



The Common Man
Reynolds, Mack

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About Reynolds:

Dallas McCord "Mack" Reynolds (November 11, 1917 - January 30, 1983) was an American science fiction writer. His pen names included Clark Collins, Mark Mallory, Guy McCord, Dallas Ross and Maxine Reynolds. Many of his stories were published in *Galaxy Magazine* and *Worlds of If Magazine*. He was quite popular in the 1960s, but most of his work subsequently went out of print.

He was an active supporter of the Socialist Labor Party. Consequently, many of his stories have a reformist theme, and almost all of his novels explore economic issues to some degree.

Most of Reynolds' stories took place in Utopian societies, many of which fulfilled L. L. Zamenhof's dream of Esperanto used worldwide as a universal second language. His novels predicted many things which have come to pass, including pocket computers and a world-wide computer network with information available at one's fingertips.

Source: Wikipedia

Also available on Feedbooks for Reynolds:

- *Adaptation* (1960)
- *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1960)
- *Medal of Honor* (1960)
- *Mercenary* (1962)
- *Gun for Hire* (1960)
- *Unborn Tomorrow* (1959)
- *Revolution* (1960)
- *Subversive* (1962)
- *Summit* (1960)

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Frederick Braun, M.D., Ph.D., various other Ds, pushed his slightly crooked horn-rims back on his nose and looked up at the two-story wooden house. There was a small lawn before it, moderately cared for, and one tree. There was the usual porch furniture, and the house was going to need painting in another six months or so, but not quite yet. There was a three-year-old hover car parked at the curb of a make that anywhere else in the world but America would have been thought ostentatious in view of the seeming economic status of the householder.

Frederick Braun looked down at the paper in his hand, then up at the house again. He said to his two companions, "By Caesar, I will admit it is the most average-looking dwelling I have ever seen."

Patricia O'Gara said impatiently, "Well, do we or don't we?" Her hair should have been in a pony tail, or bouncing on her shoulders, or at least in the new Etruscan revival style, not drawn back in its efficient bun.

Ross Wooley was unhappy. He scratched his fingers back through his reddish crew cut. "This is going to sound silly."

Patricia said testily, "We've been through all that, Rossie, good heavens."

"Nothing ventured, nothing ... " Braun let the sentence dribble away as he stuffed the paper into a coat pocket, which had obviously been used as a waste receptacle for many a year, and led the way up the cement walk, his younger companions immediately behind.

He put his finger on the doorbell and cocked his head to one side. There was no sound from the depths of the house. Dr. Braun muttered, "Bell out of order."

"It would be," Ross chuckled sourly. "Remember? Average. Here, let me." He rapped briskly on the wooden door jamb. They stood for a moment then he knocked again, louder, saying almost as though hopefully, "Maybe there's nobody home."

"All right, all right, take it easy," a voice growled even as the door opened.

He was somewhere in his thirties, easygoing of face, brownish of hair, bluish of eye and moderately good-looking. His posture wasn't the best and he had a slight tummy but he was a goodish masculine specimen by Mid-Western standards. He stared out at them, defensive now that it was obvious they were strangers. Were they selling something, or in what other manner were they attempting to intrude on his well being? His eyes went from the older man's thin face, to the football hero heft of

the younger, then to Patricia O'Gara. His eyes went up and down her figure and became approving in spite of the straight business suit she affected.

He said, "What could I do for you?"

"Mr. Crowley?" Ross said.

"That's right."

"I'm Ross Wooley and my friends are Patricia O'Gara and Dr. Frederick Braun. We'd like to talk to you."

"There's nobody sick here."

Patricia said impatiently, "Of course not. Dr. Braun isn't a practicing medical doctor. We are research biochemists."

"We're scientists," Ross told him, putting it on what he assumed was the man's level. "There's something on which you could help us."

Crowley took his eyes from the girl and scowled at Ross. "Me? Scientists? I'm just a country boy, I don't know anything about science." There was a grudging self-deprecation in his tone.

Patricia took over, a miracle smile overwhelming her air of briskness. "We'd appreciate the opportunity to discuss it with you."

Dr. Braun added the clincher. "And it might be remunerative."

Crowley opened the door wider. "Well, just so it don't cost me nothing." He stepped back for them. "Don't mind the place. Kind of mused up. Fact is, the wife left me about a week ago and I haven't got around to getting somebody to come in and kind of clean things up."

He wasn't exaggerating. Patricia O'Gara had no pretensions to the housewife's art herself, but she sniffed when she saw the condition of the living room. There was a dirty shirt drooped over the sofa back and beside the chair which faced the TV set were half a dozen empty beer cans. The ashtrays hadn't been emptied for at least days and the floor had obviously not been swept since the domestic tragedy which had sent Mrs. Crowley packing.

Now that the three strangers were within his castle, Crowley's instincts for hospitality asserted themselves. He said, "Make yourself comfortable. Here, wait'll I get these things out of the way. Anybody like a drink? I got some beer in the box, or," he smirked at Patricia, "I got some port wine you might like, not this bellywash you buy by the gallon."

They declined the refreshments, it wasn't quite noon.

Crowley wrestled the chair which had been before the TV set around so that he could sit facing them, and then sat himself down. He didn't get this and his face showed it.

Frederick Braun came to the point. "Mr. Crowley," he said, "did it ever occur to you that somewhere amidst our nearly one hundred million American males there is the average man?"

Crowley looked at him.

Braun cleared his throat and with his thumb and forefinger pushed his glasses more firmly on the bridge of his nose. "I suppose that isn't exactly the technical way in which to put it."

Ross Wooley shifted his football shoulders and leaned forward earnestly. "No, Doctor, that's exactly the way to put it." He said to Crowley, very seriously, "We've done this most efficiently. We've gone through absolute piles of statistics. We've... ."

"Done what?" Crowley all but wailed. "Take it easy, will you? What are you all talking about?"

Patricia said impatiently, "Mr. Crowley, you are the average American. The man on the street. The Common Man."

He frowned at her. "What'd'ya mean, common? I'm as good as anybody else."

"That's exactly what we mean," Ross said placatingly. "You are exactly as good as anybody else, Mr. Crowley. You're the average man."

"I don't know what the devil you're talking about. Pardon my language, Miss."

"Not at all," Patricia sighed. "Dr. Braun, why don't you take over? We seem to all be speaking at once."

The little doctor began to enumerate on his fingers. "The center of population has shifted to this vicinity, so the average American lives here in the Middle West. Population is also shifting from rural to urban, so the average man lives in a city of approximately this size. Determining average age, height, weight is simple with government data as complete as they are. Also racial background. You, Mr. Crowley, are predominately English, German and Irish, but have traces of two or three other nationalities."

Crowley was staring at him. "How in the devil did you know that?"

Ross said wearily, "We've gone to a lot of trouble."

Dr. Braun hustled on. "You've had the average amount of education, didn't quite finish high school. You make average wages working in a factory as a clerk. You spent some time in the army but never saw combat. You drink moderately, are married and have one child, which is average for your age. Your I.Q. is exactly average and you vote Democrat except occasionally when you switch over to Republican."

"Now wait a minute," Crowley protested. "You mean I'm the only man in this whole country that's like me? I mean, you mean I'm the average guy, right in the middle?"

Patricia O'Gara said impatiently. "You are the nearest thing to it, Mr. Crowley. Actually, possibly one of a hundred persons would have served our purpose."

"O.K.," Crowley interrupted, holding up a hand. "That gets us to the point. What's this here purpose? What's the big idea prying, like, into my affairs till you learned all this about me? And what's this stuff about me getting something out of it? Right now I'm between jobs."

The doctor pushed his battered horn-rims back on his nose with his forefinger. "Yes, of course," he said reasonably. "Now we get to the point. Mr. Crowley, how would you like to be invisible?"

The three of them looked at him. It seemed to be his turn.

Crowley got up and walked into the kitchen. He came back in a moment with an opened can of beer from which he was gulping even as he walked. He took the can away from his mouth and said carefully, "You mean like a ghost?"

"No, of course not," Braun said in irritation. "By Caesar, man, have you no imagination? Can't you see it was only a matter of time before someone, possibly working away on an entirely different subject of research, stumbled upon a practical method of achieving invisibility?"

"Now, wait a minute," Crowley said, his voice belligerent. "I'm only a country boy, maybe, without any egghead background, but I'm just as good as the next man and just as smart. I don't think I like your altitude."

"Attitude," Ross Wooley muttered unhappily. He shot a glance at Patricia O'Gara but she ignored him.

Patricia turned on the charm. Her face opened into smile and she said soothingly, "Don't misunderstand, Mr. Crowley. May I call you Don? I'm sure we're going to be associates. You see, Don, we need your assistance."

This was more like it. Crowley sat down again and finished the can of beer. "O.K., it won't hurt to listen. What's the pitch?"

