MORE STORIES BY R.A. LAFFERTY

*115. Mr. Hamadryad
116. The Man With the Aura
120. And Name My Name
121. Royal Licorice
126. Three Shadows of the Wolf
*129. For All Poor Folk At Picketwire
131. The Skinny People of Leptophlebo Street
133. Or Little Ducks Each Day
135. The Hand With One Hundred Fingers
138. Oh Tell Me Will It Freeze Tonight
139a. Funnyfingers
139b. Cabrito
140. Horns On Their Heads
143. Berryhill
*145. Thou Whited Wall
*150. Fall of Pebble Stones
151. Quiz Ship Loose
152. Bequest of Wings

MR. HAMADRYAD

For some time there had been the feeling of an immediate change in the earthy globe, of a great turning-over that might replace the scatterbrained, petty, irascible and inefficient, though somehow human tone of the world with something that was cool, fastidiously ordered, immeasurably cruel, suave, silky, feline and altogether devilish. But the closeness, the reality of that change didn't sweep over me till I first met Mr. Hamadryad.

(I travel in coconuts, and it is ancillary to such travel that I have the fortune to meet such persons as Hamadryad.)

I believe that Mr. Hamadryad was the oddest-looking person I had ever seen. Surprisingly I regarded him so, for I first became aware of him in The Third Cataract Club in Dongola, and some very odd-looking gentlemen come into The Third Cataract. If you cock an eyebrow at someone in that place, then he's really odd.

There had been two sets of footfalls outside on the earthen corridor: one set were those of a somewhat splayfooted person in soft buckskin boots; the other were those of a barefoot person, but these latter footfalls were blurred by a sort of double step.

Only one of the persons came into the club though, and he was the splayfoot-seeming follow in the soft skin or pelt boots.

"A Stony Giant," this person ordered from Ukali the barboy, "and the regular for lunch."

"Certainly, Mr. Hamadryad," Ukali said, and he set about building the Stony Giant.

Hamadryad's voice, when he ordered, had been a sort of muted howl or bark, but not at all unpleisant. The Stony Giant was a large, local drink. It was a huge goblet of palm wine sprinkled with the saline rock-dust of the region. It contained a stork egg, smashed in shell and set afloat in the liquid. And Ukali added a bit of Aladdin's Sesame when the drink was almost ready. The Stony Giant is a specialty of The Third Cataract Club and is found almost nowhere else in the world.

Hamadryad had a long nose. It was so long that it set him apart from the world, whether he wished it or not. After his vision had traveled the length of his nose and had come to the world itself, it had already traveled half the distance that might be expected of anyone's vision.

Hamadryad had brown eyes that seemed not to fix on a person but on a point several feet through and behind that person. Hamadryad gave me this gaze now. Then he smiled pleasantly enough at the point several feet through and beyond me. Hamadryad had a full head of hair, though of a peculiar crest and lay. He was a short person and somewhat stooped even in his shortness. But he was lively and quick of motion. His mouth -- down there somewhere beneath that very long nose -- had a twist of good-natured seriousness. In prospect he seemed a pleasant fellow: and, really, an odd appearance never hurt.

Ukali finished building the Stony Giant, and he give it to Hamadryad. The barefooted double steps were heard in the corridor outside again, going up and down, but no one entered. Hamadryad had paid for the drink with a pard d'or, a very old coin of Somaliland. Ukali gave him no change, but wrote a figure on the air. Hamadryad had set up tab for a week or more at The Third Cataract with the gold piece. Then this odd man came and sat with me.

"They have explained it all away in unconvincing words," Hamadryad began with his pleasant howl or bark. "They make it seem like nothing at all. Five-hundred ton lintel stones, and they say that they were teetered up there either with log ramps or earthen ramps, and that the ramps were removed afterwards. Banana leaves! It's nonsense, I tell you."

"What is your profession?" I asked him.

"Cosmologist," he said.

