run his beasts through their postures, moved each a fraction of an inch, photographed them, moved them another hair, photographed them, for hours and days and months. Now these rare images, this eight hundred scant feet of film, rushed through the projector.

And lo! he thought. I'll never get used to it. Look! They come *alive*!

Rubber, steel, clay, reptilian latex sheath, glass eye, porcelain fang, all ambles, trundles, strides in terrible prides through continents as yet unmanned, by seas as yet unsalted, a billion years lost away. They *do* breathe. They do smite air with thunders. Oh, uncanny!

I feel, thought Terwilliger, quite simply, that there stands my Garden, and these my animal creations which I love on this Sixth Day, and tomorrow, the Seventh, I must rest.

"Lord," said the soft voice again.

Terwilliger almost answered, "Yes?"

"This is beautiful footage, Mr.Clarence," the voice went on.

"Maybe," said the man with a boy's voice.

"Incredible animation."

"I've seen better," said Clarence the Great.

Terwilliger stiffened. He turned from the screen where his friends

lumbered into oblivion, from butcheries wrought on architectural scales. For the first time he examined his possible employers.

"Beautiful stuff."

This praise came from an old man who sat to himself far across the theater, his head lifted forward in amaze toward that ancient life.

"It's jerky. Look there!" The strange boy in the middle loge half rose, pointing with the cigarette in his mouth. "Hey, was *that* a bad shot. You *see*?"

"Yes," said the old man, tired suddenly, fading back in his chair. "I see."

Terwilliger crammed his hotness down upon a suffocation of swiftly moving blood.

"Jerky," said Joe Clarence.

White light, quick numerals, darkness; the music cut, the monsters vanished.

"Glad that's over." Joe Clarence exhaled. "Almost lunchtime. Throw on the next reel, Walter! That's all, Terwilliger." Silence. "Terwilliger?" Silence. "Is that dumb bunny still here?"

"Here." Terwilliger ground his fists on his hips.

"Oh," said Joe Clarence. "It's not bad. But don't get ideas about money. A dozen guys came here yesterday to show stuff as good or better than yours, tests for our new film, *Prehistoric Monster*. Leave your bid in an envelope with my secretary. Same door out as you came in. Walter, what the hell you waiting for? Roll the next one!"

In darkness, Terwilliger barked his shins on a chair, groped for and found the door handle, gripped it tight, tight.

Behind him the screen exploded: an avalanche fell in great flourings of stone, whole cities of granite, immense edifices of marble piled, broke and flooded down. In this thunder, he heard voices from the week ahead:

"We'll pay you one thousand dollars, Terwilliger."

"But I need a thousand for my equipment alone!"

"Look, we're giving you a break. Take it or leave it!"

With the thunder dying, he knew he would take, and he knew he would hate it.

Only when the avalanche had drained off to silence behind him and his own blood had raced to the inevitable decision and stalled in his heart, did Terwilliger pull the immensely weighted door wide to step forth into the terrible raw light of day.

Fuse flexible spine to sinuous neck, pivot neck to death's-head

skull, hinge jaw from hollow cheek, glue plastic sponge over lubricated skeleton, slip snake-pebbled skin over sponge, meld seams with fire, then rear upright triumphant in a world where insanity wakes but to look on madness – Tyrannosaurus Rex!

The Creator's hands glided down out of arc-light sun. They placed the granuled monster in false green summer wilds, they waded it in broths of teeming bacterial life. Planted in serene terror, the lizard machine basked. From the blind heavens the Creator's voice hummed, vibrating the Garden with the old and monotonous tune about the footbone connected to the... anklebone, anklebone connected to the... legbone, legbone connected to the... kneebone, kneebone connected to the...

A door burst wide.

Joe Clarence ran in very much like an entire Cub Scout pack. He looked wildly around as if no one were there.

"My God!" he cried. "Aren't you set up yet? This costs me money!"

"No," said Terwilliger dryly. "No matter how much time I take, I get paid the same."

Joe Clarence approached in a series of quick starts and stops. "Well, shake a leg. And make it real horrible."

Terwilliger was on his knees beside the miniature jungle set. His eyes were on a straight level with his producer's as he said, "How many feet of blood and gore would you like?"

"Two thousand feet of each!" Clarence laughed in a kind of gasping stutter. "Let's look." He grabbed the lizard.

"Careful!"

"Careful?" Clarence turned the ugly beast in careless and non-loving hands. "It's my monster, ain't it? The contract –"

"The contract says you use this model for exploitation advertising, but the animal reverts to me after the film's in release."

"Holy cow." Clarence waved the monster. "That's wrong. We just signed the contracts four days ago –"

"It feels like four years." Terwilliger rubbed his eyes. "I've been up two nights without sleep finishing this beast so we can start shooting."

Clarence brushed this aside. "To hell with the contract. What a slimy trick. It's my monster. You and your agent give me heart attacks. Heart attacks about money, heart attacks about equipment, heart attacks about –"

"This camera you gave me is ancient."

"So if it breaks, fix it; you got hands? The challenge of the shoestring operation is using the old brain instead of cash. Getting back to the point, this monster, it should've been specified in the deal, is my

baby."

"I never let anyone own the things I make," said Terwilliger honestly. "I put too much time and affection in them."

"Hell, okay, so we give you fifty bucks extra for the beast, and throw in all this camera equipment free when the film's done, right? Then you start your own company. Compete with me, get even with me, right, using my own machines!" Clarence laughed.

"If they don't fall apart first," observed Terwilliger.

"Another thing." Clarence put the creature on the floor and walked around it. "I don't like the way this monster shapes up."

"You don't like *what*?" Terwilliger almost yelled.

"His expression. Needs more fire, more... goombah. More mazash!"

"Mazash?"

"The old bimbo! Bug the eyes more. Flex the nostrils. Shine the teeth. Fork the tongue sharper. You can do it! Uh, the monster ain't mine, huh?"

"Mine." Terwilliger arose.

His belt buckle was now on a line with Joe Clarence's eyes. The producer stared at the bright buckle almost hypnotically for a moment.

"God damn the goddam lawyers!"

He broke for the door.

"Work!"

The monster hit the door a split second after it slammed shut.

Terwilliger kept his hand poised in the air from his overhand throw. Then his shoulders sagged. He went to pick up his beauty. He twisted off its head, skinned the latex flesh off the skull, placed the skull on a pedestal and, painstakingly, with clay, began to reshape the prehistoric face.

"A little goombah," he muttered. "A touch of mazash."

They ran the first film test on the animated monster a week later.

When it was over, Clarence sat in darkness and nodded imperceptibly.

"Better. But... more horrorific, bloodcurdling. Let's scare the hell out of Aunt Jane. Back to the drawing board!"

"I'm a week behind schedule now," Terwilliger protested. "You keep coming in, change this, change that, you say, so I change it, one day the tail's all wrong, next day it's the claws –"

"You'll find a way to make me happy," said Clarence. "Get in there and fight the old aesthetic fight!"

At the end of the month they ran the second test.

"A near miss! Close!" said Clarence. "The face is just almost right. Try again, Terwilliger!"

Terwilliger went back. He animated the dinosaur's mouth so that it said obscene things which only a lip reader might catch, while the rest of the audience thought the beast was only shrieking. Then he got the clay and worked until 3 A.M. on the awful face.

"That's it!" cried Clarence in the projection room the next week. "Perfect! Now *that's* what I call a monster!"

He leaned toward the old man, his lawyer, Mr.Glass, and Maury Poole, his production assistant.

"You *like* my creature?" He beamed.

Terwilliger, slumped in the back row, his skeleton as long as the monsters he built, could feel the old lawyer shrug.

"You seen one monster, you seen 'em all."

"Sure, sure, but this one's special." shouted Clarence happily. "Even I got to admit Terwilliger's a genius!"

They all turned back to watch the beast on the screen, in a titanic waltz, throw its razor tail wide in a vicious harvesting that cut grass and clipped flowers. The beast paused now to gaze pensively off into mists, gnawing a red bone.

"That monster," said Mr.Glass at last, squinting. "He sure looks familiar."

"Familiar?" Terwilliger stirred, alert.

"It's got such a look," drawled Mr.Glass in the dark, "I couldn't forget, from someplace."

"Natural Museum exhibits?"

"No, no."

"Maybe," laughed Clarence, "you read a book once, Glass."

"Funny..." Glass, unperturbed, cocked his head, closed one eye. "Like detectives, I don't forget a face. But, that Tyrannosaurus Rex where before did I meet *him*?"

"Who cares?" Clarence sprinted. "He's great. And all because I booted Terwilliger's behind to make him do it right. Come on, Maury!"

When the door shut, Mr.Glass turned to gaze steadily at Terwilliger. Not taking his eyes away, he called softly to the projectionist, "Walt? Walter? Could you favour us with that beast again?"

"Sure thing."

Terwilliger shifted uncomfortably, aware of some bleak force gathering in blackness, in the sharp light that shot forth once more to ricochet terror off the screen.

"Yeah. Sure," mused Mr.Glass. "I almost remember. I almost know him. But... *who*?"

The brute, as if answering, turned and for a disdainful moment stared across one hundred thousand million years at two small men hidden in a small dark room. The tyrant machine named itself in thunder.

Mr.Glass quickened forward, as if to cup his ear.

Darkness swallowed all.

With the film half finished, in the tenth week, Clarence summoned thirty of the office staff, technicians and a few friends to see a rough cut of the picture.

The film had been running fifteen minutes when a gasp ran through the small audience.

Clarence glanced swiftly about.

Mr.Glass, next to him, stiffened.

Terwilliger, scenting danger, lingered near the exit, not knowing why; his nervousness was compulsive and intuitive. Hand on the door, he watched.

Another gasp ran through the crowd.

Someone laughed quietly. A woman secretary giggled. Then there was instantaneous silence.

For Joe Clarence had jumped to his feet.

His tiny figure sliced across the light on the screen. For a moment, two images gesticulated in the dark: Tyrannosaurus, ripping the leg from a Pteranodon, and Clarence, yelling, jumping forward as if to grapple with these fantastic wrestlers.

"Stop! Freeze it right there!"

The film stopped. The image held.

"What's wrong?" asked Mr.Glass.

"Wrong?" Clarence crept up on the image. He thrust his baby hand to the screen, stabbed the tyrant jaw, the lizard eye, the fangs, the brow, then turned blindly to the projector light so that reptilian flesh was printed on his furious cheeks. "What goes? What *is* this?"

"Only a monster, Chief."

"Monster, hell!" Clarence pounded the screen with his tiny fist. "That's *me*!"

Half the people leaned forward, half the people fell back, two people jumped up, one of them Mr.Glass, who fumbled for his other spectacles, flexed his eyes and moaned, "So *that's* where I saw him before!"

"That's where you what?"

Mr. Glass shook his head, eyes shut. "That face, I knew it was familiar."

A wind blew in the room.

Everyone turned. The door stood open.

Terwilliger was gone.

They found Terwilliger in his animation studio cleaning out his desk, dumping everything into a large cardboard box, the Tyrannosaurus machine-toy model under his arm. He looked up as the mob swirled in, Clarence at the head.

"What did I do to deserve this!" he cried.

"I'm sorry, Mr.Clarence."

"You're sorry?! Didn't I pay you well?"

"No, as a matter of fact."

"I took you to lunches –"

"Once. I picked up the tab."

"I gave you dinner at home, you swam in my pool, and now *this*! You're fired!"

"You can't fire me, Mr.Clarence. I've worked the last week free and overtime, you forgot my check –"

"You're fired anyway, oh, you're *really* fired. You're blackballed in Hollywood. Mr.Glass!" He whirled to find the old man. "Sue him!"

"There is nothing," said Terwilliger, not looking up any more, just looking down, packing, keeping in motion, "nothing you can sue me for. Money? You never paid enough to save on. A house? Could never afford that. A wife? I've worked for people like you all my life. So wives are out. I'm an unencumbered man. There's nothing you can do to me. If you attach my dinosaurs, I'll just go hole up in a small town somewhere, get me a can of latex rubber, some clay from the river, some old steel pipe, and make new monsters. I'll buy stock film raw and cheap. I've got an old beat-up stop-motion camera. Take that away, and I'll build one with my own hands. I can do anything. And that's why you'll never hurt me again."

"You're fired!" cried Clarence. "Look at me. Don't look away. You're fired! You're fired!"

"Mr.Clarence," said Mr.Glass, quietly, edging forward. "Let me talk to him just a moment."

"So talk to him!" said Clarence. "What's the use? He just stands there with that monster under his arm and the goddam thing looks like me, so get out of the way!"

Clarence stormed out the door. The others followed.

Mr.Glass shut the door, walked over to the window and looked out at the absolutely clear twilight sky.

"I wish it would rain," he said. "That's one thing about California I

can't forgive. It never really lets go and cries. Right now, what wouldn't I give for a little something from that sky? A bolt of lightning, even."

He stood silent, and Terwilliger slowed in his packing. Mr.Glass sagged down into a chair and doodled on a pad with a pencil, talking sadly, half aloud, to himself.

"Six reels of film shot, pretty good reels, half the film done, three hundred thousand dollars down the drain, hail and farewell. Out the window all the jobs. Who feeds the starving mouths of boys and girls? Who will face the stockholders? Who chucks the Bank of America under the chin? Anyone for Russian roulette?"

He turned to watch Terwilliger snap the locks on a brief-case.

"What hath God wrought?"

Terwilliger, looking down at his hands, turning them over to examine their texture, said, "I didn't know I was doing it, I swear. It came out in my fingers. It was all subconscious. My fingers do everything for me. They did *this*."

"Better the fingers had come in my office and taken me direct by the throat," said Glass. "I was never one for slow motion. The Keystone Kops, at triple speed, was my idea of living, or dying. To think a rubber monster has stepped on us all. We are now so much tomato mush, ripe for canning!"

"Don't make me feel any guiltier than I feel," said Terwilliger.

"What do you want, I should take you dancing?"

"It's just," cried Terwilliger. "He kept at me. Do this. Do that. Do it the other way. Turn it inside out, upside down, he said. I swallowed my bile. I was angry all the time. Without knowing, I must've changed the face. But right up till five minutes ago, when Mr.Clarence yelled, I didn't see it. I'll take all the blame."

"No," sighed Mr.Glass, "we should *all* have seen. Maybe we did and couldn't admit. Maybe we did and laughed all night in our sleep, when we couldn't hear. So where are we now? Mr.Clarence, he's got investments he can't throw out. You got your career from this day forward, for better or worse, you can't throw out. Mr.Clarence right now is aching to be convinced it was all some horrible dream. Part of his ache, ninety-nine per cent, is in his wallet. If you could put one per cent of your time in the next hour convincing him of what I'm going to tell you next, tomorrow morning there will be no orphan children staring out of the want ads in *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*. If you would go tell him –"

"Tell me *what*?"

Joe Clarence, returned, stood in the door, his cheeks still inflamed.

"What he just told me." Mr.Glass turned calmly. "A touching story."

"I'm listening!" said Clarence.

"Mr.Clarence." The old lawyer weighed his words carefully. "This film you just saw is Mr.Terwilliger's solemn and silent tribute to you."

"It's *what*?" shouted Clarence.

Both men, Clarence and Terwilliger, dropped their jaws.

The old lawyer gazed only at the wall and in a shy voice said, "Shall I go on?"

The animator closed his jaw. "If you want to."

"This film –" the lawyer arose and pointed in a single motion toward the projection room – "was done from a feeling of honour and friendship for you, Joe Clarence. Behind your desk, an unsung hero of the motion picture industry, unknown, unseen, you sweat out your lonely little life while who gets the glory? The stars. How often does a man in Atawanda Springs, Idaho, tell his wife, 'Say, I was thinking the other night about Joe Clarence – a great producer, that man'? How often? Should I tell? Never! So Terwilliger brooded. How could he present the real Clarence to the world? The dinosaur is there; boom! it hits him! This is it! he thought, the very thing to strike terror to the world, here's a lonely, proud, wonderful, awful symbol of independence, power, strength, shrewd animal cunning, the true democrat, the individual brought to its peak, all thunder and big lightning. Dinosaur: Joe Clarence. Joe Clarence: Dinosaur. Man embodied in Tyrant Lizard!"

Mr.Glass sat down, panting quietly.

Terwilliger said nothing.

Clarence moved at last, walked across the room, circled Glass slowly, then came to stand in front of Terwilliger, his face pale. His eyes were uneasy, shifting up along Terwilliger's tall skeleton frame.

"You said *that*?" he asked faintly.

Terwilliger swallowed.

"To me he said it. He's shy," said Mr.Glass. "You ever hear him say much, ever talk back, swear? anything? He likes people, he can't say. But, immortalize them? That he can do!"

"Immortalize?" said Clarence.

"What else?" said the old man. "Like a statue, only moving. Years from now people will say, 'Remember that film, *The Monster from fhe Pleistocene*?' And people will say, 'Sure! why?' 'Because,' the others say, 'it was the one monster, the one brute, in all Hollywood history had real guts, real personality. And why is this? Because one genius had enough imagination to base the creature on a real-life, hard-hitting, fast-thinking businessman of A-one caliber.' You're one with history, Mr.Clarence. Film libraries will carry you in good supply. Cinema societies will ask for you. How lucky can you get? Nothing like this will ever happen to

Immanuel Glass, a lawyer. Every day for the next two hundred, five hundred years, you'll be starring somewhere in the world!"

"Every day?" asked Clarence softly. "For the next –"

"Eight hundred, even; why not?"

"I never thought of that."

"Think of it!"

Clarence walked over to the window and looked out at the Hollywood Hills, and nodded at last.

"My God, Terwilliger," he said. "You really like me that much."

"It's hard to put in words," said Terwilliger, with difficulty.

"So do we finish the mighty spectacle?" asked Glass. "Starring the tyrant terror striding the earth and making all quake before him, none other than Mr.Joseph J. Clarence?"

"Yeah. Sure." Clarence wandered off, stunned, to the door, where he said, "You know? I always *wanted* to be an actor!"

Then he went quietly out into the hall and shut the door.

Terwilliger and Glass collided at the desk, both clawing at a drawer.

"Age before beauty," said the lawyer, and quickly pulled forth a bottle of whiskey.

At midnight on the night of the first preview of *Monster from the Stone Age*, Mr.Glass came back to the studio, where everyone was gathering for a celebration, and found Terwilliger seated alone in his office, his dinosaur on his lap.

"You weren't *there*?" asked Mr.Glass.

"I couldn't face it. Was there a riot?"

"A riot? The preview cards are all superdandy extra plus! A lovelier monster nobody saw before! So now we're talking sequels! Joe Clarence as the Tyrant Lizard in *Return of the Stone Age Monster*, Joe Clarence and/or Tyrannosaurus Rex in, maybe, *Beast from the Old Country* –"

The phone rang. Terwilliger got it.

"Terwilliger, this is Clarence! Be there in five minutes! We've done it! Your animal! Great! Is he mine now? I mean, to hell with the contract, as a favour, can I have him for the mantel?"

"Mr.Clarence, the monster's yours."

"Better than an Oscar! So long!"

Terwilliger stared at the dead phone.

"God bless us all, said Tiny Tim. He's laughing, almost hysterical with relief."

"So maybe I know why," said Mr.Glass. "A little girl, after the preview, asked him for an autograph."

"*An autograph*?"

"Right there in the street. Made him sign. First autograph he ever gave in his life. He laughed all the while he wrote his name. Somebody knew him. There he was, in front of the theatre, big as life, Rex Himself, so sign the name. So he did."

"Wait a minute," said Terwilliger slowly, pouring drinks. "That little girl... ?"

"My youngest daughter," said Glass. "So who knows? And who will tell?"

They drank.

"Not me," said Terwilliger.

Then, carrying the rubber dinosaur between them, and bringing the whisky, they went to stand by the studio gate, waiting for the limousines to arrive all lights, horns and annunciations.

1964

DARK THEY WERE AND GOLDEN-EYED

The rocket's metal cooled in the meadow winds. Its lid gave a bulging *pop*. From its clock interior stepped a man, a woman, and three children. The other passengers whispered away across the Martian meadow, leaving the man alone among his family.

The man felt his hair flutter and the tissues of his body draw tight as if he were standing at the centre of a vacuum. His wife, before him, trembled. The children, small seeds, might at any instant be sown to all the Martian climes.

The children looked up at him. His face was cold.

"What's wrong?" asked his wife.

"Let's get back on the rocket."

"Go back to Earth?"

"Yes! Listen!"

The wind blew, whining. At any moment the Martian air might draw his soul from him, as marrow comes from a white bone.

He looked at Martian hills that time had worn with a crushing pressure of years. He saw the old cities, lost and lying like children's delicate bones among the blowing lakes of grass.

"Chin up, Harry," said his wife. "It's too late. We've come at least sixty-five million miles or more."

The children with their yellow hair hollered at the deep dome of Martian sky. There was no answer but the racing hiss of wind through the stiff grass.

He picked up the luggage in his cold hands. "Here we go," he said – a man standing on the edge of a sea, ready to wade in and be drowned.

They walked into town.

Their name was Bittering. Harry and his wife Cora; Tim, Laura, and David. They built a small white cottage and ate good breakfasts there, but the fear was never gone. It lay with Mr.Bittering and Mrs.Bittering, a third unbidden partner at every midnight talk, at every dawn awakening.

"I feel like a salt crystal," he often said, "in a mountain stream, being washed away. We don't belong here. We're Earth people. This is Mars. It was meant for Martians. For heaven's sake, Cora, let's buy tickets for home!"

But she only shook her head. "One day the atom bomb will fix Earth. Then we'll be safe here."

"Safe and insane!"

Tick-tock, seven o'clock sang the voice clock; *time to get up.* And they did.

Something made him check everything each morning – warm hearth, potted blood-geraniums – precisely as if he expected something to be amiss. The morning paper was toast-warm from the six a.m. Earth rocket. He broke its seal and tilted it at his breakfast plate. He forced himself to be convivial.

"Colonial days all over again," he declared. "Why, in another year there'll be a million Earthmen on Mars. Big cities, everything! They said we'd fail. Said the Martians would resent our invasion. But did we find any Martians? Not a living soul! Oh, we found their empty cities, but no one in them. Right?"

A river of wind submerged the house. When the windows ceased rattling, Mr.Bittering swallowed and looked at the children.

"I don't know," said David. "Maybe there're Martians around we don't see. Sometimes nights I think I hear 'em. I hear the wind. The sand hits my window. I get scared. And I see those towns way up in the mountains where the Martians lived a long ago. And I think I see things moving around those towns, Papa. And I wonder if those Martians *mind* us living here. I wonder if they won't do something to us for coming here."

"Nonsense!" Mr.Bittering looked out of the windows. "We're clean, decent people." He looked at his children. "All dead cities have some kind of ghosts in them. Memories, I mean." He stared at the hills. "You see a staircase and you wonder what Martians looked like climbing it. You see Martian paintings and you wonder what the painter was like. You make a little ghost in your mind, a memory. It's quite natural. Imagination." He stopped. "You haven't been prowling up in those ruins, have you?"

"No, Papa." David looked at his shoes.

"See that you stay away from them. Pass the jam."

"Just the same," said little David, "I bet something happens."

Something happened that afternoon.

Laura stumbled through the settlement, crying. She dashed blindly on to the porch.

"Mother, Father – the war, Earth!" she sobbed. "A radio flash just came. Atom bombs hit New York! All the space rockets blown up. No more rockets to Mars, ever!"

"Oh, Harry!" The mother held on to her husband and daughter.

"Are you sure, Laura?" asked the father quietly.

Laura wept. "We're stranded on Mars, for ever and ever!"

For a long time there was only the sound of the wind in the late afternoon.

Alone, thought Bittering. Only a thousand of us here. No way back. No way. No way. Sweat poured from his face and his hands and his body; he was drenched in the hotness of his fear. He wanted to strike Laura, cry, "No, you're lying! The rockets will come back!" Instead, he stroked Laura's head against him and said, "The rockets will get through, some day."

"In five years maybe. It takes that long to build one. Father, Father, what will we do?"

"Go about our business, of course. Raise crops and children. Wait. Keep things going until the war ends and the rockets come again."

The two boys stepped out on to the porch.

"Children," he said, sitting there, looking beyond them, "I've something to tell you."

"We know," they said.

Bittering wandered into the garden to stand alone in his fear. As long as the rockets had spun a silver web across space, he had been able to accept Mars. For he had always told himself: 'Tomorrow, if I want, I can buy a ticket and go back to Earth.'

But now: the web gone, the rockets lying in jigsaw heaps of molten girder and unsnaked wire. Earth people left to the strangeness of Mars, the cinnamon dusts and wine airs, to be baked like gingerbread shapes in Martian summers, put into harvested storage by Martian winters. What would happen to him, the others? This was the moment Mars had waited for. Now it would eat them.

He got down on his knees in the flower bed, a spade in his nervous hands. Work, he thought, work and forget.

He glanced up from the garden to the Martian mountains. He thought of the proud old Martian names that had once been on those peaks. Earthmen, dropping from the sky, had gazed upon hills, rivers, Martian seas left nameless in spite of names. Once Martians had built cities, named cities; climbed mountains, named mountains; sailed seas, named seas. Mountains melted, seas drained, cities tumbled. In spite of this, the Earthmen had felt a silent guilt at putting new names to these ancient hills and valleys.

Nevertheless, man lives by symbol and label. The names were given.

Mr.Bittering felt very alone in his garden under the Martian sun, bent here, planting Earth flowers in a wild soil.

Think. Keep thinking. Different things. Keep your mind free of Earth, the atom war, the lost rockets.

He perspired. He glanced about. No one watching. He removed his tie. Pretty bold, he thought. First your coat off, now your tie. He hung it neatly on a peach tree he had imported as a sapling from Massachusetts.

He returned to his philosophy of names and mountains. The Earthmen had changed names. Now there were Hormel Valleys, Roosevelt Seas, Ford Hills, Vanderbilt Plateaus, Rockefeller Rivers, on Mars. It wasn't right. The American settlers had shown wisdom, using old Indian prairie names: Wisconsin, Minnesota, Idaho, Ohio, Utah, Milwaukee, Waukegan, Osseo. The old names, the old meanings.

Staring at the mountains wildly he thought: 'Are you up there? All the dead ones, you Martians? Well, here we are, alone, cut off! Come down, move us out! We're helpless!'

The wind blew a shower of peach blossoms.

He put out his sun-browned hand, gave a small cry. He touched the blossoms, picked them up. He turned them, be touched them again and again. Then he shouted for his wife.

"Cora!"

She appeared at a window. He ran to her.

"Cora, these blossoms!"

She handled them.

"Do you see? They're different. They've changed! They're not peach blossoms any more!"

"Look all right to me," she said.

"They're not. They're *wrong*! I can't tell how. An extra petal, a leaf, something, the colour, the smell!"

The children ran out in time to see their father hurrying about the garden, pulling up radishes, onions, and carrots from their beds.

"Cora, come look!

They handled the onions, the radishes, the carrots among them.

"Do they look like carrots?"

"Yes... No." She hesitated. "I don't know."

"They're changed."

"Perhaps."

"You know they have! Onions but not onions, carrots but not carrots. Taste: the same but different. Smell: not like it used to be." He felt his heart pounding, and he was afraid. He dug his fingers into the earth. "Cora, what's happening? What is it? We've got to get away from this." He ran across the garden. Each tree felt his touch. "The roses. The roses. They're turning green!"

And they stood looking at the green roses.

And two days later, Tim came running. “Come see the cow. I was milking her and I saw it. Come on!”

They stood in the shed and looked at their one cow.

It was growing a third horn.

And the lawn in front of their house very quietly and slowly was colouring itself, like spring violets. Seed from Earth but growing up a soft purple.

“We must get away,” said Bittering. “We’ll eat this stuff and then we’ll change – who knows to what. I can’t let it happen. There’s only one thing to do. Burn this food!”

“It’s not poisoned.”

“But it is. Subtly, very subtly. A little bit. A very little bit. We mustn’t touch it.”

He looked with dismay at their house. “Even the house. The wind’s done something to it. The air’s burned it. The fog at night. The boards, all warped out of shape. It’s not an Earthman’s house any more.”

“Oh, your imagination!”