The older man cleared his throat. "We'll cover it quickly so that we can get to the immediate practical aspects. Are you interested in biodynamics ... umah ... no, of course not. Let me see. Are you at all familiar with the laws pertaining to refraction of ... umah, no." He cleared his throat again, unhappily. "Have you ever seen a medusa, Mr. Crowley? The gelatinous umbrella-shaped free swimming form of marine invertebrate related to the coral polyp and the sea anemone?"

Ross Wooley scratched his crew cut and grimaced. "Jellyfish, Doctor, jellyfish. But I think the Portuguese Man-of-War might be a better example."

"Oh, jellyfish," Crowley said. "Sure, I've seen jellyfish. I got an aunt lives near Baltimore. We used to go down there and swim in Chesapeake Bay. Sting the devil out of you. What about it?"

Patricia leaned forward, still smiling graciously. "I really don't see a great deal of point going into theory, gentlemen." She looked at Ross and Dr. Braun, then back at Crowley. "Don, I think that what the doctor was leading up to was an attempt to describe in layman's language the theory of the process onto which we've stumbled. He was using the jellyfish as an example of a life form all but invisible. But I'm sure you aren't interested in technical terminology, are you? A good deal of gobbledygook, really, don't you think?"

"Yeah, that's what I say. Let's get to the point. You mean you think it's possible to make a guy invisible. Nobody could see him, eh?"

"It's not a matter of thinking," Ross said sourly. "We've done it."

Crowley stared at him. "Done it? You mean, you, personal? You got invisible?"

"Yes. All three of us. Once each."

"And you come back all right, eh? So anybody can see you again."

The doctor said reasonably, "Here we are, quite visible. The effect of the usual dosage lasts for approximately twelve hours."

They let him assimilate it for a few minutes. Some of the ramifications were coming home to him. Finally he got up and went into the back again for another can of beer. By this time Ross Wooley was wishing he would renew his offer, but the other had forgotten his duties as a host.

He took the can away from his mouth and said, "You want to make me invisible. You want me to, like, kind of experiment on." His eyes thinned. "Why pick me?"

The doctor said carefully, "Because you're the common man, the average man, Mr. Crowley. Before we release this development, we would like to have some idea of the scope of the effects."

The beer went down chuck-a-luck. Crowley put the can aside and licked his bottom lip, then rubbed it with a fingertip. He said slowly, "Now take it easy while I think about this." He blinked. "Why you could just walk into a bank and... ."

The three were watching him, empty-faced.

"Exactly," Dr. Braun said.

Frederick Braun stared gloomily from the hotel suite's window at the street below. He peered absently at his thin wrist, looked blank for a moment, then realized all over again that his watch was being cleaned. He stared down at the street once more, his wrinkled face unhappy.

The door opened behind him and Patricia O'Gara came in briskly and said, "No sign of the guinea pig yet, eh?"

"No."

"Where's Rossie?"

The doctor cleared his throat. "There was an item on the newscast. A humor bit. It seems that the head waiter of the Gourmet... . Have you ever eaten at the Gourmet, Patricia?"

"Do I look like a millionaire?"

"At any rate, a half pound of the best Caspian caviar disappeared, spoonful at a time, right before his eyes."

Patricia looked at him. "Good heavens."

"Yes. Well, Ross has gone to pay the tab."

Patricia looked at her watch. "The effects will be wearing off shortly. Crowley will probably be back at any time. We warned him about returning to visibility in the middle of some street, completely nude." She sank into a seat and looked up at the doctor. "I suppose you admit I was right." Her voice was crisp.

The other turned on her. "And just why do you say that?"

"This caviar bit. Our friend, Donald Crowley, has obviously walked in to the Gourmet restaurant, having heard it was the most expensive in New York, and ate as much as he could stuff down of the most expensive item on the menu."

The elderly little doctor pushed his battered horn-rims farther back on his nose. "Tell me, Patricia, when you made the experiment, did you do anything ... umah ... anything at all, that saved you some money?"

Uncharacteristically, she suddenly giggled. "I had the time of my life riding on a bus without paying the fare."

Braun snorted. "Then Donald Crowley, in eating his caviar, did substantially the same thing. It's probably been a life's ambition of his to eat in an ultra-swank restaurant and then walk out without paying. To be frank," the doctor cleared his throat apologetically, "it's always been one of mine."

Patricia conceded him a chuckle, but then said impatiently, "It's one thing my saving fifteen cents on a bus ride, and his eating twenty-five dollars worth of caviar."

"Merely a matter of degree, my dear."

Patricia said in irritation, "Why in the world did we have to bring him to New York where he could pull such childish tricks? We could have performed the experiment right there in Far Cry, Nebraska."

Dr. Braun abruptly ceased the pacing he had begun and found a chair. He absently stuck a hand into a coat pocket, pulled out a crumbled piece of paper, stared at it for a moment, as though he had never seen it before, grunted, and returned it to the pocket. He looked at Patricia O'Gara. "We felt that on completely unknown territory he would feel less constrained, don't you remember? In his home town, his conscience would be more apt to restrict him."

Something suddenly came to her. She looked at her older companion suspiciously. "That newscast. Was there anything else on it? Don't look innocent, you know what I mean."

"Well, there was one item."

"Out with it," she demanded.

"The Hotel Belefonte threatens to sue that French movie star, Brigitte whatever-her-name is."

"Brigitte Loren," Patricia said, staring. "What's that got to do with Donald Crowley?"

The good doctor was embarrassed. "It seems that she came running out of her suite, umah, semi-dressed and screaming that the hotel was haunted."

"Good heavens," Patricia said with sudden vision. "That's one aspect I hadn't thought of."

"Evidently Crowley did."

Patricia O'Gara said definitely, "My point's been proven. Our average man is a slob. Give him the opportunity to exercise unlimited freedom without danger of consequence and he becomes an undisciplined and dangerous lout."

Ross Wooley had come in, scowling, just in time to catch most of that. He tossed his hat onto a table and fished in his pockets for pipe and tobacco. "Nuts, Pat," he said. "In fact, just the opposite's been proven. Don's just on a fun binge. Like a kid in a candy shop. He hasn't done anything serious. Went into a fancy restaurant and ate some expensive food. Sneaked into the hotel room of the world's most famous sex-symbol and got a close-up look." He grinned suddenly. "I wish I had thought of that."

"Ha!" Patricia snorted. "Our engagement is off, you Peeping Tom."

"Children, children," Braun chuckled. "I'll admit, though, I think Ross is correct. Don's done little we three didn't when first given the robe of invisibility. We experimented, largely playfully, even childishly."

Patricia bit out, "This experiment is ridiculous, anyway, and I don't know why I ever agreed to it. Scientific? Nonsense. Where are our controls? For it to make any sense we'd have to work with scores of subjects. Suppose we do agree that the manner in which Don Crowley has reacted is quite harmless. Does that mean we can release this discovery to the world? Certainly not."

Ross said sullenly, "But you agreed that we'd go by the results of this... ."

"I agreed to no such thing, Rossie Wooley, you overgrown lug. All I agreed to do was consider the results. I was, and am, of the opinion that if the person our politicians so lovingly call the Common Man was released of the restrictions inhibiting him, he'd go hog wild and destroy both society and himself. What is to prevent murder, robbery, rape and a score of other crimes, given invisibility for anyone who has a couple of dollars with which to go into a drugstore and purchase our serum?"

Her fiancé sighed deeply, jamming tobacco fiercely into the bowl of his briar. He growled, "Look, you seem to think that the only thing that restricts man is the fear of being punished. There are other things, you know."

"Good heavens," she said sarcastically. "Name *one*."

"There is the ethical code in which he was raised, based on religion or otherwise. There is the fact that man is fundamentally good, to use a trite term, given the opportunity."

"My education has evidently been neglected," Patricia said, still argumentatively. "I've never seen evidence to support your claim."

"I'm not saying individuals don't react negatively, given opportunity to be antisocial," he all but snarled. "I'm just saying people in general, common, little people, trend toward decency, desire the right thing."

"Individuals my ... my neck," Patricia snapped back. "Did you ever hear of Rome and the games? Here a whole people, millions of them, were given the opportunity to indulge in sadistic spectacles to their heart's desire. How many of them stayed home from the games?" She laughed in ridicule.

Ross flushed. "Some of them did, confound it."

Dr. Braun had been taking in their debate, uncomfortably. As though in spite of himself, he said now, "Very few, I am afraid."

"Religious ethic," Patricia pursued, relentlessly. "The greatest of the commandments is Thou Shalt Not Kill, but comes along a war in which killing becomes not only permissible but an absolute virtue and all our good Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and even Buddhists, who supposedly are not even allowed to kill mosquitoes, wade in with sheer happiness."

"War releases abnormal passions," Ross said grudgingly.

"You don't need a war. Look at the Germans, supposedly one of our most highly civilized people. When the Nazi government released all restraints on persecution of the Jews, gypsies and others, you know what happened. This began in peace time, not in war."

Dr. Braun shifted in his chair. He said, his voice low, "We needn't look beyond our own borders. The manner in which our people conducted themselves against the Amerinds from the very beginning of the white occupation of North America was quite shocking."

Ross said to him, "I thought you were on my side. The Indian wars were a long time ago. We're more advanced now."