The barefoot walking was again heard outside, pounding up and down in that earthen-floored corridor, and I was very curious. What was that very heavy, very silky double step?

"Is your friend not coming in?" I asked Hamadryad and nodded towards the corridor.

"He is not my friend. He is my slave," Hamadryad said. "He was in for a moment -- you didn't notice him -- but now he has gone out again. I prefer that he remain outside." Yes, I thought that I had heard this slave come in and go out again, but I had been unable to see him. I knew now that the double step meant the slave was a four-footed creature and that the powerful, silky tread meant the creature was five times the weight and freight of Hamadryad.

"Really, for even a minor megalithicon, such ramp-building would require the felling of a sizeable forest or else the moving of more dirt than all the earthworms of the world have moved in all time," Hamadryad was saying. "Even if I didn't know how it was done, I wouldn't accept that it was done with either log or earthen ramps. In Peru three-hundred-ton dressed stones are set into cliff faces that are eight thousand feet high, and sheer. At Baalbek there are thousand-ton stones set in the highest course. What sort of ramps might have been built up to raise such stones as those?"

"I don't know. I'm not a ramp man," I said.

"Really? You look very like one. I'm glad that you're not," Hamadryad said. "But I tell you that intensive on-the-site investigation would reveal the impossibility of any sort of ramp in any case. Always there is either a continuity or discontinuity of deposit of soil: nobody can build large ramps and then remove them again without leaving clear traces. Nobody, for that matter, could set very heavy lintel or other stones there on earth preparatory to raising them and not leave trace of them. But on the megalithic sites there are no such traces ever. One would be justified in saying that there have never been such ramps. One would almost be justified in saying that there have never been any such large stones on the sites were they not there on their high supports for all to see till this very day."

I looked at Ukali the barboy. "Which of the nine kinds of nut is this?" I asked with my eye. Ukali made a jerky motion with his hand, the motion that a user of Arabic script will make when be tries to draw a Roman E in the air.

An E? Hamadryad was an Easter Island nut? He was interested in that small island that drifts always, at slow or at faster speed, towards a foreordained spot. Why, I'd have guessed that eighth or ninth on the list, certainly not first. He didn't seem like such a one.

Ukali brought Hamadryad his lunch, the stomach of a suckling lamb distended with its

original milk.

"You can check it with any fairly old stone structure," Hamadryad was continuing with his pleasant low howl. "Examine long Barrows, Dolmons, Menhirs, Cromlechs, Henges, Temples, Pyramids and Kifo Pyramids, Sphinxes and Criosphinxes, Sanctums -- is it not odd that all megalithic structures are somehow worship buildings and that there are no secular structures among them? -- and you will always find the same things: stones that were and are too heavy to be lifted by any human device. The largest modern-day walking crane will hardly lift three hundred tons, but very many of the old buildings have stones weighing from four to eight times that much. Really, there is no device, ancient or modern, that could have lifted them. They simply weren't lifted by machines or devices. All logging or ramping militates against itself very quickly. In no time at all it will become ninety-five percent inefficient. We have the drag, the friction, the longer resolution of angles. The lever-advantage quickly becomes disadvantaged; there is a plain stickiness of all materials that sets early limits. That is why no modern building, say of the last three thousand years, contains really large set stories. The only exceptions are a very few most special buildings built by us initiated ones for our own reasons."

Small flakes, pieces, grains of Aladdin's Sesame were moving about on the tabletop, and there was no breeze. I saw that Hamadryad was moving them by an act of will. He really seemed unconscious of his act, though it was taking a lot of his energy. He was practicing this thing while he ate and drank and talked, practicing it against the day when it would be required of him. This was a talent he wished to retain and develop.

Hamadryad, while clearly one of the nine kinds of nuts, did not seem like an Easter Island nut. Had I mistaken Ukali's sign?

"How are things on Easter Island?" I asked Hamadryad.