He put on his coat and tie. “I’m going into town. We’ve got to do something now. I’ll be back.”

“Wait, Harry!” his wife cried.

But he was gone.

In town, on the shadowy step of the grocery store, the men sat with their hands on their knees, conversing with great leisure and ease.

Mr.Bittering wanted to fire a pistol in the air.

What are you doing, you fools! he thought. Sitting here! You’ve heard the news – we’re stranded on this planet. Well, move! Aren’t you frightened? Aren’t you afraid? What are you going to do?

“Hello, Harry,” said everyone.

“Look,” he said to them. “You did hear the news, the other day, didn’t you?”

They nodded and laughed. “Sure. Sure, Harry.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Do, Harry, do? What *can* we do?”

“Build a rocket, that’s what!”

“A rocket, Harry? To go back to all that trouble? Oh, Harry!”

“But you *must* want to go back. Have you noticed the peach blossoms, the onions, the grass?”

“Why, yes, Harry, seems we did,” said one of the men.

“Doesn’t it scare you?”

“Can’t recall that it did much, Harry.”

"Idiots!"

"Now, Harry."

Bittering wanted to cry. "You've got to work with me. If we stay here, we'll all change. The air. Don't you smell it? Something in the air. A Martian virus, maybe; some seed, or a pollen. Listen to me!"

They stared at him.

"Sam," he said to one of them.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Will you help me build a rocket?"

"Harry, I got a whole load of metal and some blueprints. You want to work in my metal shop, on a rocket, you're welcome. I'll sell you that metal for five hundred dollars. You should be able to construct a right pretty rocket if you work alone, in about thirty years."

Everyone laughed.

"Don't laugh."

Sam looked at him with quiet good humour.

"Sam," Bittering said. "Your eyes –"

"What about them, Harry?"

"Didn't they used to be grey?"

"Well, now, I don't remember."

"They were, weren't they?"

"Why do you ask, Harry?"

"Because now they're kind of yellow-coloured."

"Is that so, Harry?" Sam said, casually.

"And you're taller and thinner –"

"You might be right, Harry."

"Sam, you shouldn't have yellow eyes."

"Harry, what colour eyes have *you* got?" Sam said.

"My eyes? They're blue, of course."

"Here you are, Harry." Sam handed him a pocket mirror. "Take a look at yourself."

Mr.Bittering hesitated, and then raised the mirror to his face.

There were little, very dim flecks of new gold captured in the blue of his eyes.

"Now look what you've done," said Sam, a moment later. "You've broken my mirror."

Harry Bittering moved into the metal shop and began to build the rocket. Men stood in the open door and talked and joked without raising their voices. Once in a while they gave him a hand on lifting something. But mostly they just idled and watched him with their yellowing eyes.

"It's supper-time, Harry," they said.

His wife appeared with his supper in a wicker basket.

"I won't touch it," he said. "I'll eat only food from our deepfreeze. Food that came from Earth. Nothing from our garden."

His wife stood watching him. "You can't build a rocket."

"I worked in a shop once, when I was twenty. I know metal. Once I get it started, the others will help," he said, not looking at her, laying out the blueprints.

"Harry, Harry," she said, helplessly.

"We've got to get away, Cora. We've *got* to!"

The nights were full of wind that blew down the empty moonlit sea-meadows past the little white chess cities lying for their twelve-thousandth year in the shallows. In the Earthmen's settlement, the Bittering house shook with a feeling of change.

Lying abed, Mr.Bittering felt his bones shifted, shaped, melted like gold. His wife, lying beside him, was dark from many sunny afternoons. Dark she was, and golden, burnt almost black by the sun, sleeping, and the children metallic in their beds, and the wind roaring forlorn and changing through the old peach trees, violet grass, shaking out green rose petals.

The fear would not be stopped. It had his throat and heart. It dripped in a wetness of the arm and the temple and the trembling palm.

A green star rose in the east.

A strange word emerged from Mr.Bittering's lips.

"Iorrt. Iorrt." He repeated it.

It was a Martian word. He knew no Martian.

In the middle of the night he arose and dialled a call through to Simpson, the archaeologist.

"Simpson, what does the word 'Iorrt' mean?"

"Why that's the old Martian word for our planet Earth. Why?"

"No special reason."

The telephone slipped from his hand.

"Hello, hello, hello, hello," it kept saying while he sat gazing out at the green star. "Bittering? Harry, are you there?"

The days were full of metal sound. He laid the frame of the rocket with the reluctant help of three indifferent men. He grew very tired in an hour or so and had to sit down.

"The altitude," laughed a man.

"Are you *eating*, Harry?" asked another.

"I'm eating," he said, angrily,

"From your deep-freeze?"

"Yes!"
"You're getting thinner, Harry."
"I'm not!"
"And taller."
"Liar!"

His wife took him aside a few days later. "Harry, I've used up all the food in the deep-freeze. There's nothing left. I'll have to make sandwiches using food grown on Mars."

He sat down heavily.

"You must eat," she said. "You're weak."

"Yes," he said.

He took a sandwich, opened it, looked at it, and began to nibble at it.

"And take the rest of the day off," she said. "It's hot. The children want to swim in the canals and hike. Please come along."

"I can't waste time. This is a crisis!"

"Just for an hour," she urged. "A swim'll do you good."

He rose, sweating. "All right, all right. Leave me alone. I'll come."

"Good for you, Harry."

The sun was hot, the day quiet. There was only an immense staring burn upon the land. They moved along the canal, the father, the mother, the racing children in their swimsuits. They stopped and ate meat sandwiches. He saw their skin baking brown. And he saw the yellow eyes of his wife and his children, their eyes that were never yellow before. A few tremblings shook him, but were carried off in waves of pleasant heat as he lay in the sun. He was too tired to be afraid.

"Cora, how long have your eyes been yellow?"

She was bewildered. "Always, I guess."

"They didn't change from brown in the last three months?"

She bit her lips. "No. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind."

They sat there.

"The children's eyes," he said. "They're yellow, too."

"Sometimes growing children's eyes change colour."

"Maybe *we're* children, too. At least to Mars. That's a thought." He laughed. "Think I'll swim."

They leaped into the canal water, and he let himself sink down and down to the bottom like a golden statue and lie there in green silence. All was water, quiet and deep, all was peace. He felt the steady, slow current drift him easily.

If I lie here long enough, he thought, the water will work and eat away my flesh until the bones show like coral. Just my skeleton left. And then the water can build on that skeleton – green things, deep-water things, red things, yellow things. Change. Change. Slow, deep, silent change. And isn't that what it is up *there*?

He saw the sky submerged above him, the sun made Martian by atmosphere and time and space.

Up there, a big river, he thought, a Martian river, all of us lying deep in it, in our pebble houses, in our sunken boulder houses, like crayfish hidden, and the water washing away our old bodies and lengthening the bones and -

He let himself drift up through the soft light.

Tim sat on the edge of the canal, regarding his father seriously.

"Utha," he said.

"What?" asked his father.

The boy smiled. "You know. Utha's the Martian word for 'father'."

"Where did you learn it?"

"I don't know. Around. Utha!"

"What do you want?"

The boy hesitated. "I – I want to change my name."

"Change it?"

"Yes."

His mother swam over. "What's wrong with Tim for a name?"

Tim fidgeted. "The other day you called Tim, Tim, Tim. I didn't even hear. I said to myself, That's not my name. I've a new name I want to use."

Mr.Bittering held to the side of the canal, his body cold and his heart pounding slowly. "What is this new name?"

"Linnl. Isn't that a good name? Can I use it? Can I, please?"

Mr.Bittering put his hand to his head. He thought of the rocket, himself working alone, himself alone even among his family, so alone.

He heard his wife say, "Why not?"

He heard himself say, "Yes, you can use it."

"Yaaa!" screamed the boy. "I'm Linnl, Linnl!"

Racing down the meadowlands, he danced and shouted.

Mr.Bittering looked at his wife. "Why did we do that?"

"I don't know," she said. "It just seemed like a good idea."

They walked into the hills. They strolled on old mosaic paths, beside still-pumping fountains. The paths were covered with a thin film of cool water all summer long. You kept your bare feet cool all the day, splashing as in a creek, wading.

They came to a small deserted Martian villa with a good view of

the valley. It was on top of a hill. Blue-marble halls, large murals, a swimming-pool. It was refreshing in this hot summer-time. The Martians hadn't believed in large cities.

"How nice," said Mrs.Bittering, "if you could move up here to this villa for the summer."

"Come on," he said. "We're going back to town. There's work to be done on the rocket."

But as he worked that night, the thought of the cool bluemarble villa entered his mind. As the hours passed, the rocket seemed less important.

In the flow of days and weeks, the rocket receded and dwindled. The old fever was gone. It frightened him to think he had let it slip this way. But somehow the heat, the air, the working conditions -

He heard the men murmuring on the porch of his metal shop.

"Everyone's going. You heard?"

"All right. That's right."

Bittering came out. "Going where?" He saw a couple of trucks, loaded with children and furniture, drive down the dusty street.

"Up to the villa," said the man.

"Yeah, Harry. I'm going. So is Sam. Aren't you, Sam?"

"That's right, Harry. What about you?"

"I've got work to do here."

"Work! You can finish that rocket in the autumn, when it's cooler."

He took a breath. "I got the frame all set up."

"In the autumn is better." Their voices were lazy in the heat.

"Got to work," he said.

"Autumn," they reasoned. And they sounded so sensible, so right.

"Autumn would be best," he thought. "Plenty of time, then."

No! cried part of himself, deep down, put away, locked tight, suffocating. No! No!

"In the autumn," he said.

"Come on, Harry," they all said.

"Yes," he said, feeling his flesh melt in the hot liquid air. "Yes, the autumn. I'll begin work again then."

"I got a villa near the Tirra Canal," said someone.

"You mean the Roosevelt Canal, don't you?"

"Tirra. The old Martian name."

"But on the map –"

"Forget the map. It's Tirra now. Now I found a place in the Pillan mountains –"

"You mean the Rockefeller range," said Bittering.

"I mean the Pillan mountains," said Sam.

"Yes," said Bittering, buried in the hot, swarming air. "The Pillan mountains."

Everyone worked at loading the truck in the hot, still afternoon of the next day.

Laura, Tim, and David carried packages. Or, as they preferred to be known, Ttil, Linnl, and Werr carried packages.

The furniture was abandoned in the little white cottage.

"It looked just fine in Boston," said the mother. "And here in the cottage. But up at the villa? No. We'll get it when we come back in the autumn."

Bittering himself was quiet.

"I've some ideas on furniture for the villa," he said, after a time. "Big, lazy furniture."

"What about your *Encyclopedia*? You're taking it along, surely?"

Mr.Bittering glanced away. "I'll come and get it next week."

They turned to their daughter. "What about your New York dresses?"

The bewildered girl stared. "Why, I don't want them any more."

They shut off the gas, the water, they locked the doors and walked away. Father peered into the truck.

"Gosh, we're not taking much," he said. "Considering all we brought to Mars, this is only a handful!"

He started the truck.

Looking at the small white cottage for a long moment, he was filled with a desire to rush to it, touch it, say good-bye to it, for he felt as if he were going away on a long journey, leaving something to which he could never quite return, never understand again.

Just then Sam and his family drove by in another truck.

"Hi, Bittering! Here we go!"

The truck swung down the ancient highway out of town. There were sixty others travelling the same direction. The town filled with a silent, heavy dust from their passage. The canal waters lay blue in the sun, and a quiet wind moved in the strange trees.

"Good-bye, town!" said Mr.Bittering.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said the family, waving to it.

They did not look back again.

Summer burned the canals dry. Summer moved like flame upon the meadows. In the empty Earth settlement, the painted houses flaked and peeled. Rubber tyres upon which children had swung in back yards hung suspended like stopped clock pendulums in the blazing air.

At the metal shop, the rocket frame began to rust.

In the quiet autumn, Mr.Bittering stood, very dark now, very golden-eyed, upon the slope above his villa, looking at the valley.

"It's time to go back," said Cora.

"Yes, but we're not going," he said, quietly. "There's nothing there any more."

"Your books," she said. "Your fine clothes."

"Your *Illes* and your fine *ior uele rre*," she said.

"The town's empty. No one's going back," he said. "There's no reason to, none at all."

The daughter wove tapestries and the sons played songs on ancient flutes and pipes, their laughter echoing in the marble villa.

Mr.Bittering gazed at the Earth settlement far away in the low valley. "Such odd, such ridiculous houses the Earth people built."

"They didn't know any better," his wife mused. "Such ugly People. I'm glad they've gone."

They both looked at each other, startled by all they had just finished saying. They laughed.

"Where did they go?" he wondered. He glanced at his wife. She was golden and slender as his daughter. She looked at him, and he seemed almost as young as their eldest son.

"I don't know," she said.

"We'll go back to town maybe next year, or the year after, or the year after that," he said, calmly. "Now – I'm warm. How about taking a swim?"

They turned their backs to the valley. Arm in arm they walked silently down a path of clear running spring water.

Five years later, a rocket fell out of the sky. It lay steaming in the valley. Men leaped out of it, shouting.

"We won the war on Earth! We're here to rescue you! Hey!"

But the American-built town of cottages, peach trees, and theatres was silent. They found a half-finished rocket frame, rusting in an empty shop.

The rocket men searched the hills. The captain established headquarters in an abandoned bar. His lieutenant came back to report.

"The town's empty, but we found native life in the hills, sir. Dark people. Yellow eyes. Martians. Very friendly. We talked a bit, not much. They learn English fast. I'm sure our relations will be most friendly with them, sir."

"Dark, eh?" mused the captain. "How many?"

"Six, eight hundred, I'd say, living in those marble ruins in the hills, sir. Tall, healthy. Beautiful women."

"Did they tell you what became of the men and women who built this Earth settlement, Lieutenant?"

"They hadn't the foggiest notion of what happened to this town or its people."

"Strange. You think those Martians killed them?"

"They look surprisingly peaceful. Chances are a plague did this town in, sir."

"Perhaps. I suppose this is one of those mysteries we'll never solve. One of those mysteries you read about."

The captain looked at the room, the dusty windows, the blue mountains rising beyond, the canals moving in the light, and he heard the soft wind in the air. He shivered. Then, recovering, he tapped a large fresh map he had thumb-tacked to the top of an empty table.

"Lots to be done, Lieutenant." His voice droned on and quietly on as the sun sank behind the blue hills. "New settlements. Mining sites, minerals to be looked for. Bacteriological specimens taken. The work, all the work. And the old records were lost. We'll have a job of remapping to do, renaming the mountains and rivers and such. Calls for a little imagination."

"What do you think of naming those mountains the Lincoln Mountains, this canal the Washington Canal, those hills – we can name those hills for you, Lieutenant. Diplomacy. And you, for a favour, might name a town for me. Polishing the apple. And why not make this the Einstein Valley, and further over... are you *listening*, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant snapped his gaze from the blue colour and the quiet mist of the hills far beyond the town.

"What? Oh, *yes*, sir!"

1959

G.B.S.– MARK V

"Charlie! Where you going?"

Members of the rocket crew, passing, called.

Charles Willis did not answer.

He took the vacuum tube down through the friendly humming bowels of the spaceship. He fell, thinking: This is the grand hour.

"Chuck! Where travelling?" someone called.

To meet someone dead but alive, cold but warm, forever untouchable but reaching out somehow to touch.

"Idiot! Fool!"

The voice echoed. He smiled.

Then he saw Clive, his best friend, drifting up in the opposite chute. He averted his gaze, but Clive sang out through his seashell ear-pack radio:

"I want to see you!"

"Later!" Willis said.

"I *know* where you're going. Stupid!"

And Clive was gone up away while Willis fell softly down, his hands trembling.

His boots touched surface. On the instant he suffered renewed delight.

He walked down through the hidden machineries of the rocket. Lord, he thought, crazy. Here we are one hundred days gone away from the Earth in Space, and, this very hour, most of the crew, in fever, dialing their aphrodisiac animatronic devices that touched and hummed to them in their shut clamshell beds. While, what do *I* do? he thought. *This*.

He moved to peer into a small storage pit.

There, in an eternal dusk, sat the old man.

"Sir," he said, and waited.

"Shaw," he whispered. "Oh, Mr.George Bernard Shaw."

The old man's eyes sprang wide as if he had swallowed an Idea.

He seized his bony knees and gave a sharp cry of laughter.

"By God, I do accept it *all*!"

"Accept *what*, Mr.Shaw?"

Mr.Shaw flashed his bright blue gaze upon Charles Willis.

"The Universe! *It* thinks, therefore I *am*! So I had *best* accept, eh? Sit."

Willis sat in the shadowed areaway, clasping his knees and his own warm delight with being here again.

"Shall I read your mind, young Willis, and tell you what you've

been up to since last we conversed?"

"Can you read minds, Mr.Shaw?"

"No, thank God. Wouldn't it be awful if I were not only the cuneiform-tablet robot of George Bernard Shaw, but could also scan your head-bumps and spell your dreams? Unbearable."

"You already *are*, Mr.Shaw."

"*Touché*. Well, now." The old man raked his reddish beard with his thin fingers, then poked Willis gently in the ribs. "How is it you are the only one aboard this starship who ever visits me?"

"Well, sir, you see –"

The young man's cheeks burnt themselves to full blossom.

"Ah, yes, I do see," said Shaw. "Up through the honeycomb of the ship, all the happy male bees in their hives with their syrupy wind-up soft-singing nimble-nibbling toys, their bright female puppets."

"Mostly *dumb*."

"Ah, well. It was not always thus. On my last trip the Captain wished to play Scrabble using only names of characters, concepts and ideas from my plays. Now, strange boy, why do *you* squat here with this hideous old ego? Have you no need for that soft and gentle company abovestairs?"

"It's a long journey, Mr.Shaw, two years out beyond Pluto and back. Plenty of time for abovestairs company. Never enough for this. I have the dreams of a goat but the genetics of a saint."

"Well said!" The old man sprang lightly to his feet and paced about, pointing his beard now toward Alpha Centauri, now toward the nebula in Orion.

"How runs our menu today, Willis? Shall I preface Saint Joan for you? Or...?"

"Chuck...?"

Willis's head jerked. His seashell radio whispered in his ear. "Willis! Clive calling. You're late for dinner. I know where you are. I'm coming down. Chuck –"

Willis thumped his ear. The voice cut off.

"Quick, Mr.Shaw! Can you – well – *run*?"

"Can Icarus fall from the sun? Jump! I shall pace you with these spindly cricket legs!"

They ran.

Taking the corkscrew staircase instead of the air-tube, they looked back from the top platform in time to see Clive's shadow dart into that tomb where Shaw had died but to wake again.

"Willis!" cried his voice.

"To hell with him," said Willis.

Shaw beamed. “Hell? I know it well. Come. I’ll show you around!”

Laughing, they jumped into the feather-tube and fell *up*.

This was the place of stars.

Which is to say the one place in all the ship where, if one wished, one could come and truly look at the Universe and the billion billion stars which poured across it and never stopped pouring, cream from the mad dairies of the gods. Delicious frights or outcrops, on the other hand, if you thought it so, from the sickness of Lord God Jehovah turned in his sleep, upset with Creation, and birthing dinosaur worlds spun about satanic suns.

“It’s all in the thinking,” observed Mr.Shaw, sidling his eyes at his young consort.

“Mr.Shaw! You can read minds?”

“Poppycock. I merely read faces. Yours is clear glass. I glanced just now and saw Job afflicted, Moses and the Burning Bush. Come. Let us look at the Deeps and see what God has been up to in the ten billion years since He collided with Himself and procreated Vastness.”

They stood now, surveying the Universe, counting the stars to a billion and beyond.

“Oh,” moaned the young man, suddenly, and tears fell from his eyes. “How I wish I had been alive when you were alive, sir. How I wish I had *truly* known you.”

“*This* Shaw is best,” retorted the old man, “all of the mincemeat and none of the tin. The coattails are better than the man. Hang to them and survive.”

Space lay all about, as vast as God’s first thought, as deep as His primal breathing.

They stood, one of them tall, one short, by the scanning window, with a fine view of the great Andromeda Nebula whenever they wished to focus it near with a touch of the button which made the Eye magnify and suck things close.

After a long moment of drinking stars, the young man let out his breath.

“Mr.Shaw...? *Say* it. You know what I like to hear.”

“Do I, my boy?” Mr.Shaw’s eyes twinkled.

All of Space was around them, all of the Universe, all of the night of the celestial Being, all the stars and all the places between the stars, and the ship moving on its silent course, and the crew of the ship busy at work or games or touching their amorous toys, so these two were alone with their talk, these two stood viewing the Mystery and saying what must be said.

"Say it, Mr.Shaw."

"Well, now..."

Mr.Shaw fixed his eyes on a star some twenty light-years away.

"What *are* we?" he asked. "Why, we are the miracle of force and matter making itself over into imagination and will. Incredible. The Life Force experimenting with forms. You for one. Me for another. The Universe has shouted itself alive. We are one of the shouts. Creation turns in its abyss. We have bothered it, dreaming ourselves to shapes. The void is filled with slumbers; ten billion on a billion on a billion bombardments of light and material that know not themselves, that sleep moving and move but finally to make an eye and waken on themselves. Among so much that is flight and ignorance, we are the blind force that gropes like Lazarus from a billion-light-year tomb. We summon ourselves. We say, O Lazarus Life Force, truly come ye forth. So the Universe, a motion of deaths, fumbles to reach across Time to feel its own flesh and know it to be ours. We touch both ways and find each other miraculous because we are One."

Mr.Shaw turned to glance at his young friend.

"There you have it. Satisfied?"

"Oh, yes! I –"

The young man stopped.

Behind them, in the viewing-cabin door, stood Clive. Beyond him, they could hear music pulsing from the far cubicles where crewmen and their huge toys played at amorous games.

"Well," said Clive, "what goes on -?"

"Here?" interjected Shaw, lightly. "Why, only the confounding of two energies making do with puzzlements. This contraption –" he touched his own breast, "speaks from computerized elations. That genetic conglomeration –" he nodded at his young friend, "responds with raw, beloved, and true emotions. The sum of us? Pandemonium spread on biscuits and devoured at high tea."

Clive swiveled his gaze to Willis. "Damn, you're nuts. At dinner you should have *heard* the laughter! You and this old man, and just talk! they said. Just talk, talk! Look, idiot, it's your stand-watch in ten minutes. Be there! God!"

And the door was empty. Clive was gone.

Silently, Willis and Mr.Shaw floated down the drop-tube to the storage pit beneath the vast machineries.

The old man sat once again on the floor.

"Mr.Shaw." Willis shook his head, snorting softly. "Hell. Why is it you seem more alive to me than anyone I have ever known?"

"Why, my dear young friend," replied the old man, gently, "what

you warm your hands at are Ideas, eh? I am a walking monument of concepts, scrimshaws of thought, electric deliriums of philosophy and wonder. You love concepts. I am their receptacle. You love dreams in motion. I move. You love palaver and jabber. I am the consummate palaverer and jabberer. You and I, together, masticate Alpha Centauri and spit forth universal myths. We chew upon the tail of Halley's Comet and worry the Horsehead Nebula until it cries a monstrous Uncle and gives over to our creation. You love libraries. I am a library. Tickle my ribs and I vomit forth Melville's Whale, Spirit Spout and all. Tic my ear and I'll build Plato's *Republic* with my tongue for you to run and live in. You love Toys. I am a Toy, a fabulous plaything, a computerized –"

"– friend," said Willis, quietly.

Mr.Shaw gave him a look less of fire than of hearth.

"Friend," he said.

Willis turned to leave, then stopped to gaze back at that strange old figure propped against the dark storage wall.

"I – I'm afraid to go. I have this fear something may *happen* to you."

"I shall survive," replied Shaw tartly, "but only if you warn your Captain that a vast meteor shower approaches. He must shift course a few hundred thousand miles. Done?"

"Done." But still Willis did not leave.

"Mr.Shaw," he said, at last. "What... what do you do while the rest of us sleep?"

"Do? Why, bless you. I listen to my tuning fork. Then, I write symphonies between my ears."

Willis was gone.

In the dark, alone, the old man bent his head. A soft hive of dark bees began to hum under his honey-sweet breath.

Four hours later, Willis, off watch, crept into his sleep-cubicle.

In half-light, the mouth was waiting for him.

Clive's mouth. It licked its lips and whispered:

"Everyone's talking. About you making an ass out of yourself visiting a two-hundred-year-old intellectual relic, you, you, you. Jesus, the psycho-med'll be out tomorrow to X-ray your stupid skull!"

"Better that than what you men do all night every night," said Willis.

"What we do is us."

"Then why not let me be *me*?"

"Because it's unnatural." The tongue licked and darted. "We all

miss you. Tonight we piled all the grand toys in the midst of the wild room and –"

"I don't want to hear it!"

"Well, then," said the mouth, "I might just trot down and tell all this to your old gentleman friend –"

"Don't go *near* him!"

"I might." The lips moved in the shadows. "You can't stand guard on him forever. Some night soon, when you're asleep, someone might – tamper with him, eh? Scramble his electronic eggs so he'll talk vaudeville instead of *Saint Joan*? Ha, yes. Think. Long journey. Crew's bored. Practical joke like that, worth a million to see you froth. Beware, Charlie. Best come play with us".

Willis, eyes shut, let the blaze out of him.

"Whoever dares to touch Mr.Shaw, so help me God, I'll kill!"

He turned violently on his side, gnawing the back of his fist.

In the half-dark, he could sense Clive's mouth still moving.

"Kill? Well, well. Pity. Sweet dreams."

An hour later, Willis gulped two pills and fell stunned into sleep.

In the middle of the night he dreamed that they were burning good Saint Joan at the stake and, in the midst of burning, the plain-potato maiden turned to an old man stoically wrapped around with ropes and vines. The old man's beard was fiery red even before the flames reached it, and his bright blue eyes were fixed fiercely upon Eternity, ignoring the fire.

"Recant!" cried a voice. "Confess and recant! Recant!"

"There is nothing to confess, therefore no need for recantation," said the old man quietly.

The flames leaped up his body like a mob of insane and burning mice.

"Mr.Shaw!" screamed Willis.

He sprang awake.

Mr.Shaw.

The cabin was silent. Clive lay asleep.

On his face was a smile.

The smile made Willis pull back, with a cry. He dressed. He ran.

Like a leaf in auturnn he fell down the air-tube, growing older and heavier with each long instant.

The storage pit where the old man "slept" was much more quiet than it had a right to be.

Willis bent. His hand trembled. At last, he touched the old man.

"Sir?"

There was no motion. The beard did not bristle. Nor the eyes fire themselves to blue flames. Nor the mouth tremble with gentle blasphemies...

"Oh, Mr.Shaw," he said. "Are you dead, then, oh God, are you really dead?"

The old man was what they called dead when a machine no longer spoke or tuned an electric thought or moved. His dreams and philosophies were snow in his shut mouth.

Willis turned the body this way and that, looking for some cut, wound, or bruise on the skin.

He thought of the years ahead, the long travelling years and no Mr.Shaw to walk with, gibber with, laugh with. Women in the storage shelves, yes, women in the cots late at night, laughing their strange taped laughters and moving their strange machined motions, and saying the same dumb things that were said on a thousand worlds on a thousand nights.

"Oh, Mr.Shaw," he murmured at last. "Who *did* this to you?"

Silly boy, whispered Mr.Shaw's memory voice. You *know*.

I know, thought Willis.

He whispered a name and ran away.

"Damn you, you killed him!"

Willis seized Clive's bedclothes, at which instant Clive, like a robot, popped wide his eyes. The smile remained constant.

"You can't kill what was never alive," he said.

"Son of a bitch!"

He struck Clive once in the mouth, after which Clive was on his feet, laughing in some strange wild way, wiping blood from his lips.

"What did you do to him?" cried Willis.

"Not much, just –"

But that was the end of their conversation.

"On posts!" a voice cried. "Collision course!"

Bells rang. Sirens shrieked.

In the midst of their shared rage, Willis and Clive turned cursing to seize emergency spacesuits and helmets off the cabin walls.

"Damn, oh, damn, oh – d–"

Half through his last damn, Clive gasped. He vanished out a sudden hole in the side of the rocket.