Dr. Braun said softly, "My father fought against Geronimo in Arizona. It wasn't so long ago as all that."

Ross Wooley felt the argument going against him and lashed back. "We've been over and over this, what's your point?"

Patricia said doggedly, "The same point I tried to make from the beginning. This discovery must not be generally released. We'll simply have to suppress it."

The door opened behind them. They turned. Nothing was there. Ross, scowling, lumbered to his feet to walk over and close it.

"Hey, take it easy," a voice laughed. "Don't walk right into a guy."

Ross stopped, startled.

Dr. Braun and Patricia stood up and stared, too.

Crowley laughed. "You all look like you're seeing a ghost."

Ross rumbled a grudging chuckle. "It'd be all right if we *saw* the ghost, it's not seeing you that's disconcerting."

The air began to shimmer, somewhat like heat on the desert's face.

Crowley said, "Hey, the stuff's wearing off. Where're my clothes?"

"Where you left them. There in that bedroom," Ross said. "We'll wait for you." He went back and rejoined his associates. The door to the bedroom opened, there was a shimmering, more obvious now, and then the door closed behind it.

"He rejoined us just in time," Dr. Braun murmured. "Another ten minutes and he would have ... umah ... *materialized* down on the street."

Ross hadn't finished the discussion. He said, his face in all but pout, "What you don't realize, Pat, is the world has gone beyond the point where scientific discoveries can be suppressed. If we try to keep the lid on this today, the Russians or Chinese, or somebody, will hit on it tomorrow."

Patricia said impatiently, "Good heavens, let's don't bring the Cold War into it."

Ross opened his mouth to snap something back at her, closed it again and shrugged his bulky shoulders angrily.

In a matter of less than ten minutes the bedroom door reopened and this time a grinning Crowley emerged, fully dressed. He said, "Man, that was a devil of an experience!"

They saw him to a chair and had him talk it all through. He was candid enough, bubbling over with it all.

In the some eleven and a half hours he'd been on his own, he had covered quite an area of Manhattan.

Evidently the first hour had been spent in becoming used to the startling situation. He couldn't even see himself, which, to his surprise affected walking and even use of his hands. You had to get used to it. Then there was the fact that he was nude and *felt* nude and hence uncomfortable walking about in mixed pedestrian traffic. But that phase passed. Early in the game he found that there was small percentage in getting into crowds. It led to all sorts of complications, including the starting of minor rows, one person thinking another was pushing when it was simply a matter of Crowley trying to get out from underfoot.

Then he went through a period of the wonder of it all. Being able to walk *anywhere* and observe people who had no suspicion that they were being observed. It was during that phase that he had sought out the hotel in which he had read the chesty French movie actress Brigitte Loren was in residence. Evidently, he'd hit the nail right on the head. Brigitte was at her toilette when he arrived on scene. In telling about this, Crowley leered amusedly at Patricia from the side of his eyes. She ignored him.

Then he'd gone through a period when the full realization of his immunity had hit him.

At this point he turned to Braun, "Hey, Doc, you ever eaten any caviar? You know, that Russian stuff. Supposed to be the most expensive food in the world."

The doctor cleared his throat. "Small amounts in hors d'oeuvres at cocktail parties."

"Well, maybe I'm just a country boy but the stuff tastes like fish eggs to me. Anyway, to get back to the story... ."

He'd gone into Tiffany's and into some of the other swank shops. And then into a bank or two, and stared at the treasures of Manhattan.

At this point he looked at Ross. "You know, just being invisible don't mean all that. How you going to pick up a wad of thousand dollar bills

and just walk out the front door with them? Everybody'd see the dough just kind of floating through the air."

"I came to the same conclusion myself, when I experimented," Ross said wryly.

He had ridden on the subways ... free. He had eaten various food in various swank restaurants. He had even had drinks in name bars, sampling everything from Metaxa to vintage champagne. He was of the opinion that even though he remained invisible for the rest of his years, he'd still stick to bourbon and beer.

He had gone down to Wall Street and into the offices of the top brokerage firms and into the sanctum sanctorums of the wealthiest of mucky-mucks but had been too impatient to stick around long enough to possibly hear something that might be profitable. He admitted, grudgingly, that he wouldn't have known what to listen for anyway. Frustrated there, he had gone back uptown and finally located the hangout of one of the more renown sports promoters who was rumored to have gangster connections and was currently under bail due to a boxing scandal. He had stayed about that worthy's office for an hour, gleaning nothing more than several dirty jokes he'd never heard before.

All this activity had wearied him so he went to the Waldorf, located an empty suite in the tower and climbed into bed for a nap after coolly phoning room service to give him a call in two hours. That had almost led to disaster. Evidently, someone on room service had found the suite to be supposedly empty and had sent a boy up to investigate. However, when he had heard the door open, Crowley had merely rolled out of the bed and left, leaving a startled bellhop behind staring at rumpled bed-clothes which had seemed to stir of their own accord.

The rest of the day was little different from the first hours. He had gone about gawking in places he couldn't have had he been visible. Into the dressing room of the Roxie, into the bars of swank private clubs, into the offices of the F.B.I. He would have liked to have walked in on a poker game with some real high rollers playing, such as Nick the Greek, but he didn't have the time nor know-how to go about finding one.

Crowley wound it all up with a gesture of both hands, palms upward. "I gotta admit, it was fun, but what the devil good is it?"

They looked at him questioningly.

Crowley said, "I mean, how's it practical? How can you make a buck out of it, if you turn it over to the public, like? Everybody'd go around robbing everybody else and you'd all wind up equal."

Dr. Braun chuckled in deprecation. "There would be various profitable uses, Don. One priceless one would be scientific observation of wild life. For that matter there would be valid usage in everyday life. There are often personal reasons for not wishing to be observed. Celebrities, for instance, wishing to avoid crowds."

"Yeah," Crowley laughed, "or a businessman out with his secretary."

Dr. Braun frowned. "Of course, there are many other aspects. It would mean the end of such things as the Iron Curtain. And also the end of such things as American immigration control. There are many, many ramifications, Don, some of which frighten us. The world would be never quite the same."

Crowley leaned forward confidentially. "Well, I'll tell you. I was thinking it all out. What we got to do is turn it over to the Army and soak them plenty for it."

The others ignored his cutting himself a piece of the cake.

Ross Wooley merely grunted bitterly.

Patricia said impatiently, "We've thought most of these things through, Don. However, Dr. Braun happens to be quite a follower of Lord Russell."

Crowley looked at her blankly.

"He's a pacifist," she explained.

Braun pushed his glasses back more firmly on his nose and said, gently, "The military already have enough gadgets to destroy quite literally everything and I trust one set of them no more than the other. If *both* sides had our discovery, then, very well, each would go about attempting to find some manner of penetrating the invisibility, or taking various measures to protect their top secrets. But to give it to just one would be such an advantage that the other would have to embark immediately upon a desperate attack before the advantage could be fully realized. If we turn this over to the Pentagon, for exclusive use, the Soviets would have to begin a preventative war as soon as they learned of its existence."

"You a red?" Crowley said, scowling.

The doctor shrugged hopelessly. "No," he said.

Crowley turned to the other two. "If you think it's the patriotic thing to do, why don't one of you sell it to the government?"

Patricia said testily, "You don't understand, Don. Even if we were so thoroughly in disagreement that we would act unilaterally, we couldn't. You see, this is a three-way discovery. No one of us knows the complete process."

His face twisted. "Look, maybe some of this egghead stuff doesn't get through to me but I'm not stupid, see? You got the stuff, haven't you? You gave me that shot this morning."

Braun took over, saying reasonably, "Don, this discovery was hit upon by accident. The three of us are employed in the laboratories of a medical research organization. I am the department head. Patricia and Ross were doing some routine work on a minor problem when they separately stumbled upon some rather startling effects, practically at the same time. Each, separately, brought their discoveries to me, and, working you might say intuitively, I added some conclusions of my own, and ... well, I repeat, the discovery was stumbled upon."

Crowley assimilated that. "None of you knows how to do it, make those injections like, by himself?"

"That is correct. Each knows just one phase of the process. Each must combine with the other two."

Patricia said impatiently, "And thus far we wish to keep it that way. Rossie believes the discovery should be simultaneously revealed on a world-wide basis, and let man adapt to it as best he can. I think it should be suppressed until man has grown up a little—if he ever does. The doctor vacillates between the two positions. What he would truly like to see, is the method kept only for the use of qualified scientists, but even our good doctor realizes what a dream that is."

Crowley took them all in, one at a time. "Well, what the devil are you going to do?"

"That's a good question," Ross said unhappily.

"This experiment was a farce," Patricia said irritably. "After all our trouble locating Don, our *Common Man*, we have found out nothing that we didn't know before. His reactions were evidently largely similar to our own and... ." She broke it off and frowned thoughtfully. The other three looked at her questioningly.

Patricia said, "You know, we simply haven't seen this thing through as yet."

"What do you mean, Pat?" Ross growled.