"Still drifting, and with an accelerated drift," he said. A shadow had come over him. For the moment he didn't look to be quite so pleasant a person as before he had. "The home is now about twenty-seven degrees sotith and a hundred and eight degrees west, but it drifts. I'm very much afraid it will reach the dread point in my own lifetime, even within the next two hundred and fifty years. Oh well, nobody remains top ape forever. There are cycles. There are aeons."

"What is the dread point?" I isked him.

"What? What?" Hamadryad barked. Then there was a little business that I missed. Hamadryad had cocked an inquiring eye at or through the barboy Ukali. I felt rather than heard the soundless question: "Which of the nine kinds of nuts is this?" And I flubbed Ukali's quick answer. I caught him just having made a jerky motion with his hand that a user of Arabic script will make when he draws a certain Roman letter in the air. But which? Which of the nine kinds of nut had Ukali signaled to Hamadryad that I was?

I felt very much put down, but that was only for a moment. Neither Ukali nor Hamadryad was boorish. And now Hamadryad answered me with compassion and in his low, howling voice.

"Oh, twenty-nine degrees south and a hundred and eleven degrees west is about the center of it. I thought for a moment you were joking about holy things. But you really didn't know, did you?"

"No, I didn't," I said, and I felt very ignorant. Ignorant, but determined to get whatever kernel there was in this nut. "But what is so special about the point that is twenty-nine degrees south and a hundred and eleven degrees west?" I asked stubbornly.

Hamadryad looked shocked. Did he still feel that I might be making fun of holy things? Then he answered me as if he were talking to a child:

"That's the only point on the globe that God cannot see," he said then.

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Ah, it is in the shadow of His own thumb," Hamadryad said sadly. "He'll not be able to help us when things reach that point. No one will be able to help us."

I hadn't a lot of business here. No coconuts were grown in the region of The Third

Cataract, but we did import a few from the Indian Ocean coasts. And one cannot neglect any odd portion of his territory. Why should I feel like an outsider?

There was still the heavy, silken, double-step sound of bare feet in the dirt-floored corridor, the sound of a powerful animal walking on pads back and forth. I went out to look. There was nothing to be seen there, and the light was good. There was much to be heard there though -- and quite a lot to be smelled. There was a little rush now of the feet coming more rapidly, coming at me. There was the stenchy animal signature. There was fear -- mine. I bolted back into The Third Cataract Club. The fear didn't follow me there, but a sort of snicker followed. It was an evil, feline chortle. It was a big cat laughing at a lowly human. So I knew what animal was pacing invisible in the corridor.

"Well, how do you get the big stones up there?" I asked Mr. Hamadryad in total exasperation.

"Oh, we use panthers," he said simply.

"Panthers? Not leopards?" I asked. For the invisible animal in the corridor was a leopard.

"Panthers," Mr. Himidryad repeated. "After all, a leopard is only a panther gone to meat." But how can panthers aid in raising five-hundred-ton lintel stones to great heights? I believe that Mr. Caracal came into The Third Cataract Club then.

Mr. Caracal was a suave, silky man with steep cars. Hamadryad didn't like Caracal, that was plain.

"Go back into it," Hamadryad ordered. "You have no right to be out of it."

Caracal showed a fastidious contempt for Mr. Hamadryad. Certain unclear things happened.

"This is rebellion!" Hamadryad shrilled. It may be that Hamadryad left the club then, or that both of them left. Anyhow, something intervened, and I didn't see Hamadryad again for five years.

2

Is the Yin-Yang alternation the same as the Monkey-Cat alternation? Even among the Chinese this is not certain. Just how strong is the compulsion that the dominant member -- in the period of its ascendency -- holds over its contrary? Is it strong enough to rupture the Earth? Yes, Paracelsus thought so. Is it strong enough to move mountains? Yes, Mencius was sure that it was. Is it powerful enough to move continents? No, no, that's very unlikely. Powerful enough to move islands, it may be, but not continents. Avicenna believed that even small islands can only be moved a qadam or so a year. A man who sometimes comes into the Geologists' Club here says that islands can seldom be moved more than a foot a year, and that Easter Island is moving at only half that speed. He says that the tension is about the same between the Yin-Yang and the Monkey-Cat alternations -- and that these are the two strongest contraries.