The meteor had come and gone in a billionth of a second. On its way out, it had taken all the air in the ship with it through a hole the size of

a small car.

My God, thought Willis, he's gone forever.

What saved Willis was a ladder he stood near, against which the swift river of air crushed him on its way into Space. For a moment he could not move or breathe. Then the suction was finished, all the air in the ship gone. There was only time to adjust the pressure in his suit and helmet, and glance wildly around at the veering ship which was being bombarded now as in a space war. Men ran, or rather floated, shouting wildly, everywhere.

Shaw, thought Willis unreasonably, and had to laugh. Shaw.

A final meteor in a tribe of meteors struck the motor section of the rocket and blew the entire ship apart. Shaw, Shaw, oh, Shaw, thought Willis.

He saw the rocket fly apart like a shredded balloon, all its gases only impelling it to more disintegration. With the bits and pieces went wild crowds of men, dismissed from school, from life, from all and everything, never to meet face to face again, not even to say farewell, the dismissal was so abrupt and their deaths and isolation such a swift surprise.

Good-bye, thought Willis.

But there was no true good-bye. He could hear no weeping and no laments over his radio. Of all the crew, he was the last and final and only one alive, because of his suit, his helmet, his oxygen, miraculously spared. For what? To be alone and fall?

To be alone. To fall.

Oh, Mr.Shaw, oh, sir, he thought.

"No sooner called then delivered," whispered a voice.

It was impossible, but...

Drifting, spinning, the ancient doll with the wild red beard and blazing blue eyes fell across darkness as if impelled by God's breath, on a whim.

Instinctively, Willis opened his arms.

And the old party landed there, smiling, breathing heavily, or pretending to breathe heavily, as was his bent.

"Well, well, Willis! Quite a treat, eh?"

"Mr.Shaw! You were *dead*!"

"Poppycock! Someone bent some wires in me. The collision knocked things back together. The disconnection is here below my chin. A villain cut me there. So if I fall dead again, jiggle under my jaw and wire me up, eh?"

"Yes, sir!"

"How much food do you carry at this moment, Willis?"

"Enough to last two hundred days in Space."

"Dear me, that's fine, fine! And self-recycling oxygen units, also, for two hundred days?"

"Yes, sir. Now, how long will your batteries last, Mr.Shaw?"

"Ten thousand years." the old man sang out happily. "Yes, I vow, I swear! I am fitted with solar-cells which will collect God's universal light until I wear out my circuits."

"Which means you will outtalk me, Mr.Shaw, long after I have stopped eating and breathing."

"At which point you must dine on conversation, and breathe past participles instead of air. But, we must hold the thought of rescue uppermost. Are not the chances good?"

"Rockets *do* come by. And I am equipped with radio signals -–"

"Which even now cry out into the deep night: I'm here with ramshackle Shaw, eh?"

I'm here with ramshackle Shaw, thought Willis, and was suddenly warm in winter.

"Well, then, while we're waiting to be rescued, Charles Willis, what next?"

"Next? Why –"

They fell away down Space alone but not alone, fearful but elated, and now grown suddenly quiet.

"*Say* it, Mr.Shaw."

"Say what?"

"You know. Say it again."

"Well, then." They spun lazily, holding to each other. "Isn't life miraculous? Matter and force, yes, matter and force making itself over into intelligence and will."

"Is *that* what we are, sir?"

"We are, bet ten thousand bright tin-whistles on it, we are. Shall I say *more*, young Willis?"

"Please, sir," laughed Willis. "I want some more."

And the old man spoke and the young man listened and the young man spoke and the old man hooted and they fell around a corner of Universe away out of sight, eating and talking, talking and eating, the young man biting gumball foods, the old man devouring sunlight with his solar-cell eyes, and the last that was seen of them they were gesticulating and babbling and conversing and waving their hands until their voices faded into Time and the solar system turned over in its sleep and covered them with a blanket of dark and light, and whether or not a rescue ship

named Rachel, seeking her lost children, ever came by and found them, who can tell, who would truly ever want to know?

1976

THE WONDERFUL ICE-CREAM SUIT

It was summer twilight in the city and out front of the quiet-clicking pool-hall three young Mexican-American men breathed the warm air and looked around at the world. Sometimes they talked and sometimes they said nothing at all, but watched the cars glide by like black panthers on the hot asphalt or saw trolleys loom up like thunderstorms, scatter lightning, and rumble away into silence.

"Hey," sighed Martinez, at last. He was the youngest, the most sweetly sad of the three. "It's a swell night, huh? Swell."

As he observed the world it moved very close and then drifted away and then came close again. People, brushing by, were suddenly across the street. Buildings five miles away suddenly leaned over him. But most of the time everything, people, cars, and buildings, stayed way out on the edge of the world and could not be touched. On this quiet warm summer evening, Martinez's face was cold.

"Nights like this you wish... lots of things."

"Wishing," said the second man, Villanazul, a man who shouted books out loud in his room, but spoke only in whispers on the street. "Wishing is the useless pastime of the unemployed."

"Unemployed?" cried Vamenos, the unshaven. "Listen to him! We got no jobs, no money!"

"So," said Martinez, "we got no friends."

"True." Villanazul gazed off towards the green plaza where the palm-trees swayed in the soft night wind. "Do you know what I wish? I wish to go into that plaza and speak among the businessmen who gather there nights to talk big talk. But dressed as I am, poor as I am, who would listen? So, Martinez, we have each other. The friendship of the poor is real friendship. We –"

But now a handsome young Mexican with a fine thin moustache strolled by. And on each of his careless arms hung a laughing woman. "*Madre mia!*" Martinez slapped his own brow. "How does that one rate two friends?"

"It's his nice new white summer suit." Vamenos chewed a black thumbnail. "He looks sharp."

Martinez leaned out to watch the three people moving away, and then the tenement across the street, in one fourth-floor window of which, far above, a beautiful girl leaned out, her dark hair faintly stirred by the wind. She had been there for ever, which was to say, for six weeks. He had nodded, he had raised a hand, he had smiled, he had blinked rapidly, he had even bowed to her, on the street, in the hall when visiting friends, in

the park, downtown. Even now, he put his hand up from his waist and moved his fingers. But all the lovely girl did was let the summer wind stir her dark hair. He did not exist. He was nothing.

"*Madre mia!*" He looked away and down the street where the man walked his two friends around a corner. "Oh, if I had just one suit, one! I wouldn't need money if I looked okay."

"I hesitate to suggest," said Villanazul, "that you see Gomez. But he's been talking some crazy talk for a month now, about clothes. I keep on saying I'll be in on it to make him go away. That Gomez."

"Friend," said a quiet voice.

"Gomez!" Everyone turned to stare.

Smiling strangely, Gomez pulled forth an endless thin yellow ribbon which fluttered and swirled on the summer air.

"Gomez," said Martinez, "what you doing with that tape-measure?"

Gomez beamed. "Measuring people's skeletons."

"Skeletons!"

"Hold on." Gomez squinted at Martinez. "*Caramba!* Where you been all my life! Let's try you!"

Martinez saw his arm seized and taped, his leg measured, his chest encircled.

"Hold still!" cried Gomez. "Arm – perfect. Leg – chest – *perfectamente*! Now, quick, the height! There! Yes! Five foot five! You're in! Shake!" Pumping Martinez's hand he stopped suddenly. "Wait. You got... ten bucks?"

"I have!" Vamenos waved some grimy bills. "Gomez, measure me!"

"All I got left in the world is nine dollars and ninety-two cents." Martinez searched his pockets. "That's enough for a new suit? Why?"

"Why? Because you got the right skeleton, that's why!"

"*Señor Gomez*, I don't hardly know you –"

"Know me? You're going to live with me! Come on!"

Gomez vanished into the pool-room. Martinez, escorted by the polite Villanazul, pushed by an eager Vamenos, found himself inside.

"Dominguez!" said Gomez.

Dominguez, at a wall-telephone, winked at them. A woman's voice squeaked on the receiver.

"Manulo!" said Gomez.

Manulo, a wine bottle tilted bubbling to his mouth, turned.

Gomez pointed at Martinez.

"At last we found our fifth volunteer!"

Dominguez said, "I got a date, don't bother me –" and stopped. The receiver slipped from his fingers. His little black telephone book full of

fine names and numbers went quickly back into his pocket. “Gomez, you - ?”

“Yes, yes! Your money, now! *Andale!*”

The woman’s voice sizzled on the dangling phone.

Dominguez glanced at it, uneasily.

Manulo considered the empty wine bottle in his hand and the liquor-store sign across the street.

Then, very reluctantly, both men laid ten dollars each on the green velvet pool-table.

Villanazul, amazed, did likewise, as did Gomez, nudging Martinez. Martinez counted out his wrinkled bills and change. Gomez flourished the money like a royal flush.

“Fifty bucks! The suit costs sixty! All we need is ten bucks!”

“Wait,” said Martinez. “Gomez, are we talking about one suit? *Uno?*”

“*Uno!*” Gomez raised a finger. “One wonderful white ice-cream summer suit! White, white as the August moon!”

But who will own this one suit?”

“Me!” said Manulo.

“Me!” said Dominguez.

“Me!” said Villanazul.

“Me!” cried Gomez. “*And* you, Martinez. Men, let’s show him. Line up!”

Villanazul, Manulo, Dominguez, and Gomez rushed to plant their backs against the pool-room wall.

“Martinez, you too, the other end, line up! Now, Vamenos, lay that billiard cue across our heads!”

“Sure, Gomez, sure!”

Martinez, in line, felt the cue tap his head and leaned out to see what was happening. “Ah!” he gasped.

The cue lay flat on all their heads, with no rise or fall, as Vamenos slid it, grinning, along.

“We’re all the same height!” said Martinez.

“The same!” Everyone laughed.

Gomez ran down the line rustling the yellow tape-measure here and there on the men so they laughed even more wildly.

“Sure!” he said. “It took a month, four weeks, mind you, to find four guys the same size and shape as me, a month of running around measuring. Sometimes I found guys with five-foot-five skeletons, sure, but all the meat on their bones was too much or not enough. Sometimes their bones were too long in the legs or too short in the arms. Boy, all the bones! I tell you! But now, five of us, same shoulders, chests, waists,

arms, and as for weight? Men!"

Manulo, Dominguez, Villanazul, Gomez, and at last, Martinez stepped on to the scales which flipped ink-stamped cards at them as Vamenos, still smiling, wildly fed pennies. Heart pounding, Martinez read the cards.

"One hundred thirty-five pounds ... one thirty-six ... one thirty-three ... one thirty-four ... one thirty-seven... a miracle!"

"No," said Villanazul, simply, "Gomez."

They all smiled upon that genius who now circled them with his arms.

"Are we not fine?" he wondered. "All the same size, all the same dream – the suit. So each of us will look beautiful at least one night each week, eh?"

"I haven't looked beautiful in years," said Martinez. "The girls run away."

"They will run no more, they will freeze," said Gomez, "when they see you in the cool white summer ice-cream suit."

"Gomez,"said Villanazul, "just let me ask one thing."

"Of course, *compadre*."

"When we get this nice new white ice-cream summer suit, some night you're not going to put it on and walk down Greyhound bus in it and go live in El Paso for a year in it, are you?"

"Villanazul, Villanazul, how can you say that?"

"My eye sees and my tongue moves," said Villanazul. "How about the *Everybody Wins*! Punchboard Lotteries you ran and you kept running when nobody won? How about the United Chili Con Carne and Frijole Company you were going to organize and all that ever happened was the rent ran out on a two-by-four office?"

"The errors of a child now grown," said Gomez. "Enough! In this hot weather, someone may buy the special suit that is made just for us that stands waiting in the window of SHUMWAY's SUNSHINE SUITS! We have fifty dollars. Now we need just one more skeleton!"

Martinez saw the men peer around the pool-hall. He looked where they looked. He felt his eyes hurry past Vamenos, then come reluctantly back to examine his dirty shirt, his huge nicotined fingers.

"Me!" Vamenos burst out, at last. "My skeleton, measure it, it's great! Sure, my hands are big, and my arms, from digging ditches! But –"

Just then Martinez heard passing on the sidewalk outside, that same terrible man with his two girls, all laughing and yelling together.

He saw anguish move like the shadow of a summer cloud on the faces of the other men in this pool-room.

Slowly Vamenos stepped on to the scales and dropped his penny.

Eyes closed, he breathed a prayer.

"*Madre mia*, please..."

The machinery whirred, the card fell out. Vamenos opened his eyes.

"Look! One thirty-five pounds! Another miracle!"

The men stared at his right hand and the card, at his left hand and a soiled ten-dollar bill.

Gomez swayed. Sweating, he licked his lips. Then, his hand shot out, seized the money.

"The clothing store! The suit! *Andale!*"

Yelling, everyone ran from the pool-room.

The woman's voice was still squeaking on the abandoned telephone. Martinez, left behind, reached out and hung the voice up. In the silence, he shook his head. "*Santos*, what a dream! Six men," he said, "one suit. What will come of this? Madness? Debauchery? Murder? But I go with God. Gomez, wait for me!"

Martinez was young. He ran fast.

Mr.Shumway, of SHUMWAY'S SUNSHINE SUITS, paused while adjusting a tie-rack, aware of some subtle atmospheric change outside his establishment.

"Leo," he whispered to his assistant. "Look..."

Outside, one man, Gomez, strolled by, looking in. Two men. Manulo and Dominguez, hurried by, staring in. Three men, Villanazul, Martinez, and Vamenos, jostling shoulders, did the same.

"Leo," Mr.Shumway swallowed. "Call the police!"

Suddenly, six men filled the doorway.

Martinez, crushed among them, his stomach slightly upset, his face feeling feverish, smiled so wildly at Leo that Leo let go the telephone.

"Hey," breathed Martinez, eyes wide. "There's a great suit, over there!"

"No." Manulo touched a lapel. "*This* one!"

"There is only one suit in all the world!" said Gomez, coldly. "Mr.Shumway, the ice-cream white, size thirty-four, was in your window just an hour ago! It's gone! You didn't –"

"Sell it?" Mr.Shumway exhaled. "No, no. In the dressing-room. It's still on the dummy."

Martinez did not know if he moved and moved the crowd or if the crowd moved and moved him. Suddenly they were all in motion. Mr.Shumway, running, tried to keep ahead of them.

"This way, gents. Now which of you...?"

"All for one, one for all!" Martinez heard himself say, and laughed wildly. "We'll all try it on!"

"All?" Mr.Shumway clutched at the booth curtain as if his shop were a steamship that had suddenly tilted in a great swell. He stared.

That's it, thought Martinez, look at our smiles. Now, look at the skeletons behind our smiles! Measure here, there, up, down, yes, do you *see*?

Mr.Shumway saw. He nodded. He shrugged.

"All!" He jerked the curtain. "There! Buy it, and I'll throw in the dummy, free!"

Martinez peered quietly into the booth, his motion drawing the others to peer, too.

The suit was there.

And it was white.

Martinez could not breathe. He did not want to. He did not need to. He was afraid his breath would melt the suit. It was enough, just looking.

But at last he took a great trembling breath and exhaled, whispering, "*Ay. Ay, caramba!*"

"It puts out my eyes," murmured Gomez.

"Mr Shumway." Martinez heard Leo hissing. "Ain't it dangerous precedent, to sell it? I mean, what if everybody bought *one* suit for *six* people?"

"Leo," said Mr.Shumway, "you ever hear one single fifty-nine-dollar suit make so many people happy at the same time before?"

"Angels' wings," murmured Martinez. "The wings of white angels."

Martinez felt Mr.Shumway peering over his shoulder into the booth. The pale glow filled his eyes.

"You know something, Leo?" he said, in awe. "That's a suit!"

Gomez, shouting, whistling, ran up to the third-floor landing and turned to wave to the others who staggered, laughed, stopped, and had to sit down on the steps below.

"Tonight!" cried Gomez. "Tonight you move in with me, eh? Save rent as well as clothes, eh? Sure! Martinez, you got the suit?"

"Have I?" Martinez lifted the white gift-wrapped box high. "From us to us! *Ay-hah!*"

"Vamenos, you got the dummy?"

"Here!"

Vamenos, chewing an old cigar, scattering sparks, slipped. The dummy, falling, toppled, turned over twice, and banged down the stairs.

"Vamenos! Dumb! Clumsy!"

They seized the dummy from him. Stricken, Vamenos looked about

as if he'd lost something.

Manulo snapped his fingers. "Hey, Vamenos, we got to celebrate! Go borrow some wine!"

Vamenos plunged downstairs in a whirl of sparks.

The others moved into the room with the suit, leaving Martinez in the hall to study Gomez's face.

"Gomez, you look sick."

"I am," said Gomez. "For what have I done?" He nodded to the shadows in the room working about the dummy. "I pick Dominguez, a devil with the women. All right. I pick Manulo, who drinks, yes, but who sings as sweet as a girl, eh? Okay. Villanazul reads books. You, you wash behind your ears. But then what do I do? Can I wait? No! I got to buy that suit! So the last guy I pick is a clumsy slob who has the right to wear my suit –" He stopped, confused. "Who gets to wear our suit one night a week, fall down in it, or not come in out of the rain in it! Why, why, why did I do it!"

"Gomez," whispered Villanazul from the room. "The suit is ready. Come see if it looks as good using your light bulb."

Gomez and Martinez entered.

And there on the dummy in the centre of the room was the phosphorescent, the miraculously white-fired ghost with the incredible lapels, the precise stitching, the neat button-holes. Standing with the white illumination of the suit upon his cheeks, Martinez suddenly felt he was in church. White! White! It was white as the whitest vanilla ice-cream, as the bottled milk in tenement halls at dawn. White as a winter cloud all alone in the moonlit sky late at night. Seeing it here in the warm summer night room made their breath almost show on the air. Shutting his eyes, he could see it printed on his lids. He knew what colour his dreams would be this night.

"White..." murmured Villanazul. "White as the snow on that mountain near our town in Mexico which is called the Sleeping Woman."

"Say that again," said Gomez.

Villanazul, proud yet humble, was glad to repeat his tribute.

"... white as the snow on the mountain called –"

"I'm back!"

Shocked, the men whirled to see Vamenos in the door, wine bottles in each hand.

"A party! Here! Now tell us, who wears the suit first tonight? Me?"

"It's too late!" said Gomez.

"Late! It's only nine-fifteen!"

"Late?" said everyone, bristling. "Late?"

Gomez edged away from these men who glared from him to the

suit to the open window.

Outside and below it was, after all, thought Martinez, a fine Saturday night in a summer month and through the calm warm darkness the women drifted like flowers on a quiet stream. The men made a mournful sound.

"Gomez, a suggestion." Villanazul licked his pencil and drew a chart on a pad. "You wear the suit from nine-thirty to ten, Manulo till ten-thirty, Dominguez till eleven, myself till eleven-thirty, Martinez till midnight, and –"

"Why me last?" demanded Vamenos, scowling.

Martinez thought quickly and smiled. "After midnight is the best time, friend."

"Hey," said Vamenos, "that's right. I never thought of that. Okay."

Gomez sighed. "All right. A half-hour each. But from now on, remember, we each wear the suit just one night a week. Sundays we draw straws for who wears the suit the extra night."

"Me!" laughed Vamenos. "I'm lucky!"

Gomez held on to Martinez tight.

"Gomez," urged Martinez, "you first. Dress."

Gomez could not tear his eyes from that disreputable Vamenos. At last, impulsively, he yanked his shirt off over his head. "Ay-yeah!" he howled. "*Ay-yeee!*"

Whisper rustle... the clean shirt.

"Ah...!"

How clean the new clothes feel, thought Martinez, holding the coat ready. How clean they sound, how clean they smell!

Whisper... the pants... the tie, rustle... the braces. Whisper... now Martinez let loose the coat which fell in place on flexing shoulders.

"*Olé!*"

Gomez turned like a matador in his wondrous suit-of-lights.

"*Olé, Gomez, olé!*"

Gomez bowed and went out the door.

Martinez fixed his eyes to his watch. At ten sharp he heard someone wandering about in the hall as if they had forgotten where to go. Martinez pulled the door open and looked out.

Gomez was there, heading for nowhere.

He looks sick, thought Martinez. No, stunned, shook up, surprised, many things.

"Gomez! This is the place!"

Gomez turned around and found his way through the door.

"Oh, friends, friends," he said. "Friends, what an experience! This suit! This suit!"

"Tell us, Gomez!" said Martinez.

"I can't, how can I say it!" He gazed at the heavens, arms spread, palms up.

"*Tell* us, Gomez!"

"I have no words, no words. You must see, yourself! Yes, you must see –" And here he lapsed into silence, shaking his head until at last he remembered they all stood watching him. "Who's next? Manulo?"

Manulo, stripped to his shorts, leapt forward.

"Ready!"

All laughed, shouted, whistled.

Manulo ready, went out the door. He was gone twenty-nine minutes and thirty seconds. He came back holding to doorknobs, touching the wall, feeling his own elbows, putting the flat of his hand to his face.

"Oh, let me tell you," he said. "*Compadres*, I went to the bar, eh, to have a drink? But no, I did not go in the bar, do you hear? I did not drink. For as I walked I began to laugh and sing. Why, why? I listened to myself and asked this. Because. The suit made me feel better than wine ever did. The suit made me drunk, drunk! So I went to the *Guadalajara Refriterìa* instead and played the guitar and sang four songs, very high! The suit, ah, the suit!"

Dominguez, next to be dressed, moved out through the world, came back from the world.

The black telephone book! thought Martinez. He had it in his hands when he left! Now, he returns, hands empty! What? – What?

"On the street," said Dominguez, seeing it all again, eyes wide, "on the street I walked, a woman cried, 'Dominguez, is that *you*?' Another said, 'Dominguez? No, Quetzalcoatl, the Great White God come from the East,' do you hear? And suddenly I didn't want to go with six women or eight, no. One, I thought. One! And to this one, who knows what I would say? 'Be mine!' or 'Marry me!' *Caramba!* This suit is dangerous! But I did not care! I live, I live! Gomez, did it happen this way with you?"

Gomez, still dazed by the events of the evening, shook his head. "No, no talk. It's too much. Later. Villanazul...?"

Villanazul moved shyly forward.

Villanazul went shyly out.

Villanazul came shyly home.

"Picture it," he said, not looking at them, looking at the floor, talking to the floor. "The Green Plaza, a group of elderly business men gathered under the stars and they are talking, nodding, talking. Now one of them whispers. All turn to stare. They move aside, they make a channel

through which a white hot light burns its way as through ice. At the centre of the great light is this person. I take a deep breath. My stomach is jelly. My voice is very small, but it grows louder. And what do I say? I say, 'Friends. Do you know Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*? In that book we find *his* Philosophy of Suits....'"

And at last it was time for Martinez to let the suit float him out to haunt the darkness.

Four times he walked around the block. Four times he paused beneath the tenement porches, looking up at the window where the light was lit. A shadow moved, the beautiful girl was there, not there, away and gone, and on the fifth time, there she was, on the porch above, driven out by the summer heat, taking the cooler air. She glanced down. She made a gesture.

At first he thought she was waving to him. He felt like a white explosion that had riveted her attention. But she was not waving. Her hand gestured and the next moment a pair of dark-framed glasses sat upon her nose. She gazed at him.

Ah, ah, he thought, so that's it. So! Even the blind may see this suit! He smiled up at her. He did not have to wave. And at last, she smiled back. She did not have to wave either. Then, because he did not know what else to do, and he could not get rid of this smile that had fastened itself to his cheeks, he hurried, almost ran, around the corner, feeling her stare after him. When he looked back, she had taken off her glasses and gazed now with the look of the nearsighted at what, at most, must be a moving blob of light in the great darkness here. Then, for good measure he went around the block again, through a city so suddenly beautiful he wanted to yell, then laugh, then yell again.

Returning, he drifted, oblivious, eyes half-closed, and seeing him in the door the others saw not Martinez but themselves come home. In that moment, they sensed that something had happened to them all.

"You're late!" cried Vamenos, but stopped. The spell could not be broken.

"Somebody tell me," said Martinez. "Who am I?"

He moved in a slow circle through the room.

Yes, he thought, yes, it's the suit, yes, it had to do with the suit and them all together in that store on this fine Saturday night and then here, laughing and feeling more drunk without drinking, as Manulo said himself, as the night ran and each slipped on the pants and held, toppling, to the others and, balanced, let the feeling get bigger and warmer and finer as each man departed and the next took his place in the suit until now here stood Martinez all splendid and white as one who gives orders and the world grows quiet and moves aside.

"Martinez, we borrowed three mirrors while you were gone. Look!"

The mirrors, set up as in the store, angled to reflect three Martinezes and the echoes and memories of those who had occupied this suit with him and known the bright world inside this thread and cloth. Now, in the shimmering mirror, Martinez saw the enormity of this thing they were living together and his eyes grew wet. The others blinked. Martinez touched the mirrors. They shifted. He saw a thousand, a million white-armoured Martinezes march off into eternity, reflected, reflected, for ever, indomitable, and unending.

He held the white coat out on the air. In a trance, the others did not at first recognize the dirty hand that reached to take the coat. Then:

"Vamenos!"

"Pig!"

"You didn't wash!" cried Gomez. "Or even shave, while you waited! *Compadres*, the bath!"

"The bath!" said everyone.

"No!" Vamenos flailed. "The night air! I'm dead!"

They hustled him yelling out and down the hall.

Now here stood Vamenos, unbelievable in white suit, beard shaved, hair combed, nails scrubbed.

His friends scowled darkly at him.

For it was not true, thought Martinez, that when Vamenos passed by, avalanches itched on mountain-tops. If he walked under windows, people spat, dumped garbage, or worse. Tonight now, this night, he would stroll beneath ten thousand wideopened windows, near balconies, past alleys. Suddenly the world absolutely sizzled with flies. And here was Vamenos, a fresh-frosted cake.

"You sure look keen in that suit, Vamenos," said Manulo sadly.

"Thanks." Vamenos twitched, trying to make his skeleton comforable where all their skeletons had so receatly been. In a small voice, Vamenos said, "Can I go now?"

"Villanazul!" said Gomez. "Copy down these rules."

Villanazul licked his pencil.

"First," said Gomez, "don't fall down in that suit, Vamenos!"

"I won't."

"Don't lean against buildings in that suit."

"No buildings."

"Don't walk under trees with birds in them, in that suit. Don't smoke. Don't drink –"

"Please," said Vamenos, "can I *sit down* in this suit?"

"When in doubt, take the pants off, fold them over a chair."

"Wish me luck," said Vamenos.

"Go with God, Vamenos."

He went out. He shut the door.

There was a ripping sound.

"Vamenos!" cried Martinez.

He whipped the door open.

Vamenos stood with two halves of a handkerchief torn in his hands, laughing.

"Rrrip! Look at your faces! Rrrip!" He tore the cloth again. "Oh, oh, your faces, your faces! Ha!"

Roaring, Vamenos slammed the door, leaving them stunned and alone. Gomez put both hands on top of his head and turned away. "Stone me. Kill me. I have sold our souls to a demon!"

Villanazul dug in his pockets, took out a silver coin and studied it for a long while.

"Here is my last fifty cents. Who else will help me buy back Vamenos's share of the suit?"

"It's no use." Manulo showed them ten cents. "We got only enough to buy the lapels and the buttonholes."

Gomez, at the open window, suddenly leaned out and yelled, "Vamenos! No!"

Below on the street, Vamenos, shocked, blew out a match, and threw away an old cigar butt he had found somewhere. He made a strange gesture to all the men in the window above, then waved airily and sauntered on.

Somehow, the five men could not move away from the window. They were crushed together there.

"I bet he eats a hamburger in that suit," mused Villanazul. "I'm thinking of the mustard."

"Don't!" cried Gomez. "No, no!"

Manulo was suddenly at the door.

"I need a drink, bad."

"Manulo, there's wine here, that bottle, on the floor –"

Manulo went out and shut the door.

A moment later, Villanazul stretched with great exaggeration and strolled about the room.

"I think I'll walk down to the plaza, friends."

He was not gone a minute when Dominguez, waving his black book at the others, winked, and turned the doorknob.

"Dominguez," said Gomez.

"Yes?"