She turned to him. "We haven't given Don the chance to prove which one of us is right. One day is insufficient. Half the things he wished to do, such as sneaking around picking up stock tips in Wall Street and inside information on sporting events... ."

"Hey, take it easy," Crowley protested. "I was just, like, curious."

Ross said heatedly, "That's not fair. I'll admit, I, too, thought of exactly the same possibilities. But *thinking* about them and going through with them are different things. Haven't you ever thought about what you'd do if given the chance to be world-wide supreme dictator? But, truly, if the job was offered, would you take it?"

"Good heavens," Patricia said disgustedly, "remind me to break off our engagement if I haven't already done it. I hate overpowering men. All I'm saying is that we'll have to give Don at least a week. One day isn't enough."

Dr. Braun cocked his head to one side and said uncomfortably, "I'm not sure but that in a week's time our friend Don might be able... . See here, Don, do you mind going on down to the hotel's bar while we three talk this through?"

Crowley obviously took umbrage at that, but there was nothing to be done. Frowning peevishly, he left.

The doctor looked from one to the other of his associates. "By Caesar, do you realize the damage friend Don could accomplish in a week's time?"

Patricia laughed at him. "That's what I keep telling the two of you. Do you realize the damage *any* person could do with invisibility? Not to speak of giving it to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the world."

Ross said, "We've started this, lets go through with it. I back Pat's suggestion, that we give Don sufficient serum to give him twelve hours of invisibility a day for a full week. However, we will ration it out to him day by day, so that if things get out of hand we can cut his supply."

"That's an idea," Patricia said. "And I suspect that within half the period we'll all be convinced that the process will have to be suppressed."

Ross leaned forward. "Good. I suggest we three keep this suite and get Don a room elsewhere, so he won't be inhibited by our continual presence. Once a day we'll give him enough serum for one shot and he can take it any time he wishes to." He ran his beefy hand back through his

red crew cut in a gesture of satisfaction. "If he seems to get out of hand, we'll call it all off."

Dr. Braun cleared his throat unhappily. "I have premonitions of disaster, but I suppose if we've come this far we should see the experiment through."

Patricia said ungraciously, "At least the lout will be limited in his accomplishments by his lack of imagination. Imagine going into that French girl's dressing room."

"Yeah," Ross said ludicrously trying to make his big open face look dreamy.

"You wretch," Patricia laughed. "The wedding is off!"

But Crowley was no lout. He was full of the folk wisdom of his people.

God helps those who help themselves.

It's each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.

Not to speak of.

Never give a sucker an even break.

If I didn't do it, somebody else would.

Had he been somewhat more of a student he might also have run into that nugget of the ancient Greek. *Morals are the invention of the weak to protect themselves from the strong.*

Once convinced that the three eggheads were incapable of realizing the potentialities of their discovery, he had little difficulty in arguing himself into the stand that he should. It helped considerably to realize that in all the world only four persons, including himself, were aware of the existence of the invisibility serum.

He spent the first day in what Marx called in "Das Kapital" the "original accumulation of capital," although it would seem unlikely that even in the wildest accusations of the most confirmed Marxist, no great fortune was ever before begun in such wise.

It was not necessary, he found, to walk into a large bank and simply seemingly levitate the money out the front door. In fact, that would have meant disaster. However, large sums of money are to be found elsewhere on Manhattan and for eleven hours Crowley used his native ingenuity and American know-how, most of which had been gleaned from watching TV crime shows. By the end of the day he had managed to accumulate in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars and was

reasonably sure that the news would not get back to his sponsors. The fact was, he had cleaned out the treasuries of several numbers rackets and those of two bookies.

It was important, he well realized, that he be well under way before the three eggheads decided to lower the boom.

The second day he spent making his preliminary contacts, an operation that was helped by his activities of the day before. He was beginning already to get the feel of the underworld element with which he had decided he was going to have to work, at least in the early stages of his operations.

Any leader, be he military, political or financial, knows that true greatness lies in the ability to choose assistants. Be you a Napoleon with his marshals, a Roosevelt with his brain trust, a J. P. Morgan with his partners, the truism applies. No great leader has ever stood alone.

But Crowley also knew instinctively that he was going to have to keep the number of his immediate associates small. They were going to have to know his secret, and no man is so naïve as not to realize that while one person can keep a secret, it becomes twice as hard for two and from that point on the likelihood fades in a geometric progression.

On the fifth day he knocked on the door of the suite occupied by Dr. Braun and his younger associates and pushed his way in without waiting for response.

The three were sitting around awaiting his appearance and to issue him his usual day's supply of serum. They greeted him variously, Patricia with her usual brisk, almost condescending smile; Dr. Braun with a gentle nod and a speaking of his first name; Ross Wooley sourly. Ross obviously had some misgivings, the exact nature of which he couldn't quite put his finger upon.

Crowley grinned and said, "Hello, everybody."

"Sit down, Don," Braun said gently. "We have been discussing your experiment."

While the newcomer was finding his seat, Patricia said testily, "Actually, we are not quite happy about your reports, Don. We feel an ... if you'll pardon us ... an evasive quality about them. As though you aren't completely frank."

"In short," Ross snapped, "have you been pulling things you haven't told us about?"

Crowley grinned at them. "Now you folks are downright suspicious."

Dr. Braun indicated some notes on the coffee table before him. "It seems hardly possible that your activities would be confined largely to going to the cinema, to the swankier night clubs and eating in the more famed restaurants."

Crowley's grin turned into a half embarrassed smirk. Patricia thought of a small boy who had been caught in a mischief but was still somewhat proud of himself. He said, "Well, I gotta admit that there's been a few things. Come on over to my place and I'll show you." He looked at Braun. "Hey, Doc, about how much is one of them Rembrandt paintings worth?"

Braun rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, "Great Caesar," he murmured. He came to his feet and looked around at the rest of them. "Let us go over there and learn the worst," he said.

At the curb, before the hotel, Ross Wooley looked up and down the street for a cab.

Crowley said, his voice registering self-deprecation, "Over here."

Over here was a several toned, fantastically huge hover-limousine, a nattily dressed, sharp-looking, expressionless-faced young man behind the wheel.

The three looked at Crowley.

He opened the door. "Climb in folks. Nothing too good for you scientists, eh?"

Inside, sitting next to a window with Patricia beside him and Dr. Braun at the far window, and with Ross in a jump seat, Crowley said expansively, "This is Larry. Larry, this is Doc Braun and his friends I was telling you about, Ross Wooley and Pat O'Gara. They're like scientists."

Larry said, "Hi," without inflection, and tooled the heavy car out into the traffic.

Ross spun on Crowley. "Don, where'd you get this car?"

Crowley laughed. "You'll see. Take it easy. You'll see a lot of things."

They were too caught up in their own thoughts and in the barrage of demands they were leveling at Crowley to notice direction. It wasn't until they were already on the George Washington Bridge that Patricia blurted, "Don, this isn't the way to your hotel!"

Crowley said tolerantly, "Take it easy, Pat. We're taking a short detour. Something I have to show you in Jersey."

"I don't like this," Ross snapped. The redhead shifted his heavy shoulders in a reflexive protest against the confining tweed coat he wore.

"Relax," Crowley told him reasonably. "I've been thinking things out quite a bit and I've got a lot to discuss with you folks."

They were across the bridge now and Larry headed into the maze which finally unraveled itself to the point that it was obvious they were heading north. Larry hit the lift lever and they rose ten feet from the surface.

Dr. Braun said evenly, "You had no intention of taking us to your room. You used that as a ruse to get us out of our hotel and, further, across the bridge until we are now in a position where it's quite impossible for us to summon police assistance."

Crowley grinned. "That's right, Doc. Didn't I tell you these three were real eggheads, Larry? Look how quick he figured that out."

Larry grunted in what might have been amusement.

Ross, growling low in his throat, turned suddenly in his jump seat and grabbed Crowley by the coat front. "What's going on here?"

Crowley snapped, "Larry!"

From seemingly nowhere, the chauffeur had produced a thin black automatic and was now lazily pointing it, not so much at Ross Wooley as at Dr. Braun and Patricia. He said evenly, softly, "Easy, friend."

Ross released his grip, "Put that thing away," he blurted.

"Sure, sure," Larry said, his voice all but disinterested. The gun disappeared.

Crowley, only slightly ruffled, said now, "Take it easy, Ross. Nothing's going to happen to you. I'm going to need you folks and I'm going to treat you right."

"Where are we going?" Ross growled.

"I had the boys rent me a big estate like up in the Catskills. Big place, nice and quiet. In fact, the last tenants used it for one of these rest sanitariums. You know, rich people with DTs or trying to get a monkey off their back."

"The boys?" Patricia said softly.

He looked at her and grinned again. Crowley was obviously enjoying himself. "I got a few people working for me," he explained.

Dr. Braun blurted, "You fool! You mean you've revealed the existence of the process Pat, Ross and I worked out to a group of ignoramuses?"