One can move grains of sand with a little disk held in the palm of the hand, if it bears either the Yin-Yang or the Monkey-Cat union-contrast. But increasing the size of the disk will not increase the effect.

Who do the Easter Island head-statues look like? What men or ghosts or darksome creatures do these huge, deformed dished faces properly belong to? Seldom in those years did I go to Rapa Nui on Easter Island without wondering about those things, without in fact climbing those slopes again to gaze at the giant stone heads there. I got to Gran Rapa no more than once a year -- the coconut business was not really major there -- but this question was with me all the time.

Were they cat faces? No, no, cats cringed in fear before those big images. Cats do not do well on Easter Island at all. The really big cats there, they say, are still underground. Were the large images clog faces? Slightly, ever so slightly. Were they monkey faces? Not

quite, no, not quite. What monkeys had such long noses as those? And where else might be found such longish, good-naturedly serious faces as here?

Well, there are a few such faces on Egyptian friezes, though not perhaps on any of the better known ones -- not on any of those north of Qena anyway. A few such faces were on early Mexican terra-cotta figurines -- but the Mexicans did not have either the monkey or the cat, and they tied the yin only and not the yang. There were quite a few of the faces in the old comic Chinese drawings that can only be called "Monkey Shines." Some of them found in Gothic carvings ought to be named "Katzenjammern," things that are too late to be honest Gothic, fourteenth-contury things. The longish faces fire on Irish bronze-work and on Attic pottery, but not on the best of either. Deer sometimes have that long-faced look; colts and dogs have it more often. But these are all glancing coincidences, not the solid things.

Very rarely will a person have that look. And one person in particular had it, he on whose acc;ount I began to notice the big faces closely. This person was Mr. Hamadrynd, that lank-faced, long-nosed gentle man with the muted howl in his voice. He looked like that. But what was the main thing that the Easter Island heads, and Mr. Hamadryad, and all the other cited oddities looked like? What was it that pulled them all together? For the big Easter Island faces had only half their look; they implied their own intertangled opposites somewhere. One person had told me that those opposites were still sleeping in stone under the ground.

When next I saw Mr. Hamadryad, it was not in bright Africa, but in the dim and little-known interior of the North American continent. This was south of the domain of the Garfield-county wheat-growing tribe; somewhat north of those wide savannas of the bush-wool or cotton plants; west of the pecan forests and bosky bottoms of the Canadian River wilderness; east of the sunburned grazing range of those short-legged black cattle named Angus. It was some five days' portage -- or two hours by motor -- from the Alabaster Hills. It was at that dusty, trail-crossing town named Oklahoma City. Traveling in coconuts, I hadn't much business in that place. I had called on the Cross-Timbers Coconut Candy Manufacturing Company. And then I was in the Sun-Deck Club of that town. I heard the now-familiar footfalls in the corridor outside: the steps of a splayfooted person in soft buckskin boots; and the powerfully heavy, silky quiet and blurred double steps of a barefoot being. Then Mr. Hamadryad came into the club alone. The other, the slave -- if it were he - remained outside.

"A Ring-tailed Rouser, and the regular for lunch," Mr. Hamadryad ordered in that pleasant, muted howl that I would always remember.

"Certainly, Mr. Hamadryad," said Jane the beautiful bartender, and she set about building the Rouser. The Ring-tailed Rouser is composed mostly of clear, uncharted whiskey served in a quart fruit jar. There is added a sprinkle of gypsum dust from the Alabaster Hills and also the egg of the scissor-tail flycatcher, smashed in the shell and afloat in the liquid. And Hamadryad added a sprinkling of the small graiiis of the brooincorn plant -- these grains are very like Aladdin's Sesame -- as soon as the drink was set in front of him. The Ring-tailed Rouser is a specialty of the Sun-Dock Club and is found almost nowhere else in the world.