"If you see Vamenos, by accident," said Gomez, "warn him away from Mickey Murillo's Red Rooster Café. They got fights not only *on* TV but *out front* of the TV, too."

"He wouldn't go into Murillo's," said Dominguez. "That suit means too much to Vamenos. He wouldn't do anything to hurt it."

"He'd shoot his mother first," said Martinez. "Sure he would."

Martinez and Gomez, alone, listened to Dominguez's footsteps hurry away down the stairs. They circled the undressed window dummy.

For a long while, biting his lips, Gomez stood at the window, looking out. He touched his shirt pocket twice, pulled his hand away, and then at last pulled something from the pocket. Without looking at it, he handed it to Martinez.

"Martinez, take this."

"What is it?"

Martinez looked at the piece of folded pink paper with print on it, with names and numbers. His eyes widened.

"A ticket on the bus to El Paso, three weeks from now!"

Gomez nodded. He couldn't look at Martinez. He stared out into the summer night.

"Turn it in. Get the money," he said. "Buy us a nice white panama hat and a pale blue tie to go with the white ice-cream suit, Martinez. Do that."

"Gomez –"

"Shut up. Boy, is it hot in here! I need air."

"Gomez. I am touched. Gomez –"

But the door stood open. Gomez was gone.

Mickey Murillo's Red Rooster Café and Cocktail Lounge was squashed between two big brick buildings and, being narrow, had to be deep. Outside, serpents of red and sulphur-green neon fizzed and snapped. Inside, dim shapes loomed and swam away to lose themselves in a swarming night sea.

Martinez, on tiptoe, peeked through a flaked place on the red-painted front window.

He felt a presence on his left, heard breathing on his right. He glanced in both directions.

"Manulo! Villanazul!"

"I decided I wasn't thirsty," said Manulo. "So I took a walk."

"I was just on my way to the plaza," said Villanazul, "and decided to go the long way round."

As if by agreement the three men shut up now and turned together to peer on tiptoe through various flaked spots on the window.

A moment later, all three felt a new very warm presence behind them and heard still faster breathing.

"Is our white suit in there? " asked Gomez's voice.

"Gomez!" said everybody, surprised. "Hi!"

"Yes!" cried Dominguez, having just arrived to find his own peephole. "There's the suit! And, praise God, Vamenos is still in it!"

"I can't see!" Gomez squinted, shielding his eyes. "What's he *doing*?"

Martinez peered. Yes! There, way back in the shadows, was a big chunk of snow, and the idiot smile of Vamenos winking above it, wreathed in smoke.

"He's smoking!" said Martinez.

"He's drinking!" said Dominguez.

"He's eating a taco!" reported Villanazul.

"A *juicy* taco," added Manulo.

"No," said Gomez. "No, no, no..."

"Ruby Escadrillo's with him!"

"Let me see that!" Gomez pushed Martinez aside.

Yes, there was Ruby! Two hundred pounds of glittering sequins and tight black satin on the hoof, her scarlet fingernails clutching Vamenos's shoulder. Her cow-like face, floured with powder, greasy with lipstick, hung over him!

"That hippo!" said Dominguez. "She's crushing the shoulder pads. Look, she's going to sit on his lap!"

"No, no, not with all that powder and lipstick!" said Gomez. "Manulo, inside! Grab that drink! Villanazul, the cigar, the taco! Dominguez, date Ruby Escadrillo, get her away. *Andale*, men!"

The three vanished, leaving Gomez and Martinez to stare, gasping, through the peephole.

"Manulo, he's got the drink, he's *drinking* it!"

"*Olé!* There's Villanazul, he's got the cigar, he's eating the taco!"

"Hey, Dominguez, he's got Ruby! What a *brave* one!"

A shadow bulked through Murillo's front door, travelling fast.

"Gomez!" Martinez clutched Gomez's arm. "That was Ruby Escadrillo's boy friend, Bull La Jolla. If he finds her with Vamenos, the ice-cream suit will be covered with blood, covered with blood –"

"Don't make me nervous," said Gomez. "Quickly!"

Both ran. Inside, they reached Vamenos just as Bull La Jolla grabbed about two feet of the lapels of that wonderful ice-cream suit.

"Let go of Vamenos!" said Martinez.

"Let go that suit!" corrected Gomez.

Bull La Jolla, tap-dancing Vamenos, leered at these intruders.

Villanazul stepped up, shyly.

Villanazul smiled. "Don't hit him. Hit me."

Bull La Jolla hit Villanazul smack on the nose.

Villanazul, holding his nose, tears stinging his eyes, wandered off.

Gomez grabbed one of Bull La Jolla's arms, Martinez the other.

"Drop him, let go, *peòn, coyote, vaca!*"

Bull La Jolla twisted the ice-cream suit material until all six men screamed in mortal agony. Grunting, sweating, Bull La Jolla dislodged as many as climbed on. He was winding up to hit Vamenos when Villanazul wandered back, eyes streaming.

"Don't hit him. Hit me!"

As Bull La Jolla hit Villanazul on the nose, a chair crashed on Bull's head.

"*Olé!*" said Gomez.

Bull La Jolla swayed, blinking, debating whether to fall. He began to drag Vamenos with him.

"Let go!" cried Gomez. "Let go!"

One by one, with great care, Bull La Jolla's banana-like fingers let loose of the suit. A moment later he was ruins at their feet.

"*Compadres*, this way!"

They ran Vamenos outside and set him down where he freed himself of their hands with injured dignity.

"Okay, okay. My time ain't up. I still got two minutes and, let's see – ten seconds."

"What!" said everybody.

"Vamenos," said Gomez, "you let a Guadalajara cow climb on you, you pick fights, you smoke, you drink, you eat tacos, and now you have the nerve to say your time ain't up?"

"I got two minutes and one second left!"

"Hey, Vamenos, you sure look sharp!" Distantly, a woman's voice called from across the street.

Vamenos smiled and buttoned his coat.

"It's Ramona Alvarez! Ramona, wait!" Vamenos stepped off the curb.

"Vamenos," pleaded Gomez. "What can you do in one minute and –" he checked his watch. "Forty seconds!"

"Watch! Hey, Ramona!"

Vamenos loped.

"Vamenos, look out!"

Vamenos, surprised, whirled, saw a car, heard the shriek of brakes.

"No," said all five men on the sidewalk.

Martinez heard the impact and flinched. His head moved up. It looks like white laundry, he thought, flying through the air. His head came down.

Now he heard himself and each of the men make a different sound. Some swallowed too much air. Some let it out. Some choked. Some groaned. Some cried aloud for justice. Some covered their faces. Martinez felt his own fist pounding his heart in agony. He could not move his feet.

"I don't want to live," said Gomez quietly. "Kill me, someone."

Then, shuffling, Martinez looked down and told his feet to walk, stagger, follow one after the other. He collided with other men. Now they were trying to run. They ran at last and somehow crossed a street like a deep river through which they could only wade, to look down at Vamenos.

"Vamenos!" said Martinez. "You're alive!"

Strewn on his back, mouth open, eyes squeezed tight, tight, Vamenos motioned his head back and forth, back and forth, moaning.

"Tell me, tell me, oh tell me, tell me."

"Tell you what, Vamenos?"

Vamenos clenched his fists, ground his teeth.

"The suit, what have I done to the suit, the suit, the suit!"

The men crouched lower.

"Vamenos, it's... why, it's *okay*!"

"You lie!" said Vamenos. "It's torn, it must be, it must be, it's torn, all round, *underneath*?"

"No." Martinez knelt and touched here and there. "Vamenos, all around, underneath even, it's okay!"

Vamenos opened his eyes to let the tears run free at last. "A miracle," he sobbed. "Praise the saints!" He quieted at last. "The car?"

"Hit and run." Gomez suddenly remembered and glared at the empty street. "It's good he didn't stop. We'd have –"

Everyone listened.

Distantly, a siren wailed.

"Someone phoned for an ambulance."

"Quick!" said Vamenos, eyes rolling. "Set me up! Take off our coat!"

"Vamenos –"

"Shut up, idiots!" cried Vamenos. "The coat, that's it! Now, the pants, the pants, quick, quick, peònes! Those doctors! You seen movies? They rip the pants with razors to get them off! They don't *care*! They're maniacs! Ah, God, quick, quick!"

The siren screamed.

The men, panicking, all handled Vamenos at once.

"Right leg, *easy*, hurry, cows! Good! Left leg, now, left, you hear, there, easy, *easy*! Ow, God! Quick! Martinez, your pants, take them off!"

"What?" Martinez froze.

The siren shrieked.

"Fool!" wailed Vamenos. "All is lost! Your pants! Give me!"

Martinez jerked at his belt-buckle.

"Close in, make a circle!"

Dark pants, light pants, flourished on the air.

"Quick, here come the maniacs with the razors! Right leg on, left leg, *there*!"

"The zipper, cows, zip my zipper!" babbled Vamenos.

The siren died.

"*Madre mia*, yes, just in time! They arrive." Vamenos lay back down and shut his eyes. "*Gracias*."

Martinez turned, nonchalantly buckling on the white pants as the internes brushed past.

"Broken leg," said one interne as they moved Vamenos on to a stretcher.

"*Compadres*," said Vamenos, "don't be mad with me."

Gomez snorted. "Who's mad?"

In the ambulance, head tilted back, looking out at them upside down, Vamenos faltered.

"*Compadres*, when... when I come from the hospital... am I still in the bunch? You won't kick me out? Look, I'll give up smoking, keep away from Murillo's, swear off women –"

"Vamenos," said Martinez gently, "don't promise nothing."

Vamenos, upside-down, eyes brimming wet, saw Martinez there, all white now against the stars.

"Oh, Martinez, you sure look great in that suit. Compadres, don't he look *beautiful*?"

Villanazul climbed in beside Vamenos. The door slammed. The four remaining men watched the ambulance drive away.

Then, surrounded by his friends, inside the white suit, Martinez was carefully escorted back to the kerb.

In the tenement, Martinez got out the cleaning fluid and the others stood around, telling him how to clean the suit and later, how not to have the iron too hot and how to work the lapels and the crease and all. When the suit was cleaned and pressed so it looked like a fresh gardenia just opened, they fitted it to the dummy.

"Two o'clock," murmured Villanazul. "I hope Vamenos sleeps

well. When I left him, he looked good."

Manulo cleared his throat. "Nobody else is going out with that suit tonight, huh?"

The others glared at him.

Manulo flushed. "I mean... it's late. We're tired. Maybe no one will use the suit for forty-eight hours, huh? Give it a rest. Sure. Well. Where do we sleep?"

The night being still hot and the room unbearable, they carried the suit on its dummy out and down the hall. They brought with them also some pillows and blankets. They climbed the stairs towards the roof of the tenement. There, thought Martinez, is the cooler wind, and sleep.

On the way, they passed a dozen doors that stood open, people still perspiring and awake, playing cards, drinking pop, fanning themselves with movie magazines.

I wonder, thought Martinez. I wonder if – yes!

On the fourth floor, a certain door stood open.

The beautiful girl looked up as the five men passed. She wore glasses and when she saw Martinez she snatched them off and hid them under a book.

The others went on, not knowing they had lost Martinez who seemed stuck fast in the open door.

For a long moment he could say nothing. Then he said:

"Jose Martinez."

And she said:

"Celia Obregon."

And then both said nothing.

He heard the men moving up on the tenement roof. He moved to follow.

She said, quickly, "I saw you tonight!"

He came back.

"The suit," he said.

"The suit," she said and paused. "But not the suit."

"Eh?" he said.

She lifted the book to show the glasses lying in her lap. She touched the glasses.

"I do not see well. You would think I would wear my glasses, but no. I walk around for years now, hiding them, seeing nothing. But tonight, even without glasses, I see. A great whiteness passes below in the dark. So white! And I put on my glasses quickly!"

"The suit, as I said," said Martinez.

"The suit for a little moment, yes, but there is another whiteness above the suit."

"Another?"

"Your teeth! Oh, such white teeth, and so many!"

Martinez put his hand over his mouth.

"So happy, Mr.Martinez," she said. "I have not often seen such a happy face and such a smile."

"Ah," he said, not able to look at her, his face flushing now.

"So you see," she said, quietly, "the suit caught my eye, yes, the whiteness filled the night, below. But, the teeth were much whiter. Now, I have forgotten the suit."

Martinez flushed again. She too was overcome with what she had said. She put her glasses on her nose, and then took them off, nervously, and hid them again. She looked at her hands and at the door above his head.

"May I –" he said, at last.

"May you –"

"May I call for you," he asked, "when next the suit is mine to wear?"

"Why must you wait for the suit?" she said.

"I thought –"

"You do not need the suit," she said.

"But –"

"If it were just the suit," she said, "anyone would be fine in it. But no, I watched. I saw many men in that suit, all different, this night. So again I say, you do not need to wait for the suit."

"*Madre mia, madre mia!*" he cried, happily. And then, quieter, "I will need the suit for a little while. A month, six months, a year. I am uncertain. I am fearful of many things. I am young."

"That is as it should be," she said.

"Good night, Miss –"

"Celia Obregon."

"Celia Obregon," he said and was gone from the door.

The others were waiting, on the roof of the tenement. Coming up through the trapdoor, Martinez saw they had placed the dummy and the suit in the centre of the roof and put their blankets and pillows in a circle round it. Now they were lying down. Now a cooler night was blowing here, up in the sky.

Martinez stood alone by the suit, smoothing the lapels, talking half to himself.

"Aye, caramba, what a night! Seems ten years since seven o'clock, when it all started and I had no friends. Two in the morning, I got all kinds of friends..." He paused and thought, Celia Obregon, Celia Obregon. "...all kinds of friends," he went on. "I got a room, I got clothes. You tell me.

You know what?" He looked around at the men lying on the rooftop, surrounding the dummy and himself. "It's funny. When I wear this suit, I know I will win at pool, like Gomez. A woman will look at me like Dominguez. I will be able to sing like Manulo, sweetly. I will talk fine politics like Villanazul. I'm strong as Vamenos. So? So, tonight, I am more than Martinez. I am Gomez, Manulo, Dominguez, Villanazul, Vamenos. I am everyone. Ay... ay" He stood a moment longer by this suit which could save all the ways they sat or stood or walked. This suit which could move fast and nervous like Gomez or slow and thoughtfully like Villanazul or drift like Dominguez who never touched ground, who always found a wind to take him somewhere. This suit which belonged to them, but which also owned them all. This suit that was – what? A parade.

"Martinez," said Gomez. "You going to sleep?"

"Sure. I'm just thinking."

"What?"

"If we ever get rich," said Martinez, softly, "it'll be kind of sad. Then we'll all have suits. And there won't be no more nights like tonight. It'll break up the old gang. It'll never be the same after that."

The men lay thinking of what had just been said.

Gomez nodded, gently.

"Yeah... it'll never be the same... after that." Martinez lay down on his blanket. In darkness, with the others, he faced the middle of the roof and the dummy, which was the centre of their lives.

And their eyes were bright, shining, and good to see in the dark as the neon lights from nearby buildings flicked on, flicked off, flicked on, flicked off, revealing and then vanishing, revealing and then vanishing, their wonderful white vanilla ice-cream summer suit.

1959

HERE THERE BE TIGERS

"You have to beat a planet at its own game," said Chatterton. "Get in, rip it up, poison its animals, dam its rivers, sow its fields, depollinate its air, mine it, nail it down, hack away at it, and get the hell out from under when you have what you want. Otherwise, a planet will fix you good. You can't trust planets. They're bound to be different, bound to be bad, bound to be out to get you, especially this far off, a billion miles from nowhere, so you get them first. Tear their skin off, I say. Drag out the minerals and run away before the damn world explodes in your face. That's the way to treat them."

The rocket ship sank down towards planet 7 of star system 84. They had travelled millions upon millions of miles. Earth was far away, her system and her sun forgotten, her system settled and investigated and profited on, and other systems rummaged through and milked and tidied up, and now the rockets of these tiny men from an impossibly remote planet were probing out to far universes. In a few months, a few years, they could travel anywhere, for the speed of their rocket was the speed of a god, and now for the ten thousandth time one of the rockets of the far-circling hunt was feathering down towards an alien world.

"No," said Captain Forester. "I have too much respect for other worlds to treat them the way you want to, Chatterton. It's not my business to rape or ruin, anyway, thank God. I'm glad I'm just a rocket man. You're the anthropologist-mineralogist. Go ahead, do your mining and ripping and scraping. I'll just watch. I'll just go around looking at this new world, whatever it is, however it seems. I like to look. All rocket men are lookers or they wouldn't be rocket men. You like to smell new airs, if you're a rocket man, and see new colours and new people if there are new people to see, and new oceans and islands."

"Take your gun along," said Chatterton.

"In my holster," said Forester.

They turned to the port together and saw the green world rising to meet their ship. "I wonder what it thinks of us?" said Forester.

"It won't like me," said Chatterton. "By God, I'll see to it it won't like me. And I don't care, you know. I don't give a damn. I'm out for the money. Land us over there, will you, Captain; that looks like iron country if I ever saw it."

It was the freshest green colour they had seen since childhood.

Lakes lay like clear blue water droplets through the soft hills; there were no loud highways, signboards, or cities. It's a sea of green golf-links, thought Forester, which goes on for ever. Putting greens, driving greens,

you could walk ten thousand miles in any direction and never finish your game. A Sunday planet, a croquet-lawn world, where you could lie on your back, clover in your lips, eyes half-shut, smiling at the sky, smelling the grass, drowse through an eternal Sabbath, rousing only on occasion to turn the Sunday paper or crack the red-striped wooden ball through the hoop.

"If ever a planet was a woman, this one is."

"Woman on the outside, man on the inside," said Chatterton. "All hard underneath, all male iron, copper, uranium, black sod. Don't let the cosmetics fool you."

He walked to the bin where the Earth Drill waited. Its great screw-snout glittered bluely, ready to stab seventy feet deep and suck out corks of earth, deeper still with extensions into the heart of the planet. Chatterton winked at it. "We'll fix your woman, Forester, but good."

"Yes, I know you will," said Forester, quietly.

The rocket landed.

"It's too green, too peaceful," said Chatterton; "I don't like it."

He turned to the captain. "We'll go out with our rifles."

"I give orders, if you don't mind."

"Yes, and my company pays our way with millions of dollars of machinery we must protect; quite an investment."

The air on the new planet 7 in star system 84 was good. The port swung wide. The men filed out into the greenhouse world.

The last man to emerge was Chatterton, gun in hand.

As Chatterton set foot to the green lawn, the earth trembled. The grass shook. The distant forest rumbled. The sky seemed to blink and darken imperceptibly. The men were watching Chatterton when it happened.

"An earthquake, by God!"

Chatterton's face paled. Everyone laughed.

"It doesn't like you, Chatterton!"

"Nonsense!"

The trembling died away at last.

"Well," said Captain Forester, "it didn't quake for us, so it must be that it doesn't approve of your philosophy."

"Coincidence," Chatterton smiled. "Come on now on the double. I want the Drill out here in a half-hour for a few samplings."

"Just a moment." Forester stopped laughing. "We've got to clear the area first, be certain there're no hostile people or animals. Besides, it isn't every year you hit a planet like this, very nice; can you blame us if we want to have a look at it?"

"All right." Chatterton joined them. "Let's get it over with.

They left a guard at the ship and they walked away over fields and meadows, over small hills and into little valleys. Like a bunch of boys out hiking on the finest day of the best summer in the most beautiful year in history, walking in the croquet weather where if you listened you could hear the whisper of the wooden ball across grass, the click through the hoop, the gentle undulations of voices, a sudden high drift of women's laughter from some ivy-shaded porch, the tinkle of ice in the summer tea-pitcher.

"Hey," said Driscoll, one of the younger crewmen, sniffing the air. "I brought a baseball and bat; we'll have a game later. What a diamond!"

The men laughed quietly in the baseball season, in the good quiet wind for tennis, in the weather for bicycling and picking wild grapes.

"How'd you like the job of mowing all this?" asked Driscoll.

The men stopped.

"I *knew* there was something wrong!" cried Chatterton. "This grass; it's freshly cut!"

"Probably a species of dichondra, always short."

Chatterton spat on the green grass and rubbed it in with his boot. "I don't like it, I don't like it. If anything happened to us, no one on Earth would ever know. Silly policy: if a rocket fails to return, we never send a second rocket to check the reason why."

"Natural enough," explained Forester. "We can't waste time on a thousand hostile worlds, fighting futile wars. Each rocket represents years, money, lives. We can't afford to waste two rockets if one rocket proves a planet hostile. We go on to peaceful planets. Like this one."

"I often wonder," said Driscolt, "what happened to all those lost expeditions on worlds we'll never try again."

Chatterton eyed the distant forest. "They were shot, stabbed, broiled for dinner. Even as we may be, any minute. It's time we got back to work, Captain!"

They stood at the top of a little rise.

"Feel," said Driscoll, his hands and arms out loosely. "Remember how you used to run when you were a kid, and how the wind felt? Like feathers on your arms. You ran and thought any minute you'd fly, but you never quite did."

The men stood remembering. There was a smell of pollen and new rain drying upon a million grass blades.

Driscoll gave a little run. "Feel it, by God, the wind! You know, we never have really flown by ourselves. We have to sit inside tons of metal, away from flying, really. We've never flown like birds fly, to themselves. Wouldn't it be nice to put your arms out like this –" He extended his arms. "And run." He ran ahead of them, laughing at his idiocy. "And fly!" he

cried.

He flew.

Time passed on the silent gold wrist-watches of the men standing below. They stared up. And from the sky came a high sound of almost unbelievable laughter.

"Tell him to come down," whispered Chatterton. "He'll be killed."

Nobody heard. Their faces were raised away from Chatterton; they were stunned and smiling.

At last Driscoll landed at their feet. "Did you see me? My God, I flew!"

They had seen.

"Let me sit down, oh Lord, Lord." Driscoll slapped his knees, chuckling. "I'm a sparrow, I'm a hawk, God bless me. Go on, all of you, try it!"

"It's the wind. It picked me up and flew me!" he said, a moment later, gasping, shivering with delight.

"Let's get out of here." Chatterton started turning slowly in circles, watching the blue sky. "It's a trap, it wants us all to fly in the air. Then it'll drop us all at once and kill us. I'm going back to the ship."

"You'll wait for my order on that," said Forester.

The men were frowning, standing in the warm-cool air, while the wind sighed about them. There was a kite sound in the air, a sound of eternal March.

"I *asked* the wind to fly me," said Driscoll. "And it did!"

Forester waved the others aside. "I'll chance it next. If I'm killed, back to the ship, all of you."

"I'm sorry, I can't allow this; you're the captain," said Chatterton. "We can't risk you." He took out his gun. "I should have some sort of authority or force here. This game's gone on too long; I'm ordering us back to the ship!"

"Holster your gun," said Forester quietly.

"Stand still, you idiot!" Chatterton blinked now at this man, now at that. "Haven't you *felt* it? This world's alive, it has a look to it, it's playing with us, biding its time."

"I'll be the judge of that," said Forester. "You're going back to the ship, in a moment, under arrest, if you don't put up that gun."

"If you fools won't come with me, you can die out here. I'm going back, get my samples, and get out."

"Chatterton!"

"Don't try to stop me!"

Chatterton started to run. Then, suddenly, he gave a cry.

Everyone shouted and looked up.

"There he goes," said Driscoll.

Chatterton was up in the sky.

Night had come on like the closing of a great but gentle eye. Chatterton sat stunned on the side of the hill. The other men sat around him, exhausted and laughing. He would not look at them, he would not look at the sky, he would only feel of the earth, and his arms and his legs and his body, tightening in on himself.

"God, wasn't it perfect!" said a man named Koestler.

They had all flown, like orioles and eagles and sparrows, and they were all happy.

"Come out of it, Chatterton, it was fun, wasn't it?" said Koestler.

"It's impossible." Chatterton shut his eyes, tight, tight. "It can't do it. There's only one way for it to do it; it's alive. The air's alive. Like a fist, it picked me up. Any minute now, it can kill us all. It's alive!"

"All right," said Koestler, "say it's alive. And a living thing must have purposes. Suppose the purpose of this world is to make us happy."

As if to add to this, Driscoll came flying up, canteens in each hand. "I found a creek, tested and pure water, wait'll you try it!"

Forester took a canteen, nudged Chatterton with it, offering a drink. Chatterton shook his head and drew hastily away. He put his hands over his face. "It's the blood of this planet. Living blood. Drink that, put that inside and you put this world inside you to peer out your eyes and listen through your ears. No thanks!"

Forester shrugged and drank.

"Wine!" he said.

"It can't be!"

"It *is*. Smell it, taste it! A rare white wine!"

"French domestic." Driscoll sipped his.

"Poison," said Chatterton.

They passed the canteens round.

They idled on through the gentle afternoon, not wanting to do anything to disturb the peace that lay all about them. They were like very young men in the presence of great beauty, of a fine and famous woman, afraid that by some word, some gesture, they might turn her face away, avert her loveliness and her kindly attentions. They had felt the earthquake that had greeted Chatterton, thought Forester, and they did not want earthquake. Let them enjoy this Day After School Lets Out, this fishing weather. Let them sit under the shade trees or walk on the tender hills, but

let them drill no drillings, test no testings, contaminate no contaminations.

They found a small stream which poured into a boiling water pool. Fish, swimming in the cold creek above, fell glittering into the hot spring and floated, minutes later, cooked, to the surface.

Chatterton reluctantly joined the others, eating.

"It'll poison us all. There's always a trick to things like this. I'm sleeping in the rocket tonight. You can sleep out if you want. To quote a map I saw in medieval history: 'Here there be tigers.' Some time tonight when you're sleeping, the tigers and cannibals will show up."

Forester shook his head. "I'll go along with you, this planet is alive. It's a race unto itself. But it needs us to show off to, to appreciate its beauty. What's the use of a stage full of miracles if there's no audience?"

But Chatterton was busy. He was bent over, being sick.

"I'm poisoned! Poisoned!"

They held his shoulders until the sickness passed. They gave him water. The others were feeling fine.

"Better eat nothing but ship's food from now on," advised Forester. "It'd be safer."

"We're starting work right now." Chatterton swayed, wiping his mouth. "We've wasted a whole day. I'll work alone if I have to. I'll show this damned thing."

He staggered away towards the rocket.

"He doesn't know when he's well off," murmured Driscoll. "Can't we stop him, Captain?"

"He practically owns the expedition. We don't have to help him; there's a clause in our contract that guarantees refusal to work under dangerous conditions. So... do unto this Picnic Ground as you would have it do unto you. No initial-cutting on the trees. Replace the turf on the greens. Clean up your banana-peels after you."

Now, below, in the ship there was an immense humming. From the storage port rolled the great shining Drill. Chatterton followed it, called directions to its robot radio. "This way, here!"

"The fool."

"Now!" cried Chatterton.

The Drill plunged its long screw-bore into the green grass. Chatterton waved up at the other men. "I'll show it!"

The sky trembled.

The Drill stood in the centre of a little sea of grass. For a moment it plunged away, bringing up moist corks of sod which it spat unceremoniously into a shaking analysis bin.

Now the Drill gave a wrenched, metallic squeal like a monster interrupted at its feed. From the soil beneath it, slow, bluish liquids

bubbled up.

Chatterton shouted, “Get back, you fool!”

The Drill lumbered in a prehistoric dance. It shrieked like a mighty train turning on a sharp curve, throwing out red sparks. It was sinking. The black slime gave under it in a dark pool.

With a coughing sigh, a series of pants and churnings, the Drill sank into a black scum like an elephant shot and dying, trumpeting, like a mammoth at the end of an Age, vanishing limb by ponderous limb into the pit.

“My God,” said Forester under his breath, fascinated with the scene. “You know what that is, Driscoll? It’s tar. The damn fool machine hit a tar-pit!”‘

“Listen, listen!” cried Chatterton at the Drill, running about on the edge of the oily lake.”*This* way, over here!”

But like the old tyrants of the earth, the dinosaurs with their tubed and screaming necks, the Drill was plunging and thrashing in the one lake from where there was no returning to bask on the firm and understandable shore.

Chatterton turned to the other men far away. “*Do* something, someone!”

The Drill was gone.