Crowley said angrily, "Now look, Doc, let's don't get on that bit. Maybe I'm just a country boy but I'm as smart as the next man. Just because some of you eggheads spend half your life in college don't mean you've got any monopoly on good common sense. I went to the school of hard knocks, understand, and I got plenty of diplomas to prove it. Take it easy on that ignoramus talk."

Patricia said suddenly, "Don's right, Dr. Braun. I think you've badly underestimated him."

Ross snorted sourly at that remark. "We've all underestimated him. Well, I think you'll agree that our friend Don will get no more injections of the invisibility serum."

Crowley chuckled.

They looked at him. Three sinkings of stomach taking place simultaneously.

"Now, you know I thought that might be your altitude... ."

"Attitude," Ross muttered.

"... So I went to the trouble of coming up to your suite last night and sort of confiscating the supply. By the looks of it, I'd say there was enough for another ten shots or so."

"See," Patricia said to Ross. "You're not as smart as you thought you were. Don's one up on you."

The estate which the "boys" had secured for Crowley was two or three miles out of Tannersville on a mountainside and quite remote. He took considerable pride in showing them about, although it was obvious that he had been here before only once himself.

He was obviously enjoying the situation thoroughly and had planned it out in some detail. Besides the empty-faced Larry, who had driven the car, they were introduced to two more of Crowley's confederates, neither of whom gave any indication that the three were present under duress. The first was a heavy-set, moist palmed southerner with a false air of the jovial. He shook hands heartily, said nothing with a good many words for a few minutes and then excused himself. The third confidant was an older man of sad mien who would have passed easily in the swankest of Washington, New York or London private clubs. He was introduced

simply as Mr. Whitely, greeted them pleasantly as though all were fellow guests, had a word to say about the weather then and passed on.

Patricia was frowning. "Your southern friend, Paul Teeter, it seems to me I've heard his name before."

Crowley grinned. "Oh, Paul's been in the news from time to time."

Ross was looking after Mr. Whitely who had disappeared into the main building. They were standing on the lawn, as part of the guided tour Crowley was giving them. He growled, "I suppose the two of them are experienced confidence men, or something."

"Take it easy with those cracks, Ross," Crowley said. "Whitely used to have a seat on the Stock Exchange. A real big shot. But that was before they disbarred him, or whatever they call it."

"See here," Dr. Braun said urgently. "We've had enough of all this, Don. I propose we go somewhere where it will be possible for us to bring you to your senses, and save you from disaster."

"Kind of a powwow, eh? O.K., Doc, come on in here." He led them to the entrance, conducted them inside and into a library that led off the main *entrada*. He said, "By the way, Larry has a few of his boys up here just kind of like estate watchmen. Some of them aren't much used to being out of the city and they get nervous. So... ."

Ross growled, "All right, all right, don't try to make like a third-rate villain in a B-Movie. You have guards about and it would be dangerous to try to leave without your permission."

"How about that?" Crowley exclaimed as though amazed. "Man, you eggheads catch on quick. Nothing like a college education." He waved them to chairs. "I'm going to have to leave for a while. Whitely's got some big deal brewing and we got to work it out." He grinned suddenly. "And Larry's got a different kind of deal. One he's been planning for years but hasn't been able to swing one or two details. It's a caution how many details a little man who wasn't there can handle in one of these king-size capers."

He had used the pseudo-criminal term, *caper*, with considerable satisfaction. Crowley was obviously having the time of his life.

"Very well," Braun said, "we'll wait." When the other had left the room, leaving the door open behind him, the doctor turned to his two younger associates. "What children we've been."

Ross Wooley growled unhappily, "Brother, we couldn't have picked a worse so-called Common Man, if we'd tried. That character is as nutty as a stuffed date. Do you realize what he's in a position to do?"

Patricia twisted her mouth thoughtfully. "I wonder if any of us really realize. I am afraid even with all our speculation, we never truly thought this out."

Dr. Braun pushed his glasses back on his nose with a forefinger. He shook his head. "You make a mistake, Ross. We didn't make a bad choice in our selection of Don Crowley for our typical Common Man."

Ross looked at him and snorted.

Braun said doggedly, "Remember, we attempted to find the average man, the common man, the little man, the man in the street. Well, it becomes obvious to me that we did just that."

Patricia said thoughtfully, "I don't know. I'm inclined to think that from the beginning you two have underestimated Don. He has certainly shown considerable ingenuity. Do you realize that he's done all this in a matter of less than a week?"

"Done all *what*?" Ross said sarcastically.

She gestured. "Look at this establishment. He's obviously acquired considerable money, and he already has an organization, or at least the beginnings of one."

"That is beside the point," Braun said ruefully. "I say that he is reacting as would be expected. As the average man in the street would react given the opportunity to seize almost unlimited power, and with small chance of reprisal."

Patricia shrugged as though in disagreement.

Braun looked at Ross Wooley. "Close the door, Ross. Lord knows when we'll have another chance to confer. Obviously, something must be done."

Ross came quickly to his feet, crossed to the door, looked up and down the hallway which was empty and then closed the door behind him. He came back to the others and drew his chair in closer so that they could communicate in low voices.

Braun said, "One thing is definite. We must not allow him to secure further serum. For all we know, he might be planning to inject some of those gangsters he's affiliated himself with."

Patricia shook her head thoughtfully. "I still think you underestimate Don. He must realize he can't trust them. At this stage, he has had to confide in at least two or three, fully to utilize his invisibility. But in the long run it isn't to his advantage to have *anybody* know about it. If the authorities, such as the F.B.I., began looking for an invisible man, sooner or later they would penetrate the field of invisibility."

"You mean you think Crowley will use these men for a time and then ... destroy them?"

"He'll have to, or sooner or later the secret will be out."

Braun said in soft logic, "If he can't allow anyone to know about it, then we, too, must be destroyed."

Ross growled, "Then we've got to finish him first."

Patricia said, "Now, I don't know. Don is showing considerably more sense than you two evidently give him credit for. I think in many ways what he's done is quite admirable. He's seen his chance—and has grasped it. Why, I wouldn't be surprised that Don will be the most powerful man in the country within months."

The two men were staring at her. Ross sputtered, "Have you gone completely around the bend? Are you defending this ... this... ."

A voice chuckled, "Mind your language, Buster. Just take it easy or you'll wind up with some missing teeth."

Ross jumped to his feet as though couched with an electric prod. Dr. Braun stiffened in his chair and his eyes darted about the room.

Patricia alone seemed collected. "Don Crowley!" she exclaimed. "You should be ashamed of yourself, listening in on private conversations."

"Yeah," the voice said. "However, it's handy to know what the other side is dreaming up in the way of a bad time for you. Sit down, Buster. I've got a few things to say."

Muttering, Ross resumed his place. The doctor sighed deeply and sank back onto the sofa he had been occupying. The three could see an indentation magically appear in the upholstery of an easy-chair across from them.

Crowley's voice said confidently, "You know, from the first, I've kept telling you eggheads that I'm not stupid, but none of you've bothered to listen. You think just because you spent six or eight years of your life in some college that you're automatically smarter than other people. But I

got a theory, like, that it doesn't make any difference if you spent your whole life going to college, you still wouldn't wind up smart if you didn't start that way."

Ross began to mutter something, but Crowley snapped, "Shut up for a minute, I'm talking." He resumed his condescending tone. "Just for example, take a couple of guys who got to the top. Edison in science and Khrushchev in politics. For all practical purposes, neither of them went to school at all. Khrushchev didn't even learn to read until he was twenty-eight years old.

"Then take Dr. Braun here. He's spent half his life in school, and where's it got him? He'd make more dough if he owned the local garage and dealer franchise for one of the automobile companies in some jerkwater town. And look at Ross. He'd probably make more money playing pro football than he does messing around with all those test tubes and Bunsen burners and everything. What good has all the school done either?"

Dr. Braun said gently, "Could we get to the point?"

"Take it easy, Doc. I'm in charge here. You just sit and listen. The point is, you three with your smart-Aleck egghead education started off thinking Mr. Common Man, like you call me, is stupid. Well, it just so happens I'm not. Take Pat there. She's smarter than you two, but she had the same idea. That this here country boy isn't as smart as she is. She's going to fox him, see? As soon as she saw the way the cards were falling, she started buttering up to me. She even figured out that I was probably right in this room listening to you planning how to trip me up. So she pretended to take sides against you."

"Why, Don!" Patricia protested.

"Come off it, kid. You probably hate my guts worse than the others. You were the one who thought this *particular* average man was a slob. That all common people were slobs."

Patricia's face went expressionless, but Ross, knowing her well, could sense her dismay. Crowley was right. She had been trying to play a careful game but their supposedly average man had seen through her.

Crowley's voice went thoughtful. "I been doing a lot of thinking this week. A lot of it. And you want to know something? You know what I decided? I decided that everybody talks a lot about the Common Man but actually he's never had a chance to, like, express himself. He's never been able to put over the things he's always wanted."

"Haven't you ever heard of democracy?" Ross said sourly. "Who do you think elects our officials?"