Mr. Hamadryad paid for the drink with a Jackson, one of those oblong green-paper-or green-skin-coins that were used in the middle barrens of the North American continent. He would have change coming but he let it hang. he was setting up tab at the Sun-Deck Club. He came and sat at my table.

"How did the panthers do it?" I asked him. He looked at me now. The five-year interval seemed to bother him only slightly.

"Oh, for the moment I'd forgotten what we had been talking about," he said in that bemused, happy howl of his. "I suppose you could say that they did it in the nature of ransom. They had so much agony owing, and besides they are our slaves. But the real explanation will go back to the foundations of the world, and it concerns a partial tinfotlnding

or moving of those foundations. You didn't think you were the first, did you? You weren't. You were the last."

"Didn't think who was the first what?" I asked him.

"You, you people of the new line," he said. "You weren't the first, and you sure were not the strongest or the most intense. Your own encounter, well, it would have been a pretty small thing to those who have known real encounters. After your fall, it was hardly what we would call a fall, without laughing. Our own fall, now that was something."

"Tell me about it," I said.

"I may not," he told me. "'Twould blow your mind and your ears. But there were quite a number of races who had covenants, before Abraham, before Adam. These covenants were towering things, and their breakings were of immeasurable depth. There was violence and earthquake and earth-shattering in those abysmal falls. After such horrors, God repented himself and made each succeeding test more gentle. If not, no flesh would have remained anywhere. And yet ourselves were quite near the end of the series. We never know the real burning and shrieking horror of the early ones.

"We were dooined to be the slaves of slaves. For this, two races -- ourselves another -- were chained together. I do not know whether I can explain this relationship to you, the closeness that accompanies an utter alienation, the apposition and the opposition. Our counterparts in this are something like your own shoulder angels?"

"Shoulder angels?" I asked. I had never heard quite that term. "You know them though you daily them," Hamadryad said. "But your own angels, who are they really? I have heard that you yourselves usually do not see them, but every other race of magus, ghost, animal, creature or being sees them. Most of these folks believe that your refusal to see your shoulder angels is a most cruel disdain. I've come to the conclusion, though, that it's really blindness and inattention on your part. But are they really a race coupled to you for punishment? Are they even a separate race at all? "It is suggested that they are your own twins somehow deformed.

It is guessed that they are your afterbirths somewhat mutated. Sometimes they are actually attached to you as small, fleshy extensions growing out of tile human shoulders; and these, though you often deny it, can be seen by yourselves as well as by others. But these latter are usually covered up, by clothing and by silent conspiracy. But what are they really?

"With us there are two clear races involved. Our enemies serve as our angels and our slaves for an era. Then it all turns over, in a strange way and out of the sight of God. Then we must serve as angels and slaves to our enemies for a long era. We will then be forced to move and lift and carry, to hew and to shape. We, the great ones, will become the slaves of the slinking heathers, and we must serve out the ransom."

Jane, the beautiful waitress, brought Hamadryad's lunch and set it before him. It was the stomach of suckling calf distended with its first milk.

"I still don't see how the big, heavy lintel stones may be moved by means of panthers," I said.

"Things much greater than lintel stones," Hamadryad howled softly and dreamily. "Do you know which are the lowest and highest of all folks who have received the Spirit or the pseudo-spirit? The lowest of all are the gibberish people who misunderstand the old business of 'speaking in tongues.' But even in your scripture the verb used for this speaking is selected carefully from several. It means to speak clearly. For God is not the God of gibberish. These are the lowest of all folks, those who say 'Lord, I am holy. I can talk gibberish.' And a short million miles above the gibberish people are the snake-handlers. We, even more than yourselves, have an abhorence touched with fear concerning snakes. It raises my hackles every time I handle a deadly snake, and I do have hackles."