The tar-pit bubbled and gloated, sucking the hidden monster bones. The surface of the pool was silent. A huge bubble, the last, rose, expelled a scent of ancient petroleum, and fell apart.

The men came down and stood on the edge of the little black sea.

Chatterton stopped yelling.

After a long minute of staring into the silent tar-pool, Chatterton turned and looked at the hills, blindly, at the green rolling lawns. The distant trees were growing fruit now and dropping it, softly, to the ground.

“I’ll show it,” he said quietly.

“Take it easy, Chatterton.”

“I’ll fix it,” he said.

“Sit down, have a drink.”

“I’ll fix it good, I’ll show it it can’t do this to me.”

Chatterton started off back to the ship.

“Wait a minute, now,” said Forester.

Chatterton ran.”I know what to do, I know how to fix it!”

“Stop him!” said Forester. He ran, then remembered he could fly. “The A-Bomb’s on the ship, if he should get to that....”

The other men had thought of that and were in the air. A small grove of trees stood between the rocket and Chatterton as he ran on the ground, forgetting that he could fly, or afraid to fly, or not allowed to fly,

yelling. The crew headed for the rocket to wait for him, the Captain with them. They arrived, formed a line, and shut the rocket port. The last they saw of Chatterton he was plunging through the edge of the tiny forest.

The crew stood waiting.

"That fool, that crazy guy."

Chatterton did not come out on the other side of the small woodland.

"He's turned back, waiting for us to relax our guard.'

"Go bring him in," said Forester.

Two men flew off.

Now, softly, a great and gentle rain felt upon the green world.

"The final touch," said Driscoll. "We'd never have to build houses here. Notice it's not raining *on* us. It's raining all around, ahead, behind us. What a world!"

They stood dry in the middle of the blue, cool rain. The sun was setting. The moon, a large one the colour of ice, rose over the freshened hills.

"There's only one more thing this world needs."

"Yes," said everyone, thoughtfully, slowly.

"We'll have to go looking," said Driscoll "It's logical. The wind flies us, the trees and streams feed us, everything is alive. Perhaps if we asked for companionship..."

"I've thought a long time, today and other days," said Koestler. "We're all bachelors, been travelling for years, and tired of it. Wouldn't it be nice to settle down somewhere. Here, maybe. On Earth you work like hell just to save enough to buy a house, pay taxes; the cities stink. Here, you won't even need a house, with this weather. If it gets monotonous you can ask for rain, clouds, snow, changes. You don't have to work here for anything."

"It'd be boring. We'd go crazy."

"No," Koestler said, smiling. "If life got too soft, all we'd have to do is repeat a few times what Chatterton said: '*Here there be tigers*.' Listen!"

Far away, wasn't there the faintest roar of a giant cat, hidden in the twilight forest?

The men shivered.

"A versatile world," said Koestler dryly. "A woman who'll do anything to please her guests, as long as we're kind to her. Chatterton wasn't kind."

"Chatterton. What about him?"

As if to answer this, someone cried from a distance. The two men who had flown off to find Chatterton were waving at the edge of the

woods.

Forester, Driscoll, and Koestler flew down alone.

"What's up?"

The men pointed into the forest. "Thought you'd want to see this, Captain. It's damned eerie." One of the men indicated a pathway. "Look here, sir."

The marks of great claws stood on the path, fresh and clear.

"And over here."

A few drops of blood.

A heavy smell of some feline animal hung in the air.

"Chatterton?"

"I don't think we'll ever find him, Captain."

Faintly, faintly, moving away, now gone in the breathing silence of twilight, came the roar of a tiger.

The men lay on the resilient grass by the rocket and the night was warm. "Reminds me of nights when I was a kid," said Driscoll. "My brother and I waited for the hottest night in July and then we slept on the Court House lawn, counting the stars, talking; it was a great night, the best night of the year, and now, when I think back on it, the best night of my life." Then he added, "Not counting tonight, of course."

"I keep thinking about Chatterton," said Koestler.

"Don't," said Forester. "We'll sleep a few hours and take off. We can't chance staying here another day. I don't mean the danger that got Chatterton. No. I mean, if we stayed on we'd get to liking this world too much. We'd never want to leave."

A soft wind blew over them.

"I don't want to leave now." Driscoll put his hands behind his head, lying quietly. "And it doesn't want us to leave."

"If we go back to Earth and tell everyone what a lovely planet it is, what then, Captain? They'll come smashing in here and ruin it."

"No," said Forester, idly. "First, this planet wouldn't put up with a full-scale invasion. I don't know what it'd do, but it could probably think of some interesting things. Secondly, I like this planet too much; I respect it. We'll go back to Earth and lie about it. Say it's hostile. Which it would be to the average man, like Chatterton, jumping in here to hurt it. I guess we won't be lying after all."

"Funny thing," said Koestler. "I'm not afraid. Chatterton vanishes, is killed most horribly, perhaps, yet we lie here, no one runs, no one trembles. It's idiotic. Yet it's right. We trust it, and it trusts us.'

"Did you notice, after you drank just so much of the wine-water,

you didn't want more? A world of moderation."

They lay listening to something like the great heart of this earth beating slowly and warmly under their bodies.

Forester thought, 'I'm thirsty.'

A drop of rain splashed on his lips.

He laughed quietly.

'I'm lonely,' he thought.

Distantly, he heard soft high voices.

He turned his eyes in upon a vision. There was a group of hills from which flowed a clear river, and in the shallows of that river, sending up spray, their faces shimmering, were the beautiful women. They played like children on the shore. And it came to Forester to know about them and their life. They were nomads, roaming the face of this world as was their desire. There were no highways or cities, there were only hills and plains and winds to carry them like white feathers where they wished. As Forester shaped the question, some invisible answerer whispered the answers. There were no men. These women, alone, produced their race. The men had vanished fifty thousand years ago. And where were these women now? A mile down from the green forest, a mile over on the wine-stream by the six white stones, and a third mile to the large river. There, in the shallows, were the women who would make fine wives, and raise beautiful children.

Forester opened his eyes. The other men were sitting up.

"I had a dream."

They had all dreamed.

"A mile down from the green forest..."

"... a mile over on the wine-stream..."

"... by the six white stones..." said Koestler.

"... and a third mile to the large river," said Driscoll, sitting there.

Nobody spoke again for a moment. They looked at the silver rocket standing there in the starlight.

"Do we walk or fly, Captain?"

Forester said nothing.

Driscoll said, "Captain, let's stay. Let's never go back to Earth. They'll never come and investigate to see what happened to us, they'll think we were destroyed here. What do you say?"

Forester's face was perspiring. His tongue moved again and again on his lips. His hands twitched over his knees. The crew sat waiting.

"It'd be nice," said the captain.

"Sure."

"But ..." Forester sighed. "We've got our job to do. People invested in our ship. We owe it to them to go back."

Forester got up. The men still sat on the ground, not listening to him.

"It's such a goddamn nice night," said Koestler.

They stared at the soft hills and the trees and the river running off to other horizons.

"Let's get aboard ship," said Forester, with difficulty.

"Captain..."

"Get aboard," he said.

The rocket rose into the sky. Looking back, Forester saw every valley and every tiny lake.

"We should've stayed," said Koestler.

"Yes, I know."

"It's not too late to turn back."

"I'm afraid it is." Forester made an adjustment on the port telescope. "Look now."

Koestler looked.

The face of the world was changed. Tigers, dinosaurs, mammoths appeared. Volcanoes erupted, cyclones and hurricanes tore over the hills in a welter and fury of weather.

"Yes, she was a woman all right," said Forester. "Waiting for visitors for millions of years, preparing herself, making herself beautiful. She put on her best face for us. When Chatterton treated her badly, she warned him a few times, and then, when he tried to ruin her beauty, she eliminated him. She wanted to be loved, like every woman, for herself, not for her wealth. So now, after she had offered us everything, we turn our backs. She's the woman scorned. She let us go, yes, but we can never come back. She'll be waiting for us with *those*..." He nodded to the tigers and the cyclones and the boiling seas.

"Captain," said Koestler.

"Yes."

"It's a little late to tell you this. But just before we took off, I was in charge of the air-lock. I let Driscoll slip away from the ship. He wanted to go. I couldn't refuse him. I'm responsible. He's back there now on that planet."

They both turned to the viewing port.

After a long while, Forester said, "I'm glad. I'm glad one of us had enough sense to stay."

"But he's dead by now!"

"No, that display down there is for us, perhaps a visual hallucination. Underneath all the tigers and lions and hurricanes, Driscoll

is quite safe and alive, because he's her only audience now. Oh, she'll spoil him rotten. He'll lead a wonderful life, he will, while we're slugging it out up and down the system looking for but never finding a planet quite like this again. No, we won't try to go back and rescue Driscoll. I don't think 'she' would let us anyway. Full speed ahead, Koestler, make it full speed."

The rocket leaped forward into greater acceleration.

And just before the planet dwindled away in brightness and mist, Forester imagined he could see Driscoll very clearly, walking away down from the green forest, whistling quietly, all of the fresh planet around him, a wine-creek flowing for him, baked fish lolling in the hot springs, fruit ripening in the midnight trees, and distant forests and lakes waiting for him to happen by. Driscoll walked away across the endless green lawns, near the six white stones, beyond the forest to the edge of the large bright river.

1959

THE SUNSET HARP

Tom, knee-deep in the waves, a piece of driftwood in his hand, listened.

The house, up towards the Coast Highway in the late afternoon, was silent. The sounds of closets being rummaged, suitcase locks snapping, vases being smashed, and of a final door crashing shut, all had faded away.

Chico, standing on the pale sand, flourished his wire-strainer to shake out a harvest of lost coins. After a moment, without glancing at Tom, he said, "Let her go".

So it was every year. For a week or a month, their house would have music swelling from the windows, there would be new geraniums potted on the porch-rail, new paint on the doors and steps. The clothes on the wire-line changed from harlequin pants to sheath-dresses to handmade Mexican frocks like white waves breaking behind the house. Inside, the paintings on the walls shifted from imitation Matisse to pseudo-Italian Renaissance. Sometimes, looking up, he would see a woman drying her hair like a bright yellow flag on the wind. Sometimes the flag was black or red. Sometimes the woman was tall, sometimes short, against the sky. But there was never more than one woman at a time. And, at last, a day like today came....

Tom placed his driftwood on the growing pile near where Chico sifted the billion footprints left by people long vanished from their holidays.

"Chico. What are we doing here?"

"Living the life of Reilly, boy!"

"I don't feel like Reilly, Chico.

"Work at it, boy!"

Tom saw the house a month from now, the flower-pots blowing dust, the walls hung with empty squares, only sand carpeting the floors. The rooms would echo like shells in the wind. And all night every night bedded in separate rooms he and Chico would bear a tide falling away and away down a long shore, leaving no trace.

Tom nodded, imperceptibly. Once a year he himself brought a nice girl here, knowing she was right at last and that in no time they would be married. But his women always stole silently away before dawn, feeling they had been mistaken for someone else, not being able to play the part. Chico's friends left like vacuum-cleaners, with a terrific drag, roar, rush, leaving no lint unturned, no clam unprized of its pearl, taking their purses with them like toy-dogs which Chico had petted as he opened their jaws to

count their teeth.

"That's four women so far this year."

"Okay, referee." Chico grinned. "Show me the way to the showers."

"Chico –" Tom bit his lower lip, then went on. "I been thinking. Why don't we split up?"

Chico just looked at him.

"I mean," said Tom, quickly, "maybe we'd have better luck, alone."

"Well, I'll be goddamned," said Chico, slowly, gripping the strainer in his big fists before him. "Look here, boy, don't you know the facts? You and me, we'll be here come the year 2,000. A couple of crazy dumb old gooney-birds drying their bones in the sun. Nothing's ever going to happen to us now, Tom, it's too late. Get that through your head and shut up."

Tom swallowed and looked steadily at the other man. "I'm thinking of leaving – next week."

"Shut up, shut up, and get to work!"

Chico gave the sand an angry showering rake that tilled him forty-three cents in dimes, pennies, and nickels. He stared blindly at the coins shimmering down the wires like a pinball game all afire.

Tom did not move, holding his breath.

They both seemed to be waiting for something.

The something happened.

"Hey... hey... hey..."

From a long way off down the coast a voice called.

The two men turned slowly.

"Hey... hey... oh, hey...!"

A boy was running, yelling, waving, along the shore two hundred yards away. There was something in his voice that made Tom feel suddenly cold. He held on to his own arms, waiting.

"Hey!"

The boy pulled up, gasping, pointing back along the shore.

"A woman, a funny woman, by the North Rock!"

"A woman!" The words exploded from Chico's mouth and he began to laugh. "Oh, no, no!"

"What you mean, a 'funny' woman?" asked Tom.

"I don't know," cried the boy, his eyes wide. "You got to come see! Awful funny!"

"You mean 'drowned'?"

"Maybe! She came out of the water, she's lying on the shore, you got to see, yourself... funny..." The boy's voice died. He gazed off north

again. “She’s got a fish’s tail.”

Chico laughed. “Not before supper, please.”

“Please!” cried the boy, dancing now. “No lie! Oh, hurry!”

He ran off, sensed he was not followed, and looked back in dismay.

Tom felt his lips move. “Boy wouldn’t run this far for a joke, would he, Chico?”

“People have run farther for less.”

Tom started walking. “All right, son.”

“Thanks, mister, oh thanks!”

The boy ran. Twenty yards up the coast, Tom looked back. Behind him, Chico squinted, shrugged, dusted his hands wearily, and followed.

They moved north along the twilight beach, their skin weathered in tiny lizard folds about their burnt pale-water eyes, looking younger for their hair cut close to the skull so you could not see the grey. There was a fair wind and the ocean rose and fell with prolonged concussions.

“What,” said Tom, “what if we get to North Rock and it’s true? The ocean *has* washed some *thing* up?”

But before Chico could answer Tom was gone, his mind racing down coasts littered with horseshoe crabs, sand-dollars, starfish, kelp, and stone. From all the times he’d talked on what lives in the sea, the names returned with the breathing fall of waves. Argonauts, they whispered, codlings, pollacks, hound-fish, tautog, tench, sea-elephant, they whispered, gillings, flounders, and beluga, the white whale and grampus, the sea-dog... always you thought how these must look from their deep-sounding names. Perhaps you would never in your life see them rise from the salt meadows beyond the safe limits of the shore, but they were there, and their names, with a thousand others, made pictures. And you looked and wished you were a frigate-bird that might fly nine thousand miles around to return some year with the full size of the ocean in your head.

“Oh, quick!” The boy had run back to peer in Tom’s face. “It might be gone!”

“Keep your shirt on, boy,” said Chico.

They came around the North Rock. A second boy stood there, looking down.

Perhaps from the corner of his eye, Tom saw something on the sand that made him hesitate to look straight at it, but fix instead on the face of the boy standing there. The boy was pale and he seemed not to breathe. On occasion he remembered to take a breath, his eyes focused, but the more they saw there on the sand the more they took time off from focusing and turned blank and looked stunned. When the ocean came in over his tennis shoes, he did not move or notice.

Tom glanced away from the boy to the sand.

And Tom's face, in the next moment, became the face of the boy. His hands assumed the same curl at his sides and his mouth moved to open and stay half-open and his eyes, which were light in colour, seemed to bleach still more with so much looking.

The setting sun was ten minutes above the sea.

"A big wave came in and went out," said the first boy, "and here she was."

They looked at the woman lying there.

Her hair was very long and it lay on the beach like the threads of an immense harp. The water stroked along the threads and floated them up and let them down, each time in a different fan and silhouette. The hair must have been five or six feet long and now it was strewn on the hard wet sand and it was the colour of limes.

Her face...

The men bent half down in wonder.

Her face was white sand sculpture, with a few water drops shimmering on it like summer rain upon a cream-coloured rose. Her face was that moon which when seen by day is pale and unbelievable in the blue sky. It was milk-marble veined with faint violet in the temples. The eyelids, closed down upon the eyes, were powdered with a faint water-colour, as if the eyes beneath gazed through the fragile tissue of the lids and saw them standing there above her looking down and looking down. The mouth was a pale flushed sea-rose, full and closed upon itself. And her neck was slender and white and her breasts were small and white, now covered, uncovered, covered, uncovered in the flow of water, the ebb of water, the flow, the ebb, the flow. And the breasts were flushed at their tips, and her body was startlingly white, almost an illumination, a white-green lightning against the sand. And as the water shifted her, her skin glinted like the surface of a pearl.

The lower half of her body changed itself from white to very pale blue, from very pale blue to pale green, from pale green to emerald green, to moss and lime green, to scintillas and sequins all dark green, all flowing away in a fount, a curve, a rush of light and dark, to end in a lacy fan, a spread of foam and jewel on the sand. The two halves of this creature were so joined as to reveal no point of fusion where pearl woman, woman of a whiteness made of cream-water and clear sky merged with that half which belonged to the amphibious slide and rush of current that came up on the shore and shelved down the shore, tugging its half towards its proper home. The woman was the sea, the sea was woman. There was no flaw, or seam, no wrinkle or stitch; the illusion, if illusion it was, held perfectly together and the blood from one moved into and through and mingled with what must have been the ice-waters of the other.

"I wanted to run get help." The first boy seemed not to want to raise his voice. "But Skip said she was dead and there's no help for that. Is she?"

"She was never alive," said Chico. "Sure," he went on, feeling their eyes on him suddenly. "It's something left over from a movie-studio. Liquid rubber skinned over a steel frame. A prop, a dummy."

"Oh, no, it's real!"

"We'll find a label somewhere," said Chico. "Here."

"Don't!" cried the first boy.

"Hell." Chico touched the body to turn it, and stopped. He knelt there, his face changing.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

Chico took his hand away and looked at it. "I was wrong." His voice faded.

Tom took the woman's wrist. "There's a pulse."

"You're feeling your own heartbeat."

"I just don't know... maybe... maybe..."

The woman was there and her upper body was all moon pearl and tidal cream and her lower body all slithering ancient green-black coins that slid upon themselves in the shift of wind and water.

"There's a trick somewhere!" cried Chico, suddenly.

"No. No!" Just as suddenly Tom burst in laughter. "No trick! My God, my God, I feel great! I haven't felt so great since I was a kid!"

They walked slowly around her. A wave touched her white hand so the fingers faintly softly waved. The gesture was that of someone asking for another and another wave to come in and lift the fingers and then the wrist and then the arm and then the head and finally the body and take all of them together back down out to sea.

"Tom." Chico's mouth opened and closed. "Why don't you go get our truck?"

Tom didn't move.

"You hear me?" said Chico.

"Yes, but –"

"But what? We could sell this somewhere, I don't know – the university, that aquarium at Seal Beach or... well, hell, why couldn't we just set up a place? Look." He shook Tom's arm. "Drive to the pier. Buy us three hundred pounds of chipped ice. When you take anything out of the water you need ice, don't you?'

"I never thought."

"Think about it! Get moving!"

"I don't know, Chico."

"What do you mean? She's real, isn't she?" He turned to the boys.

"*You* say she's real, don't you? Well, then, what are we waiting for?"

"Chico," said Tom. "You better go get the ice yourself."

"Someone's got to stay and make sure she don't go back out with the tide!"

"Chico," said Tom. "I don't know how to explain. I don't want to get that ice for you."

"I'll go myself, then. Look, boys, build the sand up here to keep the waves back. I'll give you five bucks apiece. Hop to it!"

The sides of the boys' faces were bronze-pink from the sun which was touching the horizon now. Their eyes were a bronze colour looking at Chico.

"My God!" said Chico. "This is better than finding ambergris!" He ran to the top of the nearest dune, called, "Get to work!" and was gone.

Now Tom and the two boys were left with the lonely woman by the North Rock and the sun was one-fourth of the way below the western horizon. The sand and the woman were pink-gold.

"Just a little line," whispered the second boy. He drew his fingernail along under his own chin, gently. He nodded to the woman. Tom bent again to see the faint line under either side of her firm white chin, the small, almost invisible line where the gills were or had been and were now almost sealed shut, invisible.

He looked at the face and the great strands of hair spread out in a lyre on the shore.

"She's beautiful," he said.

The boys nodded without knowing it.

Behind them, a gull leaped up quickly from the dunes. The boys gasped and turned to stare.

Tom felt himself trembling. He saw the boys were trembling too. A car horn hooted. Their eyes blinked, suddenly afraid. They looked up towards the highway.

A wave poured about the body, framing it in a clear white pool of water.

Tom nodded the boys to one side.

The wave moved the body an inch in and two inches out towards the sea.

The next wave came and moved the body two inches in and six inches out towards the sea.

"But –" said the first boy.

Tom shook his head.

The third wave lifted the body two feet down towards the sea. The wave after that drifted the body another foot down the shingles and the next three moved it six feet down.

The first boy cried out and ran after it.

Tom reached him and held his arm. The boy looked helpless and afraid and sad.

For a moment there were no more waves. Tom looked at the woman, thinking, she's true, she's real, she's mine... but... she's dead. Or will be if she stays here.

"We can't let her go," said the first boy. "We can't, we just can't!"

The other boy stepped between the woman and the sea. "What would we do with her?" he wanted to know, looking at Tom, "if we kept her?"

The first boy tried to think. "We could – we could –" He stopped and shook his head. "Oh, my Gosh."

The second boy stepped out of the way and left a path from the woman to the sea.

The next wave was a big one. It came in and went out and the sand was empty. The whiteness was gone and the black diamonds and the great threads of the harp.

They stood by the edge of the sea, looking out, the man and the two boys, until they heard the truck driving up on the dunes behind them.

The last of the sun was gone.

They heard footsteps running down the dunes and someone yelling.

They drove back down the darkening beach in the light truck with the big-treaded tyres, in silence. The two boys sat in the rear on the bags of chipped ice. After a long while, Chico began to swear steadily, half to himself, spitting out of the window.

"Three hundred pounds of ice. Three hundred pounds of ice! What do I do with it now? And I'm soaked to the skin, soaked! You didn't even move when I jumped in and swam out to look around! Idiot, idiot! You haven't changed! Like every other time, like always, you do nothing, nothing, just stand there, stand there, do nothing, nothing, just stare!"

"And what did you do, I ask, what?" said Tom, in a tired voice, looking ahead. "The same as you always did, just the same, no different, no different at all. You should've seen yourself."

They dropped the boys off at their beach-house. The youngest spoke in a voice you could hardly hear against the wind. "Gosh, nobody'll ever believe..."

The two men drove down the coast and parked.

Chico sat for two or three minutes waiting for his fist to relax on his lap, and then he snorted.

"Hell. I guess things turn out for the best." He took a deep breath.

"It just came to me. Funny. Twenty, thirty years from now, middle of the night, our phone'll ring. It'll be one of those two boys, grown-up, calling long-distance from a bar somewhere. Middle of the night, them calling to ask one question. It's true, isn't it? they'll say. It did happen, didn't it? Back in 1958, it really happened to *us*? And we'll sit there on the edge of the bed, middle of the night, saying, Sure, boy, sure, it really happened to us in 1958. And they'll say, Thanks, and we'll say, Don't mention it, any old time. And we'll all say good night. And maybe they won't call again for a couple of years."

The two men sat on their front-porch steps in the dark.

"Tom?"

"What?"

Chico waited a moment.

"Tom, next week – you're not moving out."

Tom thought about it, a cigarette dead in his fingers. And he knew he would never go away now. For tomorrow and the day after and the day after the day after that, he knew he would walk down and go swimming there in all the green lace and the white fires and the dark caverns in the hollows under the waves. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

"That's right, Chico. I'm staying here."

Now the silver looking-glasses advanced in a crumpling line all along the coast from a thousand miles north to a thousand miles south. The mirrors did not reflect so much as one building or one tree or one highway or one car or even one man himself. The mirrors reflected only the quiet moon and then shattered into a billion bits of glass that spread out in a glaze on the shore. Then the sea was dark awhile, preparing another line of mirrors to rear up and surprise the two men who sat there for a long time, never once blinking their eyes, waiting.

1958

A SOUND OF THUNDER

The sign on the wall seemed to quaver under a film of sliding warm water. Eckels felt his eyelids blink over his stare, and the sign burned in this momentary darkness:

TIME SAFARI, INC.
SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST.
YOU NAME THE ANIMAL.
WE TAKE YOU THERE.
YOU SHOOT IT.

A warm phlegm gathered in Eckels' throat; he swallowed and pushed it down. The muscles around his mouth formed a smile as he put his hand slowly out upon the air, and in that hand waved a check for ten thousand dollars to the man behind the desk.

"Does this safari guarantee I come back alive?"

"We guarantee nothing," said the official, "except the dinosaurs." He turned. "This is Mr.Travis, your Safari Guide in the Past. He'll tell you what and where to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. If you disobey instructions, there's a stiff penalty of another ten thousand dollars, plus possible government action, on your return."

Eckels glanced across the vast office at a mass and tangle, a snaking and humming of wires and steel boxes, at an aurora that flickered now orange, now silver, now blue. There was a sound like a gigantic bonfire burning all of Time, all the years and all the parchment calendars, all the hours piled high and set aflame.

A touch of the hand and this burning would, on the instant, beautifully reverse itself. Eckels remembered the wording in the advertisements to the letter. Out of chars and ashes, out of dust and coals, like golden salamanders, the old years, the green years, might leap; roses sweeten the air, white hair turn Irish-black, wrinkles vanish; all, everything fly back to seed, flee death, rush down to their beginnings, suns rise in western skies and set in glorious easts, moons eat themselves opposite to the custom, all and everything cupping one in another like Chinese boxes, rabbits in hats, all and everything returning to the fresh death, the seed death, the green death, to the time before the beginning. A touch of a hand might do it, the merest touch of a hand.

"Hell and damn," Eckels breathed, the light of the Machine on his thin face. "A real Time Machine." He shook his head. "Makes you think. If the election had gone badly yesterday, I might be here now running

away from the results. Thank God Keith won. He'll make a fine President of the United States."

"Yes," said the man behind the desk. 'We're lucky. If Deutscher had gotten in, we'd have the worst kind of dictatorship. There's an anti-everything man for you, a militarist, anti-Christ, anti-human, anti-intellectual. People called us up, you know, joking but not joking. Said if Deutscher became President they wanted to go live in 1492. Of course it's not our business to conduct Escapes, but to form Safaris. Anyway, Keith's President now. All you got to worry about is –"

"Shooting my dinosaur," Eckels finished it for him.

"A *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The Thunder Lizard, the damnedest monster in history. Sign this release. Anything happens to you, we're not responsible. Those dinosaurs are hungry."

Eckels flushed angrily. "Trying to scare me!"

"Frankly, yes. We don't want anyone going who'll panic at the first shot. Six Safari leaders were killed last year, and a dozen hunters. We're here to give you the damnedest thrill a *real* hunter ever asked for. Travelling you back sixty million years to bag the biggest damned game in all Time. Your personal check's still there. Tear it up."

Mr.Eckels looked at the check for a long time. His fingers twitched.

"Good luck," said the man behind the desk. "Mr.Travis, he's all yours."

They moved silently across the room, taking their guns with them, toward the Machine, toward the silver metal and the roaring light.

First a day and then a night and then a day and then a night, then it was day-night-day-night-day. A week, a month, a year, a decade! A.D. 2055. A.D. 2019. 1999! 1957! Gone! The Machine roared.

They put on their oxygen helmets and tested the intercoms.

Eckels swayed on the padded seat, his face pale, his jaw stiff. He felt the trembling in his arms and he looked down and found his hands tight on the new rifle. There were four other men in the Machine. Travis, the Safari Leader, his assistant, Lesperance, and two other hunters, Billings and Kramer. They sat looking at each other, and the years blazed around them.

"Can these guns get a dinosaur cold?" Eckels felt his mouth saying.

"If you hit them right," said Travis on the helmet radio. "Some dinosaurs have two brains, one in the head, another far down the spinal column. We stay away from those. That's stretching luck. Put your first two shots into the eyes, if you can, blind them, and go back into the brain."

The Machine howled. Time was a film run backward. Suns fled and

ten million moons fled after them. “Good God,” said Eckels. “Every hunter that ever lived would envy us today. This makes Africa seem like Illinois.”

The Machine slowed; its scream fell to a murmur. The Machine stopped.

The sun stopped in the sky.