"Shut up, I told you. I'm talking now. Sure, every four years the lousy politicians come around and they stick coonskin caps on their heads or Indian bonnets and start saying ain't when they make their speeches. Showing they're just folks, see? They go out into the country, and stick a straw in their mouth and talk about crops to the farmers, all that sort of thing. But they aren't *really* common folks. Most of them are lawyers or bankers or something. They run those political parties and make all the decisions themselves. The Common Man never really has anything to say about it."

Braun said reasonably, "You have your choice. If you think one candidate is opposed to your interests you can elect the other."

Crowley grunted his contempt. "But they're both the same. No, there hasn't been no common man in Washington since Lincoln, and maybe he wasn't. Well, I'll tell you something. The kind of talk I hear down in the corner saloon from just plain people makes a lot more sense to me than all this stuff the politicians pull."

Dr. Braun cleared his throat and stared at the seemingly empty chair from whence came the other's belligerent voice. "Are you thinking of entering politics, Don?"

"Maybe I am."

"Good heavens," Patricia ejaculated.

"Oh, I'm not smart enough, eh? Well, listen baby, the eggheads don't seem to be so great in there. Maybe it's time the Common Man took over."

Dr. Braun said reasonably, "But see here, Crowley, the ability to achieve invisibility doesn't give you any advantages in swinging elections or... ." He broke off in mid-sentence and did a mental double take.

Crowley laughed in contempt. "The biggest thing you need to win elections, Doc, is plenty of dough. And I'll have that. But I'll also have the way to do more muck-raking than anybody in history. *I'll* sit in on every important private get-together those crook politicians have. I'll get the details of every scheme they cook up. I'll get into any safe or safe deposit box. I'll have the common people, you sneer so much about, screaming for their blood."

Ross rumbled, "What do you expect to accomplish in office, Crowley?"

The voice became expansive. "Lots of things. Take this Cold War. If you drop into any neighborhood bar, you'll hear what the common man thinks about it."

The three of them stared at the seemingly empty chair.

"Drop the bomb first!" Crowley snapped. "Finish those reds off before they start it. In fact, I'm not even sure they've got the bomb. They're not smart enough to... ."

"There was sputnik, you know," Ross interrupted sourly.

"Yeah, but built by those captured German scientists. We're way ahead of those Russkies in everything. Hit 'em now. Finish 'em off. The eggheads in Washington are scared of their own shadows. Another thing I'd end is getting suckered in by those French and English politicians. What does America need with those countries? They always start up these wars and get us to bail them out. And I say stop all this foreign aid and keep the money in our own country.

"And we can do a lot of cleaning up right here, too. We got to kick all the commies out of the government. Make all the commies and socialists and these egghead liberals, illegal. In fact, I'm in favor of shooting them. When you got an enemy, finish him off. And take the Jews. I'm not anti-Semitic, like, understand. Some of my best friends are Jews. But you got to realize that wherever they go they cause trouble. They stick together and take over the best businesses and all. O.K., you know what I say? I say kick them out of the country. And they all came over here poor and made their money here. So let them leave the way they came. We'll, like, confiscate all their property except like personal things."

Patricia had closed her eyes in pain long before this. She said, softly, "I imagine somewhere along in here we'll get to the Negroes."

"I'm not against them. Just so they stay in their place. But this integration stuff is bunk. You got to face facts. Negroes aren't as smart as white people, neither are Chinks or Mexicans or Puerto Ricans. So, O.K., give them their own schools, up to high school is all they need, and let them have jobs like waiters and janitors and like that. They shouldn't take a white man's job and they shouldn't be allowed to marry white people. It deteriorates the race, like."

Crowley was really becoming wound up now. Wound up and expansive. "There's a lot of things I'd change, see. Take freedom of speech and press and like that. Sure I believe in that, I'm one hundred per cent American. But you can't allow people to talk against the government.

Freedom of speech is O.K., but you can't let a guy jump up in the middle of a theater and yell fire."

"Why not?" Ross growled. "Freedom of speech is more important than a few movie houses full of people. Besides, if one man is allowed to jump up and yell fire, then somebody else can yell out 'You're a liar, there is no fire.'"

"You're not funny," Crowley said ominously.

"I wasn't trying to be," Ross muttered, and then blurred into sudden action. He shot to his feet, and then, arms extended, dashed toward the source of the voice. He hit the chair without slowing, grappled crazily.

"I've got him!" He wrestled awkwardly, fantastically, seemingly in an insane tumbling without opponent.

Patricia was on her feet. She grasped an antique bronze candle-holder and darted toward the now fallen chair and to where Ross was wrestling desperately on the floor. Crowley was attempting to shout, but was largely smothered.

Patricia held the candlestick at the ready, trying to find an opening, trying to locate the invisible Crowley's head.

Frederick Braun staggered to his own feet, bewildered, shaking.

A voice from the door said flatly, "O.K., that's it." Then, sharper, "I said cut it out. You all right, Mr. Crowley?"

It was Larry. His thin black automatic was held almost negligently in his right hand. He ran his eyes up and down Patricia, taking in the candlestick weapon. His ordinarily empty face registered a flicker of amused approval.

Patricia gasped, "Oh, no," dropped her bludgeon and sank into a chair, her head in her hands.

Ross, his face in dismay, came slowly to his feet. The redhead stared at the gunman, momentarily considering further attack. Larry, ignoring both Braun and Patricia, swung the gun to cover him exclusively. "I wouldn't," he said emptyly.

Of a sudden, Ross' head jerked backward. His nose flattened, crushingly, and then spurted blood. He reeled back, his head flinging this way and that, bruises and cuts appeared magically.

Crowley's voice raged, "You asked for it, wise guy. How do you like these apples?"

The saturnine Larry chuckled sourly. "Hey, take it easy, chief. You'll kill the guy."

Ross had crumpled to the floor. There were still sounds of blows. Crowley raged, "You're lucky I'm not wearing shoes, I'd break every rib in your body!"

Patricia was staring in hopeless horror. She said sharply, "Don, remember you need Ross! You need all of us! Without all of us there can be no more serum."

The blows stopped.

"There will be no more serum anyway," Braun said shakily. The thin little man still stood before his chair having moved not at all since the action began.

Crowley's heavy breathing could be heard but he managed a snarl. "That's what you think, Doc."

Braun said, "By Caesar, I absolutely refuse to... ."

Crowley interrupted ominously. "You know, Doc, that's where this particular common man has it all over you eggheads. You spend so much time reading, you don't take in the action shows on TV. Now what you're thinking is that even if we were going to twist your arm a little, you'd stick to your guns. But suppose, like, it was Pat we was working on, while you had to sit and watch."

The elderly man's brave front collapsed and his thin shoulders slumped.

Crowley barked a laugh.

Patricia by now, was bent over the unconscious Ross crying even as she tried to help him.

Crowley said to the silent, all but disinterested Larry, "Have these three put in separate rooms in that section they used for the violent wing when the place was a nuthouse. Have a good guard and see they don't talk back and forth."

"You're the boss," Larry said languidly.

Crowley was thorough. For that they had to give him credit. They were kept divided, each in a different room-cell and with at least two burly, efficient guards on constant watch. They were fed on army-type trays and their utensils checked carefully. There was no communication allowed—even with the guard.

The second day, Crowley took measures to see their disappearance raised no alarm at either their place of employment or at their residences. This raised few problems since all were single and all had already taken off both from the job and from their homes in order to carry out their experiment. Crowley forced them to write further notes and letters finding excuses for extending their supposed vacations. He also had Larry return to the hotel suite, pay their bill, pack their things and bring them to the Catskill estate which had become their prison.

He had them make up lists of materials and equipment they would need for further manufacture of the serum upon which they had stumbled, and sent off men to acquire the things.

And on three occasions during the following weeks he had them brought from their cells and spent an hour or so with them at lunch or dinner. Crowley evidently needed an audience beyond that of his henchmen. The release of his basic character, formerly repressed, was progressing geometrically and there seemed to be an urgency to crow, to brag, to boast.

On the third of these occasions he was already seated at the table when they were ushered into the dining room. Crowley dismissed the guards with a wave of his hand as though they were liveried servants.

All had eaten but there were liqueurs and coffee, cigars and cigarettes on the broad table.

Ross sank into a chair and growled, "Well, what hath the great man wrought by now?"

Crowley grinned at him, poured coffee and then a dollop of Napoleon brandy into it. He gestured with a hand. "Help yourselves, folks. How you feeling? You been getting all the books you wanted? You look kind of peaked, Pat."

"Miss O'Gara to you, you ape with delusions of grandeur," she snapped. "When are you going to let us out of those prison cells?"

Crowley wasn't provoked. The strong can afford to laugh at the malcontented weak. "That's one of the things you never know," he said easily. "You sure you want out? Something the Doc said the other day had a lotta fact in it. The fewer people know about this secret of mine, the better off I'll be and the better off I am, the better off the whole country is going to be and I gotta think about that. I got responsibilities."

"A combination of Engine Charley and Louis XIV, eh?" Ross muttered, running his beefy hand back over his crew cut. It was a relief to get out

of his room and talk with the others, but he didn't want Crowley to see that.