The fog that had enveloped the Machine blew away and they were in an old time, a very old time indeed, three hunters and two Safari Heads with their blue metal guns across their knees.

“Christ isn’t born yet,” said Travis. “Moses has not gone to the mountain to talk with God. The Pyramids are still in the earth, waiting to be cut out and put up. *Remember* that, Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler – none of them exists.”

The men nodded.

“That” – Mr.Travis pointed – “is the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years before President Keith.”

He indicated a metal path that struck off into green wilderness, over steaming swamp, among giant ferns and palms.

“And that,” he said, “is the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn’t touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It’s an antigravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don’t go off it. I repeat. *Don’t go off*. For any reason! If you fall off, there’s a penalty. And don’t shoot any animal we don’t okay.”

“Why?” asked Eckels.

They sat in the ancient wilderness. Far birds’ cries blew on a wind, and the smell of tar and an old salt sea, moist grasses, and flowers the colour of blood.

“We don’t want to change the Future. We don’t belong here in the Past. The government doesn’t *like* us here. We have to pay big graft to keep our franchise. A Time Machine is damn finicky business. Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a roach, a flower even, thus destroying an important link in a growing species.”

“That’s not clear,” said Eckels.

“All right,” Travis continued, “say we accidentally kill one mouse here. That means all the future families of this one particular mouse are destroyed, right?”

“Right.”

“And all the families of the families of that one mouse! With a stamp of your foot, you annihilate first one, then a dozen, then a thousand, a million, a *billion* possible mice!”

“So they’re dead,” said Eckels. “So what?”

"So what?" Travis snorted quietly. "Well, what about the foxes that'll need those mice to survive? For want of ten mice, a fox dies. For want of ten foxes, a lion starves. For want of a lion, all manner of insects, vultures, infinite billions of life forms are thrown into chaos and destruction. Eventually it all boils down to this: fifty-nine million years later, a cave man, one of a dozen on the *entire* world, goes hunting wild boar or saber-tooth tiger for food. But you, friend, have *stepped* on all the tigers in that region. By stepping on *one* single mouse. So the cave man starves. And the cave man, please note, is not just *any* expendable man, no! He is an *entire future nation*. From his loins would have sprung ten sons. From their loins one hundred sons, and thus onward to a civilization. Destroy this one man, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history of life. It is comparable to slaying some of Adam's grandchildren. The stomp of your foot, on one mouse, could start an earthquake, the effects of which could shake our earth and destinies down through Time, to their very foundations. With the death of that one cave man, a billion others yet unborn are throttled in the womb. Perhaps Rome never rises on its seven hills. Perhaps Europe is forever a dark forest, and only Asia waxes healthy and teeming. Step on a mouse and you crush the Pyramids. Step on a mouse and you leave your print, like a Grand Canyon, across Eternity. Queen Elizabeth might never be born, Washington might not cross the Delaware, there might never be a United States at al. So be careful. Stay on the Path. *Never* step off!"

"I see," said Eckels. "Then it wouldn't pay for us even to touch the *grass*?"

"Correct. Crushing certain plants could add up infinitesimally. A little error here would multiply in sixty million years, all out of proportion. Of course maybe our theory is wrong. Maybe Time *can't* be changed by us. Or maybe it can be changed only in little subtle ways. A dead mouse here makes an insect imbalance there, a population disproportion later, a bad harvest further on, a depression, mass starvation, and, finally, a change in *social* temperament in far-flung countries. Something much more subtle, like that. Perhaps only a soft breath, a whisper, a hair, pollen on the air, such a slight, slight change that unless you looked close you wouldn't see it. Who knows? Who really can say he knows! We don't know. We're guessing. But until we do know for certain whether our messing around in Time *can* make a big roar or a little rustle in history, we're being damned careful. This Machine, this Path, your clothing and bodies, were sterilized, as you know, before the journey. We wear these oxygen helmets so we can't introduce our bacteria into an ancient atmosphere."

"How do we know which animals to shoot?"

"They're marked with red paint," said Travis. "Today, before our journey, we sent Lesperance here back with the Machine. He came to this particular era and followed certain animals."

"Studying them?"

"Right," said Lesperance. "I track them through their entire existence, noting which of them lives longest. Very few. How many times they mate. Not often. Life's short. When I find one that's going to die when a tree falls on him, or one that drowns in a tar pit, I note the exact hour, minute, and second. I shoot a paint bomb. It leaves a red patch on his hide. We can't miss it. Then I correlate our arrival in the Past so that we meet the Monster not more than two minutes before he would have died anyway. This way, we kill only animals with no future, that are never going to mate again. You see how *careful* we are?"

"But if you came back this morning in Time," said Eckels eagerly, "you must've bumped into *us*, our Safari! How did it turn out? Was it successful? Did all of us get through – alive?"

Travis and Lesperance gave each other a look.

"That'd be a paradox," said the latter. "Time doesn't permit that sort of mess – a man meeting himself. When such occasions threaten, Time steps aside. Like an airplane hitting an air pocket. You felt the Machine jump just before we stopped? That was us passing ourselves on the way back to the Future. We saw nothing. There's no way of telling *if* this expedition was a success, *if* we got our monster, or whether all of – meaning *you*, Mr.Eckels – got out alive."

Eckels smiled palely.

"Cut that," said Travis sharply. "Everyone on his feet!"

They were ready to leave the Machine.

The jungle was high and the jungle was broad and the jungle was the entire world forever and forever. Sounds like music and sounds like flying tents filled the sky, and those were pterodactyls soaring with cavernous gray wings, gigantic bats out of a delirium and a night fever. Eckels, balanced on the narrow Path, aimed his rifle playfully.

"Stop that!" said Travis. "Don't even aim for fun, damn it! If your gun should go off –"

Eckels flushed. "Where's our *Tyrannosaurus*?"

Lesperance checked his wrist watch. "Up ahead. We'll bisect his trail in sixty seconds. Look for the red paint, for Christ's sake. Don't shoot till we give the word. Stay on the Path. *Stay on the Path*!"

They moved forward in the wind of morning.

"Strange," murmured Eckels. "Up ahead, sixty million years, Election Day over. Keith made President. Everyone celebrating. And here we are, a million years lost, and they don't exist. The things we worried

about for months, a lifetime, not even born or thought about yet."

"Safety catches off, everyone!" ordered Travis. "You, first shot, Eckels. Second, Billings. Third, Kramer."

"I've hunted tiger, wild boar, buffalo, elephant, but Jesus, this is *it*," said Eckels. "I'm shaking like a kid."

"Ah," said Travis.

Everyone stopped.

Travis raised his hand. "Ahead," he whispered. "In the mist. There he is. There's His Royal Majesty now."

The jungle was wide and full of twitterings, rustlings, murmurs, and sighs.

Suddenly it all ceased, as if someone had shut a door.

Silence.

A sound of thunder.

Out of the mist, one hundred yards away, came *Tyrannosaurus rex*.

"Jesus God," whispered Eckels.

"Sh!"

It came on great oiled, resilient, striding legs. It towered thirty feet above half of the trees, a great evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws close to its oily reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone, sunk in thick ropes of muscle, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail of a terrible warrior. Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body those two delicate arms dangled out front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head itself, a ton of sculptured stone, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped, exposing a fence of teeth like daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs, empty of all expression save hunger. It closed its mouth in a death grin. It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight. It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit arena warily, its beautifully reptile hands feeling the air.

"My God!" Eckels twitched his mouth. "It could reach up and grab the moon."

"Sh!" Travis jerked angrily. "He hasn't seen us yet."

"It can't be killed." Eckels pronounced this verdict quietly, as if there could be no argument. He had weighed the evidence and this was his considered opinion. The rifle in his hands seemed a cap gun. "We were fools to come. This is impossible."

"Shut up!" hissed Travis.

"Nightmare."

"Turn around," commanded Travis. "Walk quietly to the Machine. We'll remit one-half your fee."

"I didn't realize it would be this *big*," said Eckels. "I miscalculated, that's all. And now I want out."

"It sees us!"

"There's the red paint on its chest!"

The Thunder Lizard raised itself. Its armoured flesh glittered like a thousand green coins. The coins, crusted with slime, steamed. In the slime, tiny insects wriggled, so that the entire body seemed to twitch and undulate, even while the monster itself did not move. It exhaled. The stink of raw flesh blew down the wilderness.

"Get me out of here," said Eckels. "It was never like this before. I was always sure I'd come through alive. I had good guides, good safaris, and safety. This time, I figured wrong. I've met my match and admit it. This is too much for me to get hold of."

"Don't run," said Lesperance. "Turn around. Hide in the Machine."

"Yes." Eckels seemed to be numb. He looked at his feet as if trying to make them move. He gave a grunt of helplessness.

"Eckels!"

He took a few steps, blinking, shuffling.

"Not *that* way!"

The Monster, at the first motion, lunged forward with a terrible scream. It covered one hundred yards in four seconds. The rifles jerked up and blazed fire. A windstorm from the beast's mouth engulfed them in the stench of slime and old blood. The Monster roared, teeth glittering with sun.

Eckels, not looking back, walked blindly to the edge of the Path, his gun limp in his arms, stepped off the Path, and walked, not knowing it, in the jungle. His feet sank into green moss. His legs moved him, and he felt alone and remote from the events behind.

The rifles cracked again. Their sound was lost in shriek and lizard thunder. The great lever of the reptile's tail swung up, lashed sideways. Trees exploded in clouds of leaf and branch. The Monster twitched its jeweler's hands down to fondle at the men, to twist them in half, to crush them like berries, to cram them into its teeth and its screaming throat. Its boulder-stone eyes leveled with the men. They saw themselves mirrored. They fired at the metallic eyelids and the blazing black iris.

Like a stone idol, like a mountain avalanche, *Tyrannosaurus* fell. Thundering, it clutched trees, pulled them with it. It wrenched and tore the metal Path. The men flung themselves back and away. The body hit, ten

tons of cold flesh and stone. The guns fired. The Monster lashed its armoured tail, twitched its snake jaws, and lay still. A fount of blood spurted from its throat. Somewhere inside, a sac of fluids burst. Sickening gushes drenched the hunters. They stood, red and glistening.

The thunder faded.

The jungle was silent. After the avalanche, a green peace. After the nightmare, morning.

Billings and Kramer sat on the pathway and threw up. Travis and Lesperance stood with smoking rifles, cursing steadily.

In the Time Machine, on his face, Eckels lay shivering. He had found his way back to the Path, climbed into the Machine.

Travis came walking, glanced at Eckels, took cotton gauze from a metal box, and returned to the others, who were sitting on the Path.

"Clean up."

They wiped the blood from their helmets. They began to curse too. The Monster lay, a hill of solid flesh. Within, you could hear the sighs and murmurs as the furthest chambers of it died, the organs malfunctioning, liquids running a final instant from pocket to sac to spleen, everything shutting off, closing up forever. It was like standing by a wrecked locomotive or a steam shovel at quitting time, all valves being released or levered tight. Bones cracked; the tonnage of its own flesh, off balance, dead weight, snapped the delicate forearms, caught underneath. The meat settled, quivering.

Another cracking sound. Overhead, a gigantic tree branch broke from its heavy mooring, fell. It crashed upon the dead beast with finality.

"There." Lesperance checked his watch. "Right on time. That's the giant tree that was scheduled to fall and kill this animal originally." He glanced at the two hunters. "You want the trophy picture?"

"What?"

"We can't take a trophy back to the Future. The body has to stay right here where it would have died originally, so the insects, birds, and bacteria can get at it, as they were intended to. Everything in balance. The body stays. But we can take a picture of you standing near it."

The two men tried to think, but gave up, shaking their heads.

They let themselves be led along the metal Path. They sank wearily into the Machine cushions. They gazed back at the ruined Monster, the stagnating mound, where already strange reptilian birds and golden insects were busy at the steaming armour.

A sound on the floor of the Time Machine stiffened them. Eckels sat there, shivering.

"I'm sorry," he said at last.

"Get up!" cried Travis.

Eckels got up.

"Go out on that Path alone," said Travis. He had his rifle pointed. "You're not coming back in the Machine. We're leaving you here!"

Lesperance seized Travis' arm. "Wait –"

"Stay out of this!" Travis shook his hand away. "This son of a bitch nearly killed us. But it isn't *that* so much. Hell, no. It's his *shoes*! Look at them! He ran off the Path. My God, that *ruins* us! Christ knows how much we'll forfeit. Tens of thousands of dollars of insurance! We guarantee no one leaves the Path. He left it. Oh, the damn fool! I'll have to report to the government. They might revoke our license to travel. God knows *what* he's done to Time, to History!"

"Take it easy, all he did was kick up some dirt."

"How do we *know*?" cried Travis. "We don't know anything! It's all a damn mystery! Get out there, Eckels!"

Eckels fumbled his shirt. "I'll pay anything. A hundred thousand dollars!"

Travis glared at Eckels' checkbook and spat. "Go out there. The Monster's next to the Path. Stick your arms up to your elbows in his mouth. Then you can come back with us."

"That's unreasonable!"

"The Monster's dead, you yellow bastard. The bullets! The bullets can't be left behind. They don't belong in the Past; they might change something. Here's my knife. Dig them out!"

The jungle was alive again, full of the old tremorings and bird cries. Eckels turned slowly to regard the primeval garbage dump, that hill of nightmares and terror. After a long time, like a sleepwalker, he shuffled out along the Path.

He returned, shuddering, five minutes later, his arms soaked and red to the elbows. He held out his hands. Each held a number of steel bullets. Then he fell. He lay where he fell, not moving.

"You didn't have to make him do that," said Lesperance.

"Didn't I? It's too early to tell." Travis nudged the still body. "He'll live. Next time he won't go hunting game like this. Okay." He jerked his thumb wearily at Lesperance. "Switch on. Let's go home."

1492. 1776. 1812.

They cleaned their hands and faces. They changed their caking shirts and pants. Eckels was up and around again, not speaking. Travis glared at him for a full ten minutes.

"Don't look at me," cried Eckels. "I haven't done anything."

"Who can tell?"

"Just ran off the Path, that's all, a little mud on my shoes – what do you want me to do – get down and pray?"

"We might need it. I'm warning you, Eckels, I might kill you yet. I've got my gun ready."

"I'm innocent. I've done nothing!"

1999. 2000. 2055.

The Machine stopped.

"Get out," said Travis.

The room was there as they had left it. But not the same as they had left it. The same man sat behind the same desk. But the same man did not quite sit behind the same desk.

Travis looked around swiftly. "Everything okay here?" he snapped.

"Fine. Welcome home!"

Travis did not relax. He seemed to be looking at the very atoms of the air itself, at the way the sun poured through the one high window.

"Okay, Eckels, get out. Don't ever come back."

Eckels could not move.

"You heard me," said Travis. "What're you *staring* at?"

Eckels stood smelling of the air, and there was a thing to the air, a chemical taint so subtle, so slight, that only a faint cry of his subliminal senses warned him it was there. The colours, white, gray, blue, orange, in the wall, in the furniture, in the sky beyond the window, were... were... And there was a *feel*. His flesh twitched. His hands twitched. He stood drinking the oddness with the pores of his body. Somewhere, someone must have been screaming one of those whistles that only a dog can hear. His body screamed silence in return. Beyond this room, beyond this wall, beyond this man who was not quite the same man seated at this desk that was not quite the same desk... lay an entire world of streets and people. What sort of world it was now, there was no telling. He could feel them moving there, beyond the walls, almost, like so many chess pieces blown in a dry wind....

But the immediate thing was the sign painted on the office wall, the same sign he had read earlier today on first entering.

Somehow, the sign had changed:

TYME SEFARI INC.
SEFARIS TU ANY YEER EN THE PAST.
YU NAIM THE ANIMALL.
WEE TAEK YOU THAIR.
YU SHOOT ITT.

Eckels felt himself fall into a chair. He fumbled crazily at the thick slime on his boots. He held up a clod of dirt, trembling. "No, it *can't* be. Not a *little* thing like that. No!"

Embedded in the rnud, glistening green and gold and black, was a butterfly, very beautiful, and very dead.

"Not a little thing like *that*! Not a butterfly!" cried Eckels.

It fell to the floor, an exquisite thing, a small thing that could upset balances and knock down a line of small dominoes and then big dominoes and then gigantic dominoes, all down the years across Time. Eckels' mind whirled. It *couldn't* change things. Killing one butterfly couldn't be *that* important! Could it?

His face was cold. His mouth trembled, asking: "Who – who won the presidential election yesterday?"

The man behind the desk laughed. "You joking? You know damn well. Deutscher, of course! Who else? Not that damn weakling Keith. We got an iron man now, a man with guts, by God!" The official stopped. "What's wrong?"

Eckels moaned. He dropped to his knees. He scrabbled at the golden butterfly with shaking fingers. "Can't we," he pleaded to the world, to himself, to the officials, to the Machine, "can't we take it back, can't we *make* it alive again? Can't we start over? Can't we –"

He did not move. Eyes shut, he waited, shivering. He heard Travis breathe loud in the room; he heard Travis shift his rifle, click the safety catch, and raise the weapon.

There was a sound of thunder.

1952

REFERENT

Roby Morrison fidgeted. Walking in the tropical heat he heard the wet thunder of waves on the shore. There was a green silence on Orthopaedic Island.

It was the year 1997, but Roby did not care.

All around him was the garden where he prowled, all ten years of him. This was Meditation Hour. Beyond the garden wall, to the north, were the High I.Q. Cubicles where he and the other boys slept in special beds. With morning they popped up like bottle-corks, dashed into showers, gulped food, and were sucked down vacuum-tubes half across the island to Semantics School. Then to Physiology. After Physiology he was blown back underground and released through a seal in the great garden wall to spend this silly hour of meditative frustration, as prescribed by the island Psychologists.

Roby had his opinion of it. "Damned silly."

Today, he was in furious rebellion. He glared at the sea, wishing he had the sea's freedom to come and go. His eyes were dark, his cheeks flushed, his small hands twitched nervously.

Somewhere in the garden a chime vibrated softly. Fifteen more minutes of meditation. Huh! And then to the Robot Commissionary to stuff his dead hunger as taxidermists stuff birds.

And, after the scientifically pure lunch, through the tube again to Sociology. Of course, late in the warm green afternoon, games would be played in the Main Garden. Games some tremble-brained Psychologist had evolved from a nightmare-haunted sleep. This was the future! You must live, my lad, as the people of the past, of the year 1920, 1930, and 1942 predicted you would live! Everything fresh, brisk, sanitary, too, too fresh! No nasty old parents about to give one complexes. Everything controlled, dear boy!

Roby should have been in a perfect mood for something unique.

He wasn't.

When the star fell from the sky a moment later he was only more irritated.

The star was a spheroid. It crashed and rolled to a stop on the hot green grass. A small door popped open in it.

Faintly, this incident recalled a dream to the child. A dream which with superior stubbornness he had refused to record in his Freud Book this morning. The dream-thought was in his mind at the exact instant that the star-door popped wide and some 'thing' emerged.

Some 'thing'.

Young eyes, seeing an object for the first time, have to make a familiar thing of it. Roby didn't know what this 'thing' was, stepping from the sphere. So, scowling, Roby thought of what it *most resembled.*

Instantly the 'something' became *a certain* thing.

Warm air ran cold. Light flickered, form changed, melted, shifted as the thing evolved into certainty.

Startled, a tall, thin, pale man stood beside the metal star.

The man had pink, terrified eyes. He trembled.

"Oh, I know *you*." Roby was disappointed. "You're only the Sandman."

"Sand – man?"

The stranger quivered like heat rising from boiling metal. His shaking hands went wildly up to touch his long coppery hair as if he'd never seen or felt of it before. The Sandman gazed in horror at his own hands, legs, feet, body, as if they were all new. 'Sand-man?' The word was difficult. Talking was new to him, also. He seemed about to flee, but something stopped him.

"Yeah," said Roby. "I dream about you every night. Oh, I know what you think. Semantically, our teachers say that ghosts, goblins and fairies, and sandmen are labels, only names for which there aren't any actual referents, no actual objects or things. But to heck with that. We kids know more than teachers about it. You being here proves the teachers wrong. There are Sandmen after all, aren't there?"

"Don't give me a label!" cried the Sandman, suddenly. He seemed to understand now. For some reason he was unutterably frightened. He kept pinching, tugging, and feeling his own long new body as if it was a thing of terror. "Don't *name* me, don't label me!"

"Huh?"

"I'm a referent!" screamed the Sandman. "I'm not a label! I'm just a referent! Let me go!"

Roby's little green cat-eyes slitted. "Say –" He put his hands on his hips. "Did Mr.Grill send you? I bet he did! I bet this is another of those psychological tests!"

Roby flushed with dark anger. Always and for ever they were at him. They sorted his games, food, education, took away his friends and his mother, his father, and now – played tricks on him!

"I'm not from Mr.Grill," pleaded the Sandman. "Listen, before anyone else comes and sees me this way and makes it worse!"

Roby kicked violently. The Sandman danced back, gasping:

"Listen. I'm not human! You are!" he shouted. "Thought has moulded the flesh of all you here on this world! You're all dictated to by labels. But I – I am a *pure* referent!"

"Liar!" More kicking from Roby.

The Sandman gibbered with frustration. "The truth, child! Centuries of thought have moulded your atoms to your present form; if you could undermine and destroy that belief, the beliefs of your friends, teachers, and parents, you could change form, be a pure referent, too! Like Freedom, Liberty, Humanity, or Time, Space, and Justice!"

"Grill sent you; he's always pestering me!"

"No, no! Atoms are malleable. You've accepted certain labels on Earth, called Man, Woman, Child, Head, Hands, Fingers, Feet. You've changed from anything into something."

"Leave me alone," protested Roby. "I've a test today, I have to think." He sat on a rock, hands over his ears.

The Sandman glanced fearfully about, as if expecting disaster. Standing over Roby, he was beginning to tremble and cry. "Earth could have been a thousand other ways. Thought, using labels, went round tidying up a disordered cosmos. Now no one bothers trying to think things into other different shapes!"

"Go away," sniffed Roby.

"I landed near you, not suspecting the danger. I was curious. Inside my spheriod spaceship, thoughts cannot change my shape. I've travelled from world to world, over the centuries, and never been trapped like *this*!" Tears sprang down his face. "And now, by the gods, you've labelled me, caught me, imprisoned me with thought! This Sandman idea. Horrible! I can't fight it, I can't change back! And if I can't change back I'll never fit into my ship again, I'm much too large. I'll be stranded on Earth for ever. Release me!"

The Sandman screamed, wept, shouted. Roby's mind wandered. He debated quietly with himself. What did he want most of all? Escape from this island. Silly. They always caught you. What then? Games, maybe. Like to play regular games, minus psycho-supervision. Yeah, that'd be nice. Kick-the-can, or spin-the-bottle, or even just a rubber ball to bounce on the garden wall and catch, all to himself. Yeah. A red ball.

The Sandman cried, "Don't –"

Silence.

A red rubber ball bounced on the ground.

Up and down bounced the red rubber ball.

"Hey!" It took Roby a moment to realize the ball was there. "Where'd this come from?" He hurled it against the wall, caught it. "Gee!"

He didn't notice the absence of a certain stranger who had been shouting at him a few moments before.

The Sandman was gone.

Way off in the hot distance of the garden a bonging noise sounded. A cylinder was rushing up the tube to the wall's circular door. The door peeled open with a faint hiss. Footsteps rustled measuredly along the path. Mr.Grill stepped through a lush frame of tiger-lilies.

"Morning, Roby. Oh!" Mr.Grill stopped, his chubby pink face looked as if it had been kicked. "What have you there, boy?" he cried.

Roby bounced the object against the wall.

"This? A rubber ball."

"Eh?" Grill's small blue eyes blinked, narrowing. Then he relaxed. "Why, of course. For a moment I thought I saw – uh – er –"

Roby bounced the ball some more.

Grill cleared his throat. "Lunch time. Meditation Hour is over. And I'm not certain that Minister Locke would enjoy your playing unorthodox games."

Roby swore under his breath.

"Oh, well, then, go on. Play. I won't tattle." Mr.Grill was in a generous mood.

"Don't feel like playing." Roby sulked, shoving his sandal-tip into the dirt. Teachers spoiled everything. You couldn't vomit without permission.

Grill tried to interest the boy. "If you come to lunch now, I'll let you televise your mother in Chicago afterwards."

"Time limit, two minutes, ten seconds, no more, no less," was Roby's acid reply.

"I gather you don't approve of things, boy."

"I'll run away some day, wait and see!"

"Tut, lad. We'll always bring you back, you know."

"I didn't ask to be brought here in the first place." Roby bit his lip, staring at his new red rubber ball. He thought he had seen it kind of, sort of, well – *move*. Funny. He held the ball in his hand. The ball shivered.

Grill patted his shoulder. "Your mother is neurotic. Bad environment. You're better off here on the island. You have a high I.Q. and it is an honour for you to be here with the other little boy geniuses. You're unstable and unhappy and we're trying to change that. Eventually you'll be the exact antithesis of your mother."

"I love Mother!"

"You *like* her," corrected Grill, quietly.

"I like Mother," replied Roby, disquieted. The red ball twitched in his hands, without his touching it. He looked at it with wonder.

"You'll only make it harder for yourself if you love her," said Grill.

"You're a goddam silly," said Roby.

Grill stiffened. “Don’t swear. Besides, you don’t really mean god and you don’t mean damn. There’s very little of either in the world. Semantics Book Seven, page 418. Labels and Referents.”

“Now I remember!” shouted Roby, looking around. “There was a Sandman here just now and he said –”

“Come along,” said Mr.Grill. “Lunch time.”

Commissary food emerged from robot-servers on extension springs. Roby accepted the ovoid plate and milk-globe silently. Where he had hidden it, the red rubber ball pulsed and beat like a heart under his belt. A gong rang. He gulped food swiftly. The tumble for the tube began. They were blown like feathers across the island to Sociology and then, later, in the afternoon, back again for games. Hours passed.

Roby slipped away to the garden to be alone. Hatred for this insane, never-stopping routine, for his teachers and his fellow-students flashed through him in a scouring torrent. He sat alone and thought of his mother, a great distance away. In great detail he recalled how she looked and what she smelled like and how her voice was and how she touched and held and kissed him. He put his head down into his hands and began to fill the palms of his hands with small tears.

He dropped the red rubber ball.

He didn’t care. He only thought of his mother.

The jungle shivered. Something shifted, quickly.

A woman ran through the deep grass!

She ran away from Roby, slipped, cried out, and fell.

Something glittered in the sunlight. The woman was running towards that silvery glittering thing. The spheroid. The silver star ship! And where had *she* come from? And why was she running towards the sphere? And why had she fallen as he looked up? She didn’t seem ta be able to get up. Roby leaped from his rock, gave chase. He caught up with her and stood over the woman.

“Mother!” he screamed.

Her face shivered and changed, like melting snow, then took on a hard cast, became definite and handsome.

“I’m not your mother,” she said.

He didn’t hear. He only heard his own breath moving over his shaking lips. He was so weak with shock he could hardly stand. He put out his hands towards her.

“Can’t you understand?” Her face was cold. “I’m not your mother. Don’t label me! Why must I have a name! Let me get back to my ship! I’ll kill you if you don’t!”

Roby swayed. “Mother, don’t you know me? I’m Roby, your son!” He wanted only to cry against her, tell her of the long months of imprisonment. “Please, remember me!”

Sobbing, he moved forward and fell against her.

Her fingers tightened on his throat.

She strangled him.

He tried to scream. The scream was caught, pressed back into his bursting lungs. He flailed his legs.

Deep in her cold, hard, angry face, Roby found the answer even as her fingers tightened and things grew dark.

Deep in her face he saw a vestige of the Sandman.

The Sandman. The star falling on the summer sky. The silver sphere, the ship towards which this ‘woman’ had been running. The disappearance of the Sandman, the appearance of the red ball, the vanishing of the red ball and now the appearance of his mother. It all fitted.

Matrixes. Moulds. Thought habits. Patterns. Matter. The history of man, his body, all things in the universe.

She was killing him.

She would make him stop thinking, then she would be free.

Thoughts. Darkness. He could barely move, now. Weak, weak. He had thought ‘it’ was his mother. It wasn’t. Nevertheless ‘it’ was killing him. What if Roby thought something else? Try, anyway. Try it. He kicked. In the wild darkness he thought hard, hard.

With a wail, his ‘mother’ withered before him.

He concentrated.

Her fingers dwindled from his throat. Her bright face crumbled. Her body shrank to another size.

He was free. He rose up, gasping.

Through the jungle he saw the silver sphere lying in the sun. He staggered towards it, then cried out with the sharp thrill of the plan that formed in his mind.

He laughed triumphantly. He stared once more at ‘it’. What was left of the woman form changed before his eyes, like melting wax. He reshaped it into something new.

The garden wall trembled. A vacuum cylinder was hissing up through the tube. Mr.Grill was coming. Roby would have to hurry or his plan would be ruined.

Roby ran to the spheroid, peered in. Simple controls. Just enough room for his small body – if the plan worked. It had to work. It would

work!

The garden trembled with the approaching thunder of the cylinder. Roby laughed. To hell with Mr Grill. To hell with this island.

He thrust himself into the ship. There was much he could learn, it would come in time. He was just on the skirt of knowledge now, but that little knowledge had saved his life, and now it would do even more.

A voice cried out behind him. A familiar voice. So familiar that it made Roby shudder. Roby heard small-boy feet crash the underbrush. Small feet on a small body. A small voice pleading.

Roby grasped the ship controls. Escape. Complete and unsuspected. Simple. Wonderful Grill would never know.

The sphere door slammed. Motion.

The star, Roby inside, rose on the summer sky.

Mr.Grill stepped out of the seal in the garden wall. He looked around for Roby. Sunlight struck him warmly in the face as he hurried down the path.

There! There was Roby. In the clearing ahead of him. Little Roby Morrison staring at the sky, making fists, crying out to nobody. At least Grill could see nobody about.

"Hello, Roby," called Grill.

The boy jerked at the sound. He wavered – in colour, density, and quality. Grill blinked, decided it was only the sun.

"I'm not Roby!" cried the child. "Roby escaped! He left me to take his place, to fool you so you wouldn't hunt for him! He fooled me, too!" screamed the child, nastily, sobbing. "No, no, don't *look* at me! Don't think that I'm Roby, you'll make it worse! You came expecting to find him, and you found me and made me into Roby! You're moulding me and I'll *never*, never change, now! Oh, God!"

"Come now, Roby –"

"Roby'll never come back. I'll *always* be him. I was a rubber ball, a woman, a Sandman. But, believe me, I'm only malleable atoms, that's all. Let me go!"

Grill backed up slowly. His smile was sick.

"I'm a referent. I'm *not* a label!" cried the child.

"Yes, yes, I understand. Now, now, Roby, Roby, you just wait right there, right there now, while I, while I, while I call the Psycho-Ward."

Moments later, a corps of assistants ran through the garden.

"Damn you all!" screamed the child, kicking. "God damn you!"

"Tut," declared Grill quietly, as they forced the child into the vac-cylinder. "You're using a label for which there is no referent!"

The cylinder sucked them away.

A star blinked on the summer sky and vanished.

1959

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 gentlemen 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 happened."

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! Incredible!"

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 three-dimensional 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 whisper.

“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 is – well, 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 mentally?”

“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, 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.

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. Otherwise, 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 triangular 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 occasion. 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 feed-mech; 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 exportimport 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 a child.

Peter Horn had the nursery soundproofed.

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

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

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

"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, Father!"

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 soliloquy 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."

"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 geometrical 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 well.”

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 life.

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 glittered 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 stooped and picked up something from the floor.

It was Peter Horn's son. A living, pink-faced, blue-eyed 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.

1969

THE WOMEN

It was as if a light came on in a green room.

The ocean burned. A white phosphorescence stirred like a breath of steam through the autumn morning sea, rising. Bubbles rose from the throat of some hidden sea ravine.

Like lightning in the reversed green sky of the sea it was aware. It was old and beautiful. Out of the deeps it came, indolently. A shell, a wisp, a bubble, a weed, a glitter, a whisper, a gill. Suspended in its depths were brainlike trees of frosted coral, eyelike pips of yellow kelp, hairlike fluids of weed. Growing with the tides, growing with the ages, collecting and hoarding and saving unto itself identities and ancient dusts, octopusinks and all the trivia of the sea.

Until now – it was aware.

It was a shining green intelligence, breathing in the autumn sea. Eyeless but seeing, earless but hearing, bodyless but feeling. It was of the sea. And being of the sea it was – feminine.

It in no way resembled man or woman. But it had a woman's ways, the silken, sly, and hidden ways. It moved with a woman's grace. It was all the evil things of vain women.

Dark waters flowed through and by and mingled with strange memory on its way to the gulf streams. In the water were carnival caps, horns, serpentine, confetti. They passed through this blossoming mass of long green hair like wind through an ancient tree. Orange peels, napkins, papers, eggshells, and burnt kindling from night fires on the beaches; all the flotsam of the gaunt high people who stalked on the lone sands of the continental islands, people from brick cities, people who shrieked in metal demons down concrete highways, gone.

It rose softly, shimmering, foaming, into cool morning airs.

The green hair rose softly, shimmering, foaming, into cool morning airs. It lay in the swell after the long time of forming through darkness.

It perceived the shore.

The man was there.

He was a sun-darkened man with strong legs and a cow body.

Each day he should have come down to the water, to bathe, to swim. But he had never moved. There was a woman on the sand with him, a woman in a black bathing suit who lay next to him talking quietly, laughing. Sometimes they held hands, sometimes they listened to a little sounding machine that they dialed and out of which music came.

The phosphorescence hung quietly in the waves. It was the end of the season. September. Things were shutting down.

Any day now he might go away and never return.

Today he must come in the water.

They lay on the sand with the heat in them. The radio played softly and the woman in the black bathing suit stirred fitfully, eyes closed.

The man did not lift his head from where he cushioned it on his muscled left arm. He drank the sun with his face, his open mouth, his nostrils. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"A bad dream," said the woman in the black suit.

"Dreams in the daytime?"

"Don't you ever dream in the afternoon?"

"I never dream. I've never had a dream in my life."

She lay there, fingers twitching. "God, I had a horrible dream."

"What about?"

"I don't know," she said, as if she really didn't. It was so bad she had forgotten. Now, eyes shut, she tried to remember.

"It was about me," he said, lazily, stretching.

"No," she said.

"Yes," he said, smiling to himself. "I was o& with another woman, that's what."

"No."

"I insist," he said. "There I was, off with another woman, and you discovered us, and somehow, in all the mix-up, I got shot or something."

She winced involuntarily. "Don't talk that way."

"Let's see now," he said. "What sort of woman was I with? Gentlemen prefer blondes, don't they?"

"Please don't joke," she said. "I don't feel well."

He opened his eyes. "Did it affect you that much?"

She nodded. "Whenever I dream in the daytime this way, it depresses me something terrible."

"I'm sorry." He took her hand. "Anything I can get you?"

"No."

"Ice-cream cone? Eskimo pie? A Coke?"

"You're a dear, but no. I'll be all right. It's just that, the last four days haven't been right. This isn't like it used to be early in the summer. Something's happened."

"Not between us," he said.

"Oh, no, of course not," she said quickly. "But don't you feel that sometimes *places* change? Even a thing like a pier changes, and the merry-go-rounds, and all that. Even the hot dogs taste different this week."

"How do you mean?"

"They taste old. It's hard to explain, but I've lost my appetite, and I wish this vacation were over. Really, what I want to do most of all is go home."

"Tomorrow's our last day. You know how much this extra week means to me."

"I'll try," she said. "If only this place didn't feel so funny and changed. I don't know. But all of a sudden I just had a feeling I wanted to get up and run."

"Because of your dream? Me and my blonde and me dead all of a sudden."

"Don't," she said. "Don't talk about dying that way."

She lay there very close to him. "If I only knew what it was."

"There." He stroked her. "I'll protect you."

"It's not me, it's you," her breath whispered in his ear. "I had the feeling that you were tired of me and went away."

"I wouldn't do that; I love you."

"I'm silly." She forced a laugh. "God, what a silly thing I am."

They lay quietly, the sun and sky over them like a lid.

"You know," he said, thoughtfully, "I get a little of that feeling you're talking about. This place has changed. There is something different."

"I'm glad you feel it, too."

He shook his head, drowsily, smiling softly, shutting his eyes, drinking the sun. "Both crazy. Both crazy." Murmuring. "Both."

The sea came in on the shore three times, softly.

The afternoon came on. The sun struck the skies a grazing blow. The yachts bobbed hot and shining white in the harbor swells. The smells of fried meat and burnt onion filled the wind. The sand whispered and stirred like an image in a vast, melting mirror.

The radio at their elbow murmured discreetly. They lay like dark arrows on the white sand. They did not move. Only their eyelids flickered with awareness, only their ears were alert. Now and again their tongues might slide along their baking lips. Sly prickles of moisture appeared on their brows to be burned away by the sun.

He lifted his head, blindly, listening to the heat.

The radio sighed.

He put his head down for a minute.

She felt him lift himself again. She opened one eye and he rested on one elbow looking around, at the pier, at the sky, at the water, at the sand.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said, lying down again.

"Something," she said.

"I thought I heard something."

"The radio."

"No, not the radio. Something else."

"Somebody else's radio."

He didn't answer. She felt his arm tense and relax, tense and relax. "Dammit," he said. "There it is, again."

They both lay listening.

"I don't hear anything -"

"Shh!" he cried. "For God's sake -"

The waves broke on the shore, silent mirrors, heaps of melting, whispering glass.

"Somebody singing."

"What?"

"I'd swear it was someone singing."

"Nonsense."

"No, listen."

They did that for a while.

"I don't hear a thing," she said, turning very cold.

He was on his feet. There was nothing in the sky, nothing on the pier, nothing on the sand, nothing in the hot-dog stands. There was a staring silence, the wind blowing over his ears, the wind preening along the light, blowing hairs of his arms and legs.

He took a step toward the sea.

"Don't!" she said.

He looked down at her, oddly, as if she were not there. He was still listening.

She turned the portable radio up full, loud. It exploded words and rhythm and melody:

"– I found a million-dollar baby -"

He made a wry face, raising his open palm violently. "Turn it off."

"No, I like it!" She turned it louder. She snapped her fingers, rocking her body vaguely, trying to smile.

It was two o'clock.

The sun steamed the waters. The ancient pier expanded with a loud groan in the heat. The birds were held in the hot sky, unable to move. The sun struck through the green liquors that poured about the pier; struck, caught and burnished an idle whiteness that drifted in the offshore ripples.

The white foam, the frosted coral brain, the kelp pip, the tide dust lay in the water, spreading.

The dark man still lay on the sand, the woman in the black suit beside him.

Music drifted up like mist from the water. It was a whispering music of deep tides and passed years, of salt and travel, of accepted and familiar strangenesses. The music sounded not unlike water on the shore, rain falling, the turn of soft limbs in the depths. It was a singing of a time-lost voice in a caverned seashell. The hissing and sighing of tides in deserted holds of treasure ships. The sound the wind makes in an empty skull thrown out on the baked sand.

But the radio on the blanket on the beach played louder.

The phosphorescence, light as a woman, sank down, tired, from sight. Only a few more hours. They might leave at any time. If only he would come in, for an instant, just an instant. The mists stirred silently, aware of his face and his body in the water, deep under. Aware of him caught, held, as they sank ten fathoms down, on a sluice that bore them twisting and turning in frantic gesticulations, to the depths of a hidden gulf in the sea.

The heat of his body, the water taking fire from his warmth, and the frosted coral brain, the jeweled dusts, the salted mists feeding on his hot breath from his open lips.

The waves moved the soft and changing thoughts into the shallows which were tepid as bath waters from the two o'clock sun.

He mustn't go away. If he goes now, he'll not return.

Now. The cold coral brain drifted, drifted. Now. Calling across the hot spaces of windless air in the early afternoon. *Come down to the water. Now*, said the music. *Now.*

The woman in the black bathing suit twisted the radio dial.

"Attention." cried the radio. "Now, today, you can buy a new carat -"

"Jesus!" The man reached over and tuned the scream down. "Must you have it so loud!"

"I like it loud," said the woman in the black bathing suit, looking over her shoulder at the sea.

It was three o'clock. The sky was all sun.

Sweating, he stood up. "I'm going in," he said.

"Get me a hot dog first?" she said.

"Can't you wait until I come out?"

"Please." She pouted. "*Now.*"

"Everything on it?"

"Yes, and bring *three* of them."

"Three? God, what an appetite!" He ran off to the small car.

She waited until he was gone. Then she turned the radio off. She lay listening a long time. She heard nothing. She looked at the water until the glints and shatters of sun stabbed through her eyes like needles.

The sea had quieted. There was only a faint, far and fine net of ripples giving off sunlight in infinite repetition. She squinted again and again at the water, scowling.

He bounded back. "Damn, but the sand's hot; burns my feet oft!" He flung himself on the blanket. "Eat 'em up!"

She took the three hot dogs and fed quietly on one of them. When she finished it, she handed him the remaining two. "Here, you finish them. My eyes are bigger than my stomach."

He swallowed the hot dogs in silence. "Next time," he said, finishing, "don't order more than you can use. Helluva waste."

"Here," she said, unscrewing a thermos, "you must be thirsty. Finish our lemonade."

"Thanks." He drank. Then he slapped his hands together and said, "Well, I'll go jump in the water now." He looked anxiously at the bright sea.

"Just one more thing," she said, just remembering it. "Will you buy me a bottle of suntan oil? I'm all out."

"Haven't you some in your purse?"

"I used it all."

"I wish you'd told me when I was up there buying the hot dogs," he said. "But, okay." He ran back, loping steadily.

When he was gone, she took the suntan bottle from her purse, half full, unscrewed the cap, and poured the liquid into the sand, covering it over surreptitiously, looking out at the sea, and smiling. She rose then and went down to the edge of the sea and looked out, searching the innumerable small and insignificant waves.

You can't have him, she thought. Whoever or whatever you are, he's mine, and you can't have him. I don't know what's going on; I don't know anything, really. All I know is we're going on a train tonight at seven. And we won't be here tomorrow. So you can just stay here and wait, ocean, sea, or whatever it is that's wrong here today.

Do your damnedest; you're no match for me, she thought. She picked up a stone and threw it at the sea.

"There!" she cried. "You."

He was standing beside her.

"Oh?" She jumped back.

"Hey, what gives? You standing here, muttering?"

"Was I?" She was surprised at herself. "Where's the suntan oil? Will you put it on my back?"

He poured a yellow twine of oil and massaged it onto her golden back. She looked out at the water from time to time, eyes sly, nodding at the water as if to say, "Look! You see? Ah-ha!" She purred like a kitten.

"There." He gave her the bottle.

He was half into the water before she yelled.

"Where are you going! Come here!"

He turned as if she were someone he didn't know. "For God's sake, what's wrong?"

"Why, you just finished your hot dogs and lemonade – you can't go in the water now and get cramps!"

He scored. "Old wives' tales."

"Just the same, you come back up on the sand and wait an hour before you go in, do you hear? I won't have you getting a cramp and drowning."

"Ah," he said, disgusted.

"Come along." She turned, and he followed, looking back at the sea.

Three o'clock. Four.

The change came at four ten. Lying on the sand, the woman in the black suit saw it coming and relaxed. The clouds had been forming since three. Now, with a sudden rush, the fog came in from off the bay. Where it had been warm, now it was cold. A wind blew up out of nothing. Darker clouds moved in.

"It's going to rain," she said.

"You sound absolutely pleased," he observed, sitting with arms folded. "Maybe our last day, and you sound pleased because it's clouding up."

"The weatherman," she confided, "said there'd be thunder showers all tonight and tomorrow. It might be a good idea to leave tonight."

"We'll stay, just in case it clears. I want to get one more day of swimming in, anyway," he said. "I haven't been in the water yet today."

"We've had so much fun talking and eating, time passes."

"Yeah," he said, looking at his hands.

The fog flailed across the sand in soft strips.

"There," she said. "That was a raindrop on my nose!" She laughed ridiculously at it. Her eyes were bright and young again. She was almost triumphant. "Good old rain."

"Why are you so pleased? You're an odd duck."

"Come on, rain." she said. "Well, help me with these blankets. We'd better run!"

He picked up the blankets slowly, preoccupied. "Not even one last swim, dammit. I've a mind to take just one dive." He smiled at her. "Only a minute!"

"No." Her face paled. "You'll catch cold, and I'll have to nurse you!"

"Okay, okay." He turned away from the sea. Gentle rain began to fall.

Marching ahead of him, she headed for the hotel. She was singing softly to herself.

"Hold on!" he said.

She halted. She did not turn. She only listened to his voice far away.

"There's someone out in the water!" he cried. "Drowning!"

She couldn't move. She heard his feet running.

"Wait here!" he shouted. "I'll be right back! There's someone there! A woman, I think!"

"Let the lifeguards get her!"

"Aren't any! Off duty; late!" He ran down to the shore, the sea, the waves.

"Come back!" she screamed. "There's no one out there! Don't, oh, don't!"

"Don't worry, I'll be right back." he called. "She's drowning out there, see?"

The fog came in, the rain pattered down, a white flashing light raised in the waves. He ran, and the woman in the black suit ran after him, scattering beach implements behind her, crying, tears rushing from her eyes. "Don't." She put out her hands.

He leaped into an onrushing dark wave.

The woman in the black bathing suit waited in the rain.

At six o'clock the sun set somewhere behind black clouds. The rain rattled softly on the water, a distant drum snare.

Under the sea, a move of illuminant white.

The soft shape, the foam, the weed, the long strands of strange green hair lay in the shallows. Among the stirring glitter, deep under, was the man.

Fragile. The foam bubbled and broke. The frosted coral brain rang against a pebble with thought, as quickly lost as found. Men. Fragile. Like dolls, they break. Nothing, nothing to them. A minute under water and they're sick and pay no attention and they vomit out and kick and then, suddenly, just lie there, doing nothing. Doing nothing at all. Strange. Disappointing, after all the days of waiting.

What to do with him now? His head lolls, his mouth opens, his eyelids loosen, his eyes stare, his skin pales. Silly man, wake up! Wake up!

The water surged about him.

The man hung limply, loosely, mouth agape.

The phosphorescence, the green hair weed withdrew.

He was released. A wave carried him back to the silent shore. Back to his wife, who was waiting for him there in the cold rain.

The rain poured over the black waters.

Distantly, under the leaden skies, from the twilight shore, a woman screamed.

Ah – the ancient dusts stirred sluggishly in the water – isn't that *like* a woman? Now, *she* doesn't want him, *either*!

At seven o'clock the rain fell thick. It was night and very cold and the hotels all along the sea had to turn on the heat.

1969

THE KILIMANJARO DEVICE

I arrived in the truck very early in the morning. I had been driving all night, for I hadn't been able to sleep at the motel so I thought I might as well drive and I arrived among the mountains and hills near Ketchum and Sun Valley just as the sun came up and I was glad I had kept busy with driving.

I drove into the town itself without looking up at that one hill. I was afraid if I looked at it, I would make a mistake. It was very important not to look at the grave. At least that is how I felt. And I had to go on my hunch.

I parked the truck in front of an old saloon and walked around the town and talked to a few people and breathed the air and it was sweet and clear. I found a young hunter, but he was wrong; I knew that after talking to him for a few minutes. I found a very old man, but he was no better. Then I found me a hunter about fifty, and he was just right. He knew, or sensed, everything I was looking for.

I bought him a beer and we talked about a lot of things, and then I bought him another beer and led the conversation around to what I was doing here and why I wanted to talk to him. We were silent for a while and I waited, not showing my impatience, for the hunter, on his own, to bring up the past, to speak of other days three years ago, and of driving toward Sun Valley at this time or that and what he saw and knew about a man who had once sat in this bar and drunk beer and talked about hunting or gone hunting out beyond.

And at last, looking off at the wall as if it were the highway and the mountains, the hunter gathered up his quiet voice and was ready to speak.

"That old man," he said. "Oh, that old man on the road. Oh, that poor old man."

I waited.

"I just can't get over that old man on the road," he said, looking down now into his drink.

I drank some more of my beer, not feeling well, feeling very old myself and tired.

When the silence prolonged itself, I got out a local map and laid it on the wooden table. The bar was quiet. It was midmorning and we were completely alone there.

"This is where you saw him most often?" I asked.

The hunter touched the map three times. "I used to see him walking here. And along there. Then he'd cut across the land here. That poor old man. I wanted to tell him to keep off the road. I didn't want to hurt or

insult him. You don't tell a man like that about roads or that maybe he'll be hit. If he's going to be hit, well that's it. You figure it's his business, and you go on. Oh, but he was old there at the last."

"He was," I said, and folded the map and put it in my pocket.

"You another of those reporters?" said the hunter.

"Not quite *those*," I said.

"Didn't mean to lump you in with them," he said.

"No apology needed," I said. "Let's just say I was one of his readers."

"Oh, he had readers all right, all kinds of readers. Even me. I don't touch books from one autumn to the next. But I touched his. I think I liked the Michigan stories best. About the Fishing. I think the stories about the fishing are good. I don't think anybody ever wrote about fishing that way and maybe won't ever again. Of course, the bullfight stuff is good, too. But that's a little far off. Some of the cowpokes like them; they been around the animals all their life. A bull here or a bull there, I guess it's the same. I know one cowpoke has read just the bull stuff in the Spanish stories of the old man's forty times. He could go over there and fight, I swear."

"I think all of us felt," I said, "at least once in our lives, when we were young, we could go over there, after reading the bull stuff in the Spanish stories, that we could go over there and fight. Or at least jog ahead of the running of the bulls, in the early morning, with a good drink waiting at the other end of the run, and your best girl with you there for the long weekend."

I stopped. I laughed quietly. For my voice had, without knowing, fallen into the rhythm of his way of saying, either out of his mouth, or from his hand. I shook my head and was silent.

"You been up to the grave yet?" asked the hunter, as if he knew I would answer yes.

"No," I said.

That really surprised him. He tried not to show it.

"They all go up to the grave," he said.

"Not this one."

He explored around in his mind for a polite way of asking. "I mean..." he said. "Why not?"

"Because it's the wrong grave," I said.

"All graves are wrong graves when you come down to it," he said.

"No," I said. "There are right graves and wrong ones, just as there are good times to die and bad times."

He nodded at this. I had come back to something he knew, or at least smelled was right.

"Sure, I knew men," he said, "died just perfect. You always felt, yes, that was good. One man I knew, sitting at the table waiting for supper, his wife in the kitchen, when she came in with a big bowl of soup there he was sitting dead and neat at the table. Bad for her, but, I mean, wasn't that a good way for him? No sickness. No nothing but sitting there waiting for supper to come and never knowing if it came or not. Like another friend. Had an old dog. Fourteen years old. Dog was going blind and tired. Decided at last to take the dog to the pound and have him put to sleep. Loaded the old blind tired dog on the front seat of his car. The dog licked his hand, once. The man felt awful. He drove toward the pound. On the way there, with not one sound, the dog passed away, died on the front seat, as if he knew and, knowing, picked the better way, just handed over his ghost, and there you are. That's what you're talking about, right?"

I nodded.

"So you think that grave up on the hill is a wrong grave for a right man, do you?"

"That's about it," I said.

"You think there are all kinds of graves along the road for all of us?"

"Could be," I said.

"And if we could see all our life one way or another, we'd choose better? At the end, looking back," said the hunter, "we'd say, hell, *that* was the year and the place, not the *other* year and the other place, but that one year, that one place. Would we say that?"

"Since we have to choose or be pushed finally," I said, "yes."

"That's a nice idea," said the hunter. "But how many of us have that much sense? Most of us don't have brains enough to leave a party when the gin runs out. We hang around."

"We hang around," I said, "and what a shame."

We ordered some more beer.

The hunter drank half the glass and wiped his mouth.

"So what can you do about wrong graves?" he said.

"Treat them as if they didn't exist," I said. "And maybe they'll go away, like a bad dream."

The hunter laughed once, a kind of forlorn cry. "God, you're crazy. But I like listening to crazy people. Blow some more."

"That's all," I said.

"Are you the Resurrection and the Life?" said the hunter.

"No."

"You going to say Lazarus come forth?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I just want, very late in the day," I said, "to choose right places, right times, right graves."

"Drink that drink," said the hunter. "You need it. Who in hell sent you?"

"Me," I said. "I did. And some friends. We all chipped in and picked one out of ten. We bought that truck out on the street and I drove it across country. On the way I did a lot of hunting and fishing to put myself in the right frame. I was in Cuba last year. Spain the summer before. Africa the summer before that. I got a lot to think about. That's why they picked me."

"To do *what*, to do *what*, goddammit?" said the hunter urgently, half wildly, shaking his head. "You can't do anything. It's all over."

"Most of it," I said. "Come on."

I walked to the door. The hunter sat there. At last, examining the fires lit in my face by my talking, he grunted, got up, walked over, and came outside with me.

I pointed at the curb. We looked together at the truck parked there.

"I've seen those before," he said. "A truck like that, in a movie. Don't they hunt rhino from a truck like that? And lions and things like that? Or at least travel in them around Africa?"

"You remember right."

"No lions around here," he said. "No rhino, no water buffalo, nothing."

"No?" I asked.

He didn't answer that.

I walked over and touched the open truck.

"You know what this is?"

"I'm playing dumb from here on," said the hunter. "What is it?"

I stroked the fender for a long moment.

"A Time Machine," I said.

His eyes widened and then narrowed and he sipped the beer he was carrying in one large hand. He nodded me on.

"A Time Machine," I repeated.

"I heard you," he said.

He walked out around the safari truck and stood in the street looking at it. He wouldn't look at me. He circled the truck one entire round and stood back on the curb and looked at the cap on the gas tank.

"What kind of mileage you get?" he said.

"I don't know yet."

"You don't know anything," he said.

"This is the first trip," I said. "I won't know until it's over."

"What do you fuel a thing like that with?" he said.

I was silent.

"What kind of stuff you put in?" he asked.

I could have said: Reading late at night, reading many nights over the years until almost morning, reading up in the mountains in the snow or reading at noon in Pamplona, or reading by the streams or out in a boat somewhere along the Florida coast. Or I could have said: All of us put our hands on this Machine, all of us thought about it and bought it and touched it and put our love in it and our remembering what his words did to us twenty years or twenty-five or thirty years ago. There's a lot of life and remembering and love put by here, and that's the gas and the fuel and the stuff or whatever you want to call it; the rain in Paris, the sun in Madrid, the snow in the high Alps, the smoke off the guns in the Tyrol, the shine of light off the Gulf Stream, the explosion of bombs or explosions of leapt fish, that's the gas and the fuel and the stuff here; I should have said that, I thought it, but I let it stay unsaid.

The hunter must have smelled my thought, for his eyes squinted up and, telepath that he was from long years in the forest, chewed over my thinking.

Then he walked over and did an unexpected thing. He reached out and... *touched*... my Machine.

He laid his hand on it and left it there, as if feeling for the life, and approving what he sensed beneath his hand. He stood that way for a long time.

Then he turned without a word, not looking at me, and went back into the bar and sat drinking alone, his back turned toward the door.

I didn't want to break the silence. It seemed a good time to go, to try.

I got in the truck and started the motor.

What kind of mileage? What kind of fuel? I thought. And drove away.

I kept on the road and didn't look right or left and I drove for what must have been an hour, first this direction and then that, part of the time my eyes shut for full seconds, taking a chance I might go off and get hurt or killed.

And then, just before noon, with the clouds over the sun, suddenly I knew it was all right.

I looked up at the hill and I almost yelled.

The grave was gone.

I drove down into a little hollow just then and on the road ahead, wandering along by himself, was an old man in a heavy sweater.

I idled the safari truck along until I was pacing him as he walked. I saw he was wearing steel-rimmed glasses and for a long moment we moved together, each ignoring the other until I called his name.

He hesitated, and then walked on.

I caught up with him in the truck and said again, "Papa."

He stopped and waited.

I braked the car and sat there in the front seat.

"Papa," I said.

He came over and stood near the door.

"Do I know you?"

"No. But I know you."

He looked me in the eyes and studied my face and mouth. "Yes. I think you do."