"What's that?" the other was impatient of conversation that went above his head.

Dr. Braun explained gently. "One said, *I am the State*, and the other, *anything that's good for my corporation is good for the United States*—or something quite similar."

Crowley sipped at his coffee royal. "Well, anyway, Pat, the day you're ready to leave that cell, you'd better start worrying cause that'll mean I don't need you any more."

Ross growled, "You didn't answer my question. Robbed any banks lately, great man?"

The other eyed him coldly. "Take it easy, Buster. Maybe in the early stages of the Common Man Movement we hafta take some strong-arm measures, but that stage's about finished."

Patricia O'Gara was interested in spite of herself. She said. "You mean you already have all the money you need?"

He was expansive. Obviously there was nothing to lose with these three and he liked a sounding board. In spite of his alleged contempt for eggheads there was an element in Crowley which wished to impress them, to grant him equal status in their own estimations.

"There's a devil of a lot to know about big finance. You need a starter, but once you get it, the stuff just rolls in automatic." He grinned suddenly, almost boyishly. "Especially when you got a certain little advantage, like me."

Braun said, interestedly, "How do you put your advantage to work?"

"Well, now, I gotta admit we aren't quite out of the woods. We need more capital to work with, but after tonight we'll have it. Remember that Brinks job up in New England a long time ago? Well, we got something lined up even bigger. I work with Larry and his boys to pull it. Then there's another thing cooking that Whitely's been keeping tabs on. It looks like IBM is going to split its stock, three for one. I gotta attend their next secret executive meeting and find out. If they do, we buy in just before, see? We buy on margin, buy options, all that sort of jazz. Whitely knows all about it. Then we got another big deal in Washington. Looks like the government might devalue the dollar. Whitely explained it to me, kind of. Anyway, I got to sit in on a conference the President's gonna have. If they really decide to devalue, then Whitely and me, we go ahead

and put every cent we got into Swiss gold. Then the day after devaluation, we switch it all back into dollars again. Double our money. Oh, we got all sorts of angles, Doc."

"By Caesar," Braun ejaculated. "You seem to have."

Patricia had poured herself some coffee and was sipping it, black, even as she stared at him. "But, Don, what do you need all this money for? You already have more than plenty. Why not call it all off. Get out from under."

Ross grunted, "Too late, Pat. Can't you see? He's got the power urge already."

Crowley ignored him and turned to her, pouring more coffee and cognac for himself. "I'm not running up all this dough just for me. You think you're the only one's got ideals, like? Let me tell you, I might just be a country boy but I got ambitions to put some things right in this world."

"Such as... ." Patricia prodded, bitterness in her voice.

"Aw, we went through all that the other day. The thing is, now it's really under way. If you was seeing the newspapers these days, you'd know about the Common Man Party."

"Oh, oh," Ross muttered unhappily.

"It's just getting under way," Crowley said modestly, "but we're hiring two of the top Madison Avenue outfits to handle publicity and we're recruiting some of the best practical politicians in the field."

"Practical politicians!" Ross snorted. "Types like Huey Long, McCarthy, Pendergast, I suppose."

The other misunderstood him. "Yeah, and even better. We're going in big for TV time, full-page ads in the newspapers and magazines. That sort of thing. The average man's getting tired of the same old talk from the Republicans and Democrats. Paul Teeter thinks we might have a chance in the next election, given enough dough to plow into it."

Ross leaned back disdainfully. "What a combination. Whitely, the broker who has been barred from activity on Wall Street; Teeter, the crooked politician, but with connections from top to bottom; and Larry, whatever his name is... ."

"Morazzoni," Crowley supplied. "You know where I first ran into his name? In one of them true crime magazines. He's a big operator."

"I'll bet he is," the redhead growled. "Probably with good Mafia connections. I'm surprised you haven't attempted to take over that outfit."

Crowley laughed abruptly. "We're working on that, pal. Just take it easy and all these things will work their way out. But meanwhile I didn't bring you jokers here to make snide remarks. I got work for you. I'm fresh out of that serum and you three are going to brew me up another batch."

They looked at him, Dr. Braun, Ross Wooley, Patricia O'Gara, their faces registering stubbornness, revolt and dismay.

He shook his head. "Larry and some of his boys have experience. I gotta admit, I wouldn't even want to watch."

"I'm for standing firm," Braun said stiffly. "There are but three of us. The most they can do is kill us. But if this man's insanity is released on the world... ."

Crowley was shaking his head in deprecation. "Like when you say the worst we can do is kill you. Man, haven't you heard about the Nazis and commies and all? You oughta read some of the men's adventure magazines. How do you think Joe Stalin got all them early Bolsheviks to confess? You think they weren't tough buzzards? Why make us go to all the trouble, when you'd just cave in eventually anyway? Save yourself the grief."

Patricia said impatiently, "He's right, I'm afraid. I would collapse rather quickly under physical coercion. You might last a bit longer, Ross possibly longer still. But in the end we would concede."

Crowley said, as though in amazement, "You know, eggheads aren't as stupid as some would reckon. O.K., folks, I got a laboratory all fixed up with your things. Let's go. Ah, Ross, old pal, I'm carrying heat, as Larry would say, so let's don't have any trouble, eh?"

He had been as good as his word in regards to the laboratory. It was obviously one of the rooms used by the staff when the place had been a sanitarium. Now, each of the three had all the equipment and supplies they required.

Crowley took a seat at the far end of the room, facing them. There had been a guard outside the door when they entered and a call would bring him in seconds. Even so, Crowley sat in such wise that his right hand was ready to plunge inside his coat to the gun that evidently was holstered there. He said, "O.K., folks, let's get about it."

It took them half an hour or so to sort out those materials each needed in his own contribution to the end product.

Their captor looked at his watch impatiently. "Let's get a move on, here. I thought this was going to take a few minutes."

Patricia said testily, "What's the hurry, Don?"

He grinned at her. "Tonight's the big night. This evening, just before closing, I walk into... . Well, you don't have to know the name. Like I said, it'll make the Brinks job look like peanuts. They lock up the place and leave, see? O.K., about two o'clock in the morning, when the city's dead, Larry and the boys drive up into an alley, behind. I go around, one by one, and sock the four guards on the back of the head. Then I open up for Larry and they take their time and clear the place out. From then on, we got all the dough we need to start pyramiding it up on the Stock Exchange and like that."

Patricia had drawn on rubber gloves, pulled a lab apron around her. She began reaching for test tubes, measuring devices. She murmured softly, "What keeps you from telling yourself you're nothing but a crook, Don? When we first met you—it seems a terribly long time ago, back there in Far Cry—you didn't seem to be such a bad egg."

"We didn't know, then, he was a cracked egg," Ross muttered. He looked to where Crowley slouched, his eyes narrow as though considering his chances of rushing the other. Crowley grinned and shook his head. "Don't try it, Buster."

Crowley looked at Patricia. "You don't get it, sister. It's like somebody or other said. The ends, uh, justify the means. That means... ."

"I know what it means," Patricia said impatiently.

Dr. Braun, who rather hopelessly was also beginning to work at the equipment their captor had provided, said reasonably, "Don, the greater number of the thinkers of the world have rejected that maxim. If you will, umah, analyze it, you will find that the end and the means are one."

"Yeah, yeah, a lot of complicated egghead gas. What I'm saying, Pat, is that what I'm eventually heading for is good for everybody. At least it's good for all real hundred per cent Americans. Everybody's going to go to college and guaranteed to come out with what you three got, a doctor's degree. Everybody's going to get a guaranteed annual wage, like, whether or not they can do any work. It's not a guy's fault if he gets sick or unemployed or something. Everybody... ."

"Shades of all the social-reformers who ever lived," Ross muttered.

"By Caesar," Braun said in despair, "I have an idea you'll get the vote of every halfwit in the country."

Crowley came to his feet. "I don't like that kind of talk, Doc. Maybe I'm just a country boy, but I know what the common man wants and what I'm going to do is give it to him."

Patricia looked up from her work long enough to frown at him. "What special are you going to get out of this, Don?"

That took him back for a moment and he scowled at her.

"Come, come," she said. "You've already admitted to we three just what you think and are going to do. Now, how do you picture yourself, after all this has been accomplished?"

His face suddenly broke into its grin, a somewhat sly element in it now. "You know, when I get this all worked out, the folks are going to be pretty thankful."

"I'll bet," Ross muttered. He, too, was working at his element of compounding the serum.

"Yeah, they will, Buster," Crowley said truculently. "And they're going to want to show it. You ever seen one of those movies like 'Ben Hur' back in Roman days? Can you imagine everybody in the whole country thinking you were the best guy ever lived? You know, like an Emperor."

"Like Caligula," Dr. Braun said softly.

"I don't know any of their names, but they really had it made. Snap your fingers and there's a big banquet with the best floor show in the world. Snap your fingers and here comes the sexiest dames in Hollywood. Snap your fingers and some big entertainment like a chariot race, or something. Once I put this over, the Common Man Party, that's the way people are going to feel about me and want to treat me."