"I saw you on the road. I think I'm going your way. Want a lift?"

"It's good walking this time of day," he said. "Thanks."

"Let me tell you where I'm going," I said.

He had started off but now stopped and, without looking at me, said, "Where?"

"A long way," I said.

"It sounds long, the way you tell it. Can't you make it shorter?"

"No. A long way," I said. "About two thousand six hundred days, give or take some days, and half an afternoon."

He came back and looked into the car.

"Is that how far you're going?"

"That's how far."

"In which direction? Ahead?"

"Don't you want to go ahead?"

He looked at the sky. "I don't know. I'm not sure."

"It's not ahead," I said. "It's back."

His eyes took on a different color. It was a subtle shift, a flex, like a man stepping out from the shade of a tree into sunlight on a cloudy day.

"Back."

"Somewhere between two thousand and three thousand days, split half a day, give or take an hour, borrow or loan a minute, haggle over a second," I said.

"You really talk," he said.

"Compulsive," I said.

"You'd make a lousy writer," he said. "I never knew a writer yet was a good talker."

"That's my albatross," I said.

"Back?" He weighed the word.

"I'm turning the car around," I said. "And I'm going back down the road."

"Not miles but days?"

"Not miles but days."

"Is it that kind of car?"

"That's how it's built."

"You're an inventor then?"

"A reader who happens to invent."

"If the car works, that's some car you got there."

"At your service," I said.

"And when you get where you're going," said the old man, putting his hand on the door and leaning and then, seeing what he had done, taking his hand away and standing taller to speak to me, "where will you be?"

"January 10, 1954."

"That's quite a date," he said.

"It is, it was. It can be more of a date."

Without moving, his eyes took another step out into fuller light.

"And where will you be on that day?"

"Africa," I said.

He was silent. His mouth did not work. His eyes did not shift.

"Not far from Nairobi," I said.

He nodded, once, slowly.

"Africa, not far from Nairobi."

I waited.

"And when we get there, if we go?" he said.

"I leave you there."

"And then?"

"You stay there."

"And then?"

"That's all."

"That's all?"

"Forever," I said.

The old man breathed out and in, and ran his hand over the edge of the doorsill.

"This car," he said, "somewhere along the way does it turn into a plane?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Somewhere along the way do you turn into my pilot?"

"It could be. I've never done this before."

"But you're willing to try?"

I nodded.

"Why?" he said, and leaned in and stared me directly in the face with a terrible, quietly wild intensity. "*Why?*"

Old man, I thought, I can't tell you why. Don't ask me.

He withdrew, sensing he had gone too far.

"I didn't say that," he said.

"You didn't say it," I said.

"And when you bring the plane in for a forced landing," he said, "will you land a little differently this time?"

"Different, yes."

"A little harder?"

"I'll see what can be done."

"And will I be thrown out but the rest of you okay?"

"The odds are in favor."

He looked up at the hill where there was no grave. I looked at the same hill. And maybe he guessed the digging of it there.

He gazed back down the road at the mountains and the sea that could not be seen beyond the mountains and a continent beyond the sea. "That's a good day you're talking about."

"The best."

"And a good hour and a good second."

"Really, nothing better."

"Worth thinking about."

His hand lay on the doorsill, not leaning, but testing, feeling, touching, tremulous, undecided. But his eyes came full into the light of African noon.

"Yes."

"Yes?" I said.

"I think," he said, "I'll grab a lift with you."

I waited one heartbeat, then reached over and opened the door.

Silently he got in the front seat and sat there and quietly shut the door without slamming it. He sat there, very old and very tired. I waited. "Start her up," he said.

I started the engine and gentled it.

"Turn her around," he said.

I turned the car so it was going back on the road.

"Is this really," he said, "that kind of car?"

"Really, that kind of car."

He looked out at the land and the mountains and the distant house.

I waited, idling the motor.

"When we get there," he said, "will you remember something...?"

"I'll try."

"There's a mountain," he said, and stopped and sat there, his mouth quiet, and he didn't go on.

But I went on for him. There is a mountain in Africa named Kilimanjaro, I thought. And on the western slope of that mountain was once found the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has ever explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude.

We will put you up on that same slope, I thought, on Kilimanjaro, near the leopard, and write your name and under it say nobody knew what he was doing here so high, but here he is. And write the date born and died, and go away down toward the hot summer grass and let mainly dark warriors and white hunters and swift okapis know the grave.

The old man shaded his eyes, looking at the road winding away over the hills. He nodded.

"Let's go," he said.

"Yes, Papa," I said.

And we motored away, myself at the wheel, going slow, and the old man beside me, and as we went down the first hill and topped the next, the sun came out full and the wind smelled of Fire. We ran like a lion in the long grass. Rivers and streams flashed by. I wished we might stop for one hour and wade and fish and lie by the stream frying the fish and talking or not talking. But if we stopped we might never go on again. I gunned the engine. It made a great fierce wondrous animal's roar. The old man grinned.

"It's going to be a great day!" he shouted.

"A great day."

Back on the road, I thought, How must it be now, and now, us disappearing? And now, us gone? And now, the road empty. Sun Valley quiet in the sun. What must it be, having us gone?

I had the car up to ninety.

We both yelled like boys.

After that I didn't know anything.

"By God," said the old man, toward the end. "You know? I think we're... flying?"

1969

THE BLUE BOTTLE

The sundials were tumbled into white pebbles. The birds of the air now flew in ancient skies of rock and sand, buried, their songs stopped. The dead sea bottoms were currented with dust which flooded the land when the wind bade it reenact an old tale of engulfment. The cities were deep laid with granaries of silence, time stored and kept, pools and fountains of quietude, and memory.

Mars was dead.

Then, out of the large stillness, from a great distance, there was an insect sound which grew large among the cinnamon hills and moved in the sun-blazed air until the highway trembled and dust was shook whispering down in the old cities.

The sound ceased.

In the shimmering silence of midday, Albert Beck and Leonard Craig sat in an ancient landcar, eyeing a dead city which did not move under their gaze but waited for their shout:

"Hello!"

A crystal tower dropped into soft dusting rain.

"You there!"

And another tumbled down.

And another and another fell as Beck called, summoning them to death. In shattering flights, stone animals with vast granite wings dived to strike the courtyards and fountains. His cry summoned them like living beasts and the beasts gave answer, groaned, cracked, leaned up, tilted over, trembling, hesitant, then split the air and swept down with grimaced mouths and empty eyes, with sharp, eternally hungry teeth suddenly seized out and strewn like shrapnel on the tiles.

Beck waited. No more towers fell.

"It's safe to go in now."

Craig didn't move. "For the same reason?"

Beck nodded.

"For a damned *bottle*! I don't understand. Why does everyone want it?"

Beck got out of the car. "Those that found it, they never told, they never explained. But – it's old. Old as the desert, as the dead seas – and it might contain anything. That's what the legend says. And because it could hold anything – well, that stirs a man's hunger."

"Yours, not mine," said Craig. His mouth barely moved; his eyes were half-shut, faintly amused. He stretched lazily. "I'm just along for the ride. Better watching you than sitting in the heat."

Beck had stumbled upon the old landcar a month back, before Craig had joined him. It was part of the flotsam of the First Industrial Invasion of Mars that had ended when the race moved on toward the stars. He had worked on the motor and run it from city to dead city, through the lands of the idlers and roustabouts, the dreamers and lazers, men caught in the backwash of space, men like himself and Craig who had never wanted to do much of anything and had found Mars a fine place to do it in.

"Five thousand, ten thousand years back the Martians made the Blue Bottle," said Beck. "Blown from Martian glass – and lost and found and lost and found again and again."

He stared into the wavering heat shimmer of the dead city. All my life, thought Beck, I've done nothing and nothing inside the nothing. Others, better men, have done big things, gone off to Mercury, or Venus, or out beyond the System. Except me. Not me. But the Blue Bottle can *change* all that.

He turned and walked away from the silent car.

Craig was out and after him, moving easily along. "What is it now, ten years you've hunted? You twitch when you sleep, wake up in fits, sweat through the days. You want the damn bottle *that* bad, and don't know what's in it. You're a fool, Beck."

"Shut up, shut up," said Beck, kicking a slide of pebbles out of his way.

They walked together into the ruined city, over a mosaic of cracked tiles shaped into a stone tapestry of fragile Martian creatures, long-dead beasts which appeared and disappeared as a slight breath of wind stirred the silent dust.

"Wait," said Beck. He cupped his hands to his mouth and gave a great shout. "You there!"

"... there," said an echo, and towers fell. Fountains and stone pillars folded into themselves. That was the way of these cities. Sometimes towers as beautiful as a symphony would fall at a spoken word. It was like watching a Bach cantata disintegrate before your eyes.

A moment later: bones buried in bones. The dust settled. Two structures remained intact.

Beck stepped forward, nodding to his friend.

They moved in search.

And, searching, Craig paused, a faint smile on his lips. "In that bottle," he said, "is there a little accordion woman, all folded up like one of those tin cups, or like one of those Japanese flowers you put in water and it opens out?"

"I don't need a woman."

"Maybe you do. Maybe you never had a real woman, a woman who

loved you, so, secretly, that's what you hope is in it." Craig pursed his mouth. "Or maybe, in that bottle, something from your childhood. All in a tiny bundle – a lake, a tree you climbed, green grass, some crayfish. How's *that* sound?"

Beck's eyes focused on a distant point. "Sometimes – that's almost it. The past – Earth. I don't know."

Craig nodded. "What's in the bottle would depend, maybe, on who's looking. Now, if there was a shot of *whiskey* in it..."

"Keep looking," said Beck.

There were seven rooms filled with glitter and shine; from floor to tiered ceiling there were casks, crocks, magnums, urns, vases – fashioned of red, pink, yellow, violet, and black glass. Beck shattered them, one by one, to eliminate them, to get them out of the way so he would never have to go through them again.

Beck finished his room, stood ready to invade the next. He was almost afraid to go on. Afraid that this time he would find it; that the search would be over and the meaning would go out of his life. Only after he had heard of the Blue Bottle from fire-travellers all the way from Venus to Jupiter, ten years ago, had life begun to take on a purpose. The fever had lit him and he had burned steadily ever since. If he worked it properly, the prospect of finding the bottle might fill his entire life to the brim. Another thirty years, if he was careful and not too diligent, of search, never admitting aloud that it wasn't the bottle that counted at all, but the search, the running and the hunting, the dust and the cities and the going-on.

Beck heard a muffled sound. He turned and walked to a window looking out into the courtyard. A small gray sand cycle had purred up almost noiselessly at the end of the street. A plump man with blond hair eased himself off the spring seat and stood looking into the city. Another searcher. Beck sighed. Thousands of them, searching and searching. But there were thousands of brittle cities and towns and villages and it would take a millennium to sift them all.

"How you doing?" Craig appeared in a doorway.

"No luck." Beck sniffed the air. "Do you smell anything?"

"What?" Craig looked about.

"Smells like – bourbon."

"Ho!" Craig laughed. "That's *me*!"

"You?"

"I just took a drink. Found it in the other room. Shoved some stuff around, a mess of bottles, like always, and one of them had some bourbon

in it, so I had myself a drink."

Beck was staring at him, beginning to tremble. "What – what would bourbon be doing here, in a Martian bottle?" His hands were cold. He took a slow step forward. "Show me!"

"I'm sure that..."

"*Show* me, damn you!"

It was there, in one corner of the room, a container of Martian glass as blue as the sky, the size of a small fruit, light and airy in Beck's hand as he set it down upon a table.

"It's half-full of bourbon," said Craig.

"I don't see anything inside," said Beck.

"Then shake it."

Beck picked it up, gingerly shook it.

"Hear it gurgle?"

"I can hear it plain."

Beck replaced it on the table. Sunlight spearing through a side window struck blue flashes off the slender container. It was the blue of a star held in the hand. It was the blue of a shallow ocean bay at noon. It was the blue of a diamond at morning.

"This *is* it," said Beck quietly. "I know it is. We don't have to look anymore. We've found the Blue Bottle."

Craig looked sceptical. "Sure you don't *see* anything in it?"

"Nothing... But –" Beck bent close and peered deeply into the blue universe of glass. "Maybe if I open it up and let it out, whatever it is, I'll know."

"I put the stopper in tight. Here." Craig reached out.

"If you gentlemen will excuse me," said a voice in the door behind them.

The plump man with blond hair walked into their line of vision with a gun. He did not look at their faces, he looked only at the blue glass bottle. He began to smile. "I hate very much to handle guns," he said, "but it is a matter of necessity, as I simply must have that work of art. I suggest that you allow me to take it without trouble."

Beck was almost pleased. It had a certain beauty of timing, this incident; it was the sort of thing he might have wished for, to have the treasure stolen before it was opened. Now there was the good prospect of a chase, a fight, a series of gains and losses, and, before they were done, perhaps another four or five years spent upon a new search.

"Come along now," said the stranger. "Give it up." He raised the gun warningly.

Beck handed him the bottle.

"Amazing. Really amazing," said the plump man. "I can't believe it was as simple as this, to walk in, hear two men talking, and to have the Blue Bottle simply *handed* to me. Amazing!"

And he wandered off down the hall, out into the daylight, chuckling to himself.

Under the cool double moons of Mars the midnight cities were bone and dust. Along the scattered highway the landcar bumped and rattled, past cities where the fountains, the gyrostats, the furniture, the metal-singing books, the paintings lay powdered over with mortar and insect wings. Past cities that were cities no longer, but only things rubbed to a fine silt that flowered senselessly back and forth on the wine winds between one land and another, like the sand in a gigantic hourglass, endlessly pyramiding and repyramiding. Silence opened to let the car pass, and closed swiftly in behind.

Craig said, "We'll never find him. These damned roads. So old. Potholes, lumps, everything wrong. He's got the advantage with the cycle; he can dodge and weave. Damn!"

They swerved abruptly, avoiding a bad stretch. The car moved over the old highway like an eraser, coming upon blind soil, passing over it, dusting it away to reveal the emerald and gold colours of ancient Martian mosaics worked into the road surface.

"Wait," cried Beck. He throttled the car down. "I saw something back there."

"Where?"

They drove back a hundred yards.

"There. You see. It's *him*."

In a ditch by the side of the road the plump man lay folded over his cycle. He did not move. His eyes were wide, and when Beck flashed a torch down, the eyes burned dully.

"Where's the bottle?" asked Craig.

Beck jumped into the ditch and picked up the man's gun. "I don't know. Gone."

"What killed him?"

"I don't know that either."

"The cycle looks okay. Not an accident."

Beck rolled the body over. "No wounds. Looks like he just – stopped, of his own accord."

"Heart attack, maybe," said Craig. "Excited over the bottle. He gets down here to hide. Thought he'd be all right, but the attack finished him."

"That doesn't account for the Blue Bottle."

"Someone came along. Lord, you know how many searchers there are...."

They scanned the darkness around them. Far off, in the starred blackness, on the blue hills, they saw a dim movement.

"Up there." Beck pointed. "Three men on foot."

"They must have..."

"My God, look!"

Below them, in the ditch, the figure of the plump man glowed, began to melt. The eyes took on the aspect of moonstones under a sudden rush of water. The face began to dissolve away into fire. The hair resembled small firecracker strings, lit and sputtering. The body fumed as they watched. The fingers jerked with flame. Then, as if a gigantic hammer had struck a glass statue, the body cracked upward and was gone in a blaze of pink shards, becoming mist as the night breeze carried it across the highway.

"They must have – *done* something to him," said Craig. "Those three, with a new kind of weapon."

"But it's happened before," said Beck. "Men I knew about who had the Blue Bottle. They vanished. And the bottle passed on to others who vanished." He shook his head. "Looked like a million fireflies when he broke apart...."

"You going after them?"

Beck returned to the car. He judged the desert mounds, the hills of bone-silt and silence. "It'll be a tough job, but I think I can poke the car through after them. I *have* to, now." He paused, not speaking to Craig. "I think I know what's in the Blue Bottle.... Finally, I realize that what I want most of all is in there. Waiting for me."

"I'm not going," said Craig, coming up to the car where Beck sat in the dark, his hands on his knees. "I'm not going out there with you, chasing three armed men. I just want to live, Beck. That bottle means nothing to me. I won't risk my skin for it. But I'll wish you luck."

"Thanks," said Beck. And he drove away, into the dunes.

The night was as cool as water coming over the glass hood of the landcar.

Beck throttled hard over dead river washes and spills of chalked pebble, driving between great cliffs. Ribbons of double moonlight painted the bas-reliefs of gods and animals on the cliff sides all yellow gold: mile-high faces upon which Martian histories were etched and stamped in symbols, incredible faces with open cave eyes and gaping cave mouths.

The motor's roar dislodged rocks, boulders. In a whole rushing downpour of stone, golden segments of ancient cliff sculpture slid out of the moons' rays at the top of the cliff and vanished into blue cool-well darkness.

In the roar, as he drove, Beck cast his mind back – to all the nights in the last ten years, nights when he had built red fires on the sea bottoms, and cooked slow, thoughtful meals. And dreamed. Always those dreams of wanting. And not knowing what. Ever since he was a young man, the hard life on Earth, the great panic of 2130, the starvation, chaos, riot, want. Then bucking through the planets, the womanless, loveless years, the alone years. You come out of the dark into the light, out of the womb into the world, and what do you find that you really want?

What about that dead man back there in the ditch? Wasn't he always looking for something extra? Something he didn't have. What was there for men like himself? Or for anyone? Was there anything at all to look forward to?

The Blue Bottle.

He quickly braked the car, leaped out, gun ready. He ran, crouching, into the dunes. Ahead of him, the three men lay on the cold sand, neatly. They were Earthmen, with tan faces and rough clothes and gnarled hands. Starlight shone on the Blue Bottle, which lay among them.

As Beck watched, the bodies began to melt. They vanished away into rises of steam, into dewdrops and crystals. In a moment they were gone.

Beck felt the coldness in his body as the flakes rained across his eyes, flicking his lips and his cheeks.

He did not move.

The plump man. Dead and vanishing. Craig's voice: "Some new weapon..."

No. Not a weapon at all.

The Blue Bottle.

They had opened it to find what they most desired. All of the unhappy, desiring men down the long and lonely years had opened it to find what they most wanted in the planets of the universe. And all had found it, even as had these three. Now it could be understood, why the bottle passed on so swiftly, from one to another, and the men vanishing behind it. Harvest chaff fluttering on the sand, along the dead sea rims. Turning to flame and fireflies. To mist.

Beck picked up the bottle and held it away from himself for a long moment. His eyes shone clearly. His hands trembled.

So this is what I've been looking for, he thought. He turned the bottle and it flashed blue starlight.

So this is what all men *really* want? The secret desire, deep inside, hidden all away where we never guess? The subliminal urge? So this is what each man seeks, through some private guilt, to find?

Death.

An end to doubt, to torture, to monotony, to want, to loneliness, to fear, an end to everything.

All men?

No. Not Craig. Craig was, perhaps, far luckier. A few men were like animals in the universe, not questioning, drinking at pools and breeding and raising their young and not doubting for a moment that life was anything but good. That was Craig. There were a handful like him. Happy animals on a great reservation, in the hand of God, with a religion and a faith that grew like a set of special nerves in them. The unneurotic men in the midst of the billionfold neurotics. They would only want death, later, in a natural manner. Not now. Later.

Beck raised the bottle. How simple, he thought, and how right. This is what I've always wanted. And nothing else.

Nothing.

The bottle was open and blue in the starlight. Beck took an immense draught of the air coming from the Blue Bottle, deep into his lungs.

I have it at last, he thought.

He relaxed. He felt his body become wonderfully cool and then wonderfully warm. He knew he was dropping down a long slide of stars into a darkness as delightful as wine. He was swimming in blue wine and white wine and red wine. There were candles in his chest, and fire wheels spinning. He felt his hands leave him. He felt his legs fly away, amusingly. He laughed. He shut his eyes and laughed.

He was very happy for the first time in his life.

The Blue Bottle dropped onto the cool sand.

At dawn, Craig walked along, whistling. He saw the bottle lying in the first pink light of the sun on the empty white sand. As he picked it up, there was a fiery whisper. A number of orange and red-purple fireflies blinked on the air, and passed on away.

The place was very still.

"I'll be damned." He glanced toward the dead windows of a nearby city. "Hey, Beck!"

A slender tower collapsed into powder.

"Beck, here's your treasure! I don't want it. Come and get it!"

"... and get it," said an echo, and the last tower fell.

Craig waited.

"That's rich," he said. "The bottle right here, and old Beck not even around to take it." He shook the blue container.

It gurgled.

"Yes, sir! Just the way it was before. Full of bourbon, by God!" He opened it, drank, wiped his mouth.

He held the bottle carelessly.

"All that trouble for a little bourbon. I'll wait right here for old Beck and give him his damn bottle. Meanwhile – have another drink, Mr.Craig. Don't mind if I do."

The only sound in the dead land was the sound of liquid running into a parched throat. The Blue Bottle flashed in the sun.

Craig smiled happily and drank again.

1976

В ПОМОЩЬ ИЗУЧАЮЩИМ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК

ОБЩЕУПОТРЕБИТЕЛЬНЫЕ ВЫРАЖЕНИЯ,
ФРАЗЫ ДЛЯ ЗАПОМИНАНИЯ, КЛИШЕ

The Pedestrian

Stand still! Stay where you are! – Стой, ни с места!/Стоять на месте!
Don't move anybody! – Всем/никому не двигаться!
Don't speak unless you're spoken to! – Не разговаривать!/Молчать, пока вас не спросят!
Wait a minute, I haven't done anything! – Постойте! Я же ничего не сделал!

The One Who Waits

Doesn't it look like one? – Разве он на него не похож?
We should never have come. – Нам не недо было сюда приходить/приезжать/прилетать.
I don't want to stay here, let's get out! – Не хочу здесь оставаться, давайте убираться отсюда!

In A Season Of Calm Weather

I know what you've been thinking. – Я знаю, что ты подумал.
Don't ever do that again. – Больше никогда так не делай!
What'll you have? – Что будешь есть?
What's wrong? – Что такое? В чём дело?

The Flying Machine

Let me guess. – Дай, я угадаю./Давайте, я угадаю.
I have just told you. – Я тебе/вам ведь только что сказал.
What is it like? – Каково оно?/На что это похоже?
How does it feel? – Как ощущение? *Зд.:* Что при этом чувствуешь?
I must take solace from that thought. – Я должен искать утешение в этой мысли.

The Dragon

Enough of that! – Довольно/хватит об этом!
Just like I told you! – Всё, как я тебе и говорил.

The Little Mice

How do you mean? – Что ты имеешь в виду? Что ты хочешь сказать?
I'd never thought, it's peculiar. – Интересно, никогда бы не подумал/не подумала.
They're succeeding! – И у них это получилось!

The Tyrannosaurus Rex

You're five minutes late! – Вы опоздали на пять минут!
I've seen better. – Я видел и получше.
Take it or leave it! – Хотите – берите, хотите – нет!
You're fired! – Ты уволен!
Don't make me feel any guiltier than I feel. – Не заставляйте меня чувствовать себя еще более виноватым!
It's hard to put in words. – Это трудно выразить словами./Трудно подобрать для этого слова.

Dark They Were And Golden-Eyed

Chin up! – Выше голову/нос! / Не унывай!
See that you stay away from them. – Смотри, держись от них подальше.
We must get away. – Нам надо убираться.
What are you going to do about it?– Что вы намерены теперь предпринять?
No special reason. – Просто так./Без всякого повода./Особой причины нет.
It just seemed like a good idea. – Просто показалось, что это неплохая идея.
What about you? – А ты как?
I've got work to do here. – У меня здесь дело./Мне здесь есть чем заняться.

G.B.S.-Mark V

Can you read minds? – Вы читаете мысли?/Вы умеете читать мысли?
It was not always thus. – Так было не всегда.
What goes on? – Что происходит?
I don't want to hear it! – Я не желаю это слышать!
Don't go near him! – Даже близко к нему не подходи!

The Wonderful Ice-Cream Suit

How does that one rate two friends? – Почему это один стоит двух?
He looks sharp. – Он шикарно выглядит.
I'll be in on it. – Я приму в этом участие.
Shake! (*разг.*) – Руку!/Дай пять!
Don't promise nothing! – Ничего не обещай! (*двойное отрицание характерно для разговорной речи*)

Carlyle's Sartor Resartus... his Philosophy of Suits... – имеется в виду «Сартор Резартус» – произведение английского философа и писателя Томаса Карлейля, в коем он сформулировал свою философию, согласно которой все явления окружающего мира предстают в виде внешних преходящих одеяний, за каковыми таится истинная реальность – Божественная сущность.

Here There Be Tigers

I knew there was something wrong. – Я знал, что что-то не так.
Don't try to stop me! – И не пытайтесь меня остановить!
It's not too late to turn back. – Ещё не поздно вернуться.

The Sunset Harp

Shut up, and get to work! – Помолчи и займись делом!
There's a trick somewhere! – Это какой-то обман!/Здесь какой-то фокус!
I guess things turn out for the best. – Думаю, всё к лучшему.

A Sound Of Thunder

Chinese boxes – речь идёт о китайских резных коробочках из слоновой кости, вкладывающихся одна в другую.
Deutscher – «говорящая» фамилия у кандидата (Deutscher по-немецки значит «немец») и его дальнейшая характеристика в тексте служат намёком на возможность прихода к власти фашистов.
Then it wouldn't pay for us even to touch the grass? – Тогда даже прикосновение к траве не пройдёт нам даром?
This is too much for me to get hold of. – Для меня это слишком.

Referent

Don’t give me a label! – Не вешайте на меня ярлык!/Не давайте мне названия!
You’ll only make it harder for yourself. – Ты бы сделал только себе хуже, если бы...

The Blue Bottle

It’s safe to go in now. – Теперь можно входить.
I hate very much to handle guns, but it is a matter of necessity. – Терпеть не могу орудовать пушкою, но ничего не поделаешь.
Here’s your treasure! I don’t want it! – Вот твоё сокровище! Оно мне не нужно.
Come and get it! – Приходи и забирай!/Приди и забери!

Books by Ray Bradbury:

Dark Carnival (1947)
The Martian Chronicles (1950)
The Illustrated Man (1951)
The Golden Apples of the Sun (1953)
Fahrenheit 451 (1954)
The October Country (1956)
Moby Dick (screenplay) (1956)
Dandelion Wine (1957)
A Medicine for Melancholy (1959)
The Day it Rained Forever (1959)
Something Wicked This Way Comes (1962)
R is for Rocket (1962)
The Machineries of Joy (1964)
The Vintage Bradbury (1965)
I Sing the Body Electric! (1969)
The Halloween Tree (1972)
Long After Midnight (1976)
The Stories of Ray Bradbury (1980)

When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed (poetry)
The Anthem Sprinters
Switch on the Night
Timeless Stories for Today and Tomorrow
S Is for Space
Twice 22
The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit and Other Plays

Ray Bradbury was born at Waukegan, Illinois, U.S.A., in 1920. During the war years he had numerous short stories published and some of these were included in the annual issues of *Best American Short Stories* and *O.Henry Prize Stories* in the years after the war.

His work was chosen for best American short story collections in 1946, 1948 and 1952. His awards include: The O'Henry Memorial Award, The Benjamin Franklin Award in 1954 and The Aviation-Space Writer's Association Award for best space article in an American magazine in 1967.

He has published over 300 stories, and twenty-two books including stories and novels. Among the books he has published are *Dark Carnival* (1947), *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *The Illustrated Man* (1951), *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953), *Fahrenheit 451* (1954), *The October Country* (1956), *Dandelion Wine* (1957), *A Medicine for Melancholy* (1959), *The Day it Rained Forever* (1959), *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962), *R is for Rocket* (1962), *The Machineries of Joy* (1964), *The Vintage Bradbury* (1965), *I Sing the Body Electric!* (1969), *The Halloween Tree* (1972), *Long After Midnight* (1976), *The Anthology: The Stories of Ray Bradbury* (1980).

Bradbury has written poetry, plays, short stories and novels. He has written for television, radio, the theater and film, and he has been published in every major American magazine. Editions of his novels and shorter fiction span several continents and languages, and he has gained worldwide acceptance for his work.