"And if they don't, you'll make them?" Ross said sarcastically.

"You're too smart for your own britches, egghead," Crowley snarled. He looked at his watch. "Let's get this rolling. I got to get on down to the city and start this caper going."

Ross handed a test tube to Dr. Braun and began stripping the gloves from his hands. "That's my contribution," he said.

Patricia had already delivered hers. Dr. Braun combined them, then heated the compound, adding a distillate of his own. He said, "When this cools... ."

Crowley crossed the room to the door and said something to the guard there. He returned in a moment with an anthropoid ape in a cage. He sat it on the table and looked at them.

"O.K.," he said to Braun, his voice dangerous. "Let's see you inject the monk with this new batch of serum."

Braun raised his eyebrows.

The other watched him narrowly, saying nothing further.

Dr. Braun shrugged, located a hypodermic needle and prepared it. In a matter of moments, the animal was injected.

Ross Wooley said sourly, "Don't you trust your fellow man, Don?"

"No, I don't, and stop calling me Don. It's Dan. Daniel Crowley."

The three of them looked at him in bewilderment.

The ape was beginning to shimmer as though he was being seen through a window wet with driving rain.

"Don's my goody-goody brother. Used to live in the same house with me, but ever since we were kids and I got picked up on a juvenile delinquent rap for swiping a car, he's been snotty. Anyway, now he's moved out to Frisco."

Patricia blurted, "But ... but you let us believe you were Donald... ."

He brushed it off with a flick of his hand. "You said you had some deal where I could make me some money. O.K., I was between jobs."

The ape was invisible now. Crowley peered in at him. "Seems to work, all right."

Dr. Braun sighed. "I am not a Borgia, Daniel Crowley."

"You're not a what?"

"Never mind. I wouldn't poison even you, if that is what you feared."

Daniel Crowley took up the new container of serum and put a lid on it. He said, "I got to get going. The guy out in front will get you back to your rooms. No tricks with him, Buster"—he was talking directly to Ross—"he's already beat a couple of homicide raps."

Back in their cell-rooms, they found that there was but one guard. Evidently, the all-out robbery attempt to be held this night involved practically all of Larry Morazzoni's forces. Beyond that, this guard did not seem particularly interested in keeping them from talking back and forth to each other through the peepholes that centered their doors.

After a couple of hours during which time they largely held silence, immersed in their own thoughts, Dr. Braun called out, "Patricia, Ross, I should tender my apologies. It was my less than brilliant idea to find the average man and use him as a guinea pig."

"No apology necessary," Patricia said impatiently. "We all went into it with open eyes."

"But you were correct, Pat," the doctor said unhappily. "Our common man turned out to be a Frankenstein monster."

Ross growled, "That's the trouble. It turned out he wasn't our common man but his brother, whose petty criminal record evidently goes back to juvenile days."

"Even that doesn't matter," Patricia said testily. "I've about come to the conclusion that it wouldn't have made any difference *who* we'd put in Don's ... I mean Daniel Crowley's position. Man is too near the animal, as yet at least, to be trusted with such power. Any man."

"Why, Pat," Dr. Braun said doggedly, "I don't quite believe you correct. For instance, do you feel the same about me? Would I have reacted like our friend Dan?" He chuckled in deprecation.

"That's my point," she said. "I think you would ... ultimately. Once again look at the Caesars, they held godlike power."

"You're thinking of such as Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Commodus... ."

"I'm also thinking of such as Claudius, the scholar who was practically forced to take the Imperial mantle. And Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher who although bound up in learning himself allowed his family free rein in their vices and finally turned the Empire over to his son Commodus, one of the most vicious men of all time. But take Caligula and Nero if you will. Both of them stepped into power comparatively clean and with the best of prospects. Well approved, well loved. What happened to them when given power without restraint?"

Ross grumbled, "I admit I missed the boat, but not for the reasons Pat presents. In a sane society, our serum would be a valuable contribution. But in a dog eat dog world, where it's each man for himself, then it becomes a criminal tool."

Patricia said sarcastically, "And can you point out a sane society?"

Ross grunted. "No," he said. After a moment he added, "You know, in a way Crowley was right. We three eggheads didn't do so well up against what he called his common sense. I tried to slug him, with

negative results. Dr. Braun, you tried sweet reason on him. Forgive me if I laugh. Pat, you tried your womanly wiles, but he saw through that, too."

"The chickens have not all come home to roost," Patricia said mysteriously. "What time is it?"

Ross told her.

She called to the guard, "See here, you."

"Shut up. You ain't supposed to be talking at all. Go to sleep."

"I want to speak to Mr. Morazzoni. It's very important and you are going to be dreadfully sorry if you don't bring him."

"Larry can't be bothered. He's getting ready to go on down to the city."

"I know what he's doing, but if he doesn't listen to me, he's going to be very unhappy and probably full of bullet holes."

The guard came over to her door and stared at her for a long moment. He checked the lock on her door and then those of Dr. Braun and Ross Wooley. "We'll see who's going to be sorry," he grunted. He turned and left.

When he returned it was with both Larry Morazzoni and Paul Teeter, Dan Crowley's political adviser. Morazzoni growled, "What goes on? You squares looking for trouble?"

Patricia said testily, "I suggest you let us out of here, Mr. Morazzoni. If you do, we pledge not to press kidnaping charges against you. I believe you are aware of the penalty in this State."

"You trying to be funny?"

"Definitely not, Mr. Morazzoni," Patricia said icily. "Daniel Crowley bragged to us of your plans for tonight."

The hoodlum muttered a contemptuous obscenity under his breath.

Paul Teeter, the heavy-set southerner said jovially, "But what has this to do with releasing you, Miss O'Gara? Admittedly Dan is a bit indiscreet but... ." He let the sentence fade away.

"Yes," Patricia said. "I realize that he is a nonprofessional in your ranks, and have little doubt that eventually you would have surmounted whatever precautions he has taken to keep you in underling positions. That's beside the point. The point is that by this time Daniel Crowley has, ah, infiltrated the institution you expected to burglarize tonight. He is

inside, and you are still outside. There are four guards also inside, whom he is expected to eliminate before you can join him."

"He told you everything all right, the jerk," Larry said coldly. "But so what?"

"So Dan Crowley had us make up a new amount of serum tonight and tested it on a chimpanzee in the lab. If you'll go and check, you'll undoubtedly find the chimp is again visible."

The gunman looked at Paul Teeter blankly.

The other's reactions were quicker. "The serum lasts for twelve hours," Teeter barked.

"This batch lasts for three hours," Patricia said definitely. "Your friend Crowley is suddenly going to become visible right before the eyes of those four guards—and long before he had expected to eliminate them."

Teeter barked, "Larry, check that monkey."

Doc Braun spoke up for the first time since the appearance of the two. He said dryly, "You'll also notice that the animal is sound asleep. It seems that I added a slow-acting but rather potent sleeping compound to the serum."

The gunman started from the room in a rush.

Ross called after him, "If you'll look closely, you'll also note the chimp's skin has turned a brilliant red. There have been some basic changes in the pigment."

"Holy smokes," Paul Teeter protested, moping his face with a handkerchief. "Didn't he take any precautions against you people at all?"

Ross said, "He was too busy telling us how smart a country boy he happened to be."

Larry returned in moments, biting his lip in the first nervous manifestation any of them had ever seen in him. He took Teeter to one side.

Patricia called to them impatiently. "You have no time and no one to contact Crowley now. Don't be fools. Mend your bridges while you can. Let us out of here, and we'll prefer no charges."

Larry was a man of quick decisions. He snapped to the blank-faced guard who had assimilated only a fraction of all this, "Go on back to the boys and tell them to start packing to get out of here. Tell them the fix has chilled. It's all off. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"O.K., chief." The other had the philosophical outlook of those who were meant to take orders and knew it. He left.

Larry and Teeter opened the cell doors.

Teeter said, "How do we know we can trust you?"

Ross looked at him.

Larry said, "It's a deal. Give us an hour to get out of here. Then use the phone if you want to call a taxi, or whatever. I ain't stupid, this thing was too complicated to begin with."

When Teeter and Morazzoni were gone, the three stood alone in the corridor, looking at each other.

The doctor pushed his glasses back onto his nose with a thumb and forefinger. "By Caesar," he said.

Ross ran a hefty paw back through his red crew cut and twisted his face into a mock grimace. "Well," he said, "I have to revise my former statement. I used brute strength against Crowley, the doctor used sweet reason, and Pat her womanly wiles. And all failed. But as biochemists, each working without the knowledge of the others, we used science—and it paid off. I suppose the thing to do now is buy three jet tickets for California."

Braun and Patricia looked at him blankly.

Ross explained. "Didn't you hear what Crowley said? His brother, Donald, has moved out to San Francisco. He's our real Common Man, we'll have to start the experiment all over again."

Dr. Braun snorted.

Patricia O'Gara, hands on hips, snapped, "Ross Wooley, our engagement is off!"

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