Yes, Hamadryad did have hackles in the peculiar crest and lay of his lank hair.

"Snake-handlers bring courage to the affair," said Hamadryad, "in contrast to the gibberish people who bring nothing. But greatest of all is the Faith-that-Moves-Mountains. Those who bring most are the mountain-movers, the elite of all the preternaturals, of all those

who are tinder the punishment and the ransom. I tell you that mountain-moving is very hard to fake. Mountain-moving is the most terrible task that has ever been given to man or magus to do."

"What are you doing in the barrens of North America?" I asked Hamadryad. "In particular, what are you doing here in the canton of Oklahoma?"

"I had a report, and I came to observe the Black Mesa out in the corner of this canton," he said. "I really came to observe a now and valid talent which had appeared in the region. It's of the enemy, of the slaves, but it's worth observing. I watched the working of it for three days, and it took a lot out of me. Did you know that the Black Mesa moved nine inches in three days ending yesterday?"

"I heard that there were earthquake tremors in that region."

"There was a young and untrained puma in that region, an unslaved natural talent," Hamadryad said. "Though I loathe all cats, yet I admired that young puma. By soul-wrenching sacrifice, by towering mentality, by garish ghastliness, by rampant animality that young puma moved that mountain named the Black Mesa nine inches in three days. I saw this. I attest it. Before God, he moved it! And he did it not even for the ransom yet. I lo was a free puma. His was Faith, pure and undefiled."

"What has that to do with moving lintel stones?" I asked.

"It has to do with the moving of a mountain that is the equivalent of many millions of lintel stones," Hamadryad said. Hamadryad was quite shaken even in the telling of this, and I began to wonder about this person. Hamadryad had changed somewhat in appearance in the five years since I had seen him last. His oddities were all sharpened. Whatever it was that he represented, be represented it much more strongly now. Hamadryad had once mentioned the Criosphinxes, those ram-headed sphinxes of Greece and Egypt. But he now reminded me of the Man-Drill Sphinx at Baidoa in upper Itiba.

Small flakes, pieces, grains of broomcorn were moving about on the tabletop, and there was no breeze. I saw that Hamadryad was moving them by an act of will. He really seemed unconscious of his act, though it was taking a lot of energy. He was practicing this thing while he ate and drank and talked. It was a talent which he wished to retain and develop. But it would have to be developed many millionfold to equal that of the young enemy puma who had moved the Black Mesa nine inches. Was it mountains to be moved that were overshadowing this likeable man?

"Were there mountains involved in yourown original encounter?" I asked.

"Aye, Magic Mountains, Floating Mountains!" he cried with soaring memory. "But it was more than mountains, more than ships, more than islands. It was a Pavilion! Ah, what a Pavilion we did have once! It floated on the water, and it bore mountains and forests and gardens on its back. Did God ever give so magnificent an exile-float to anyone else? This was the tent that had been pitched in the pleasant place, and originally it had been larger than the world. You have heard of 'floats' in parades? Ours was the original of those moving flower-tiered wagons, or the beautiful juggernauts that moved over lind and sea or the 'floats' that were floats indeed. You have, perhaps, heard the term 'watercolors' as applied to art? The water, like a witch's oils,/Burnt green, and blue and white' -- as a poet (I sometimes think he was one of us) has written. Our moving mountain, our floating garden was the primordial watercolor in that it was a pandemonium -- and it had recently been a panangelicum -- of hues so vivid as to be scandal to the land. Aye, we were expelled from the lind; we and our verdant, tiered and terraced mountain that was like a mile-high platter of fruits. We were marooned on our mountain-island-barge, marooned on the blue and green and scarlet mirroring ocean: for maroon is a color as well as a condition. This was our purple exile on the royal and purple sea."

"It sounds wonderful, but what are you talking about?" I asked him.

"Oh, it was full of wonder, but it wasn't a pleasure-wonder," he said sadly as though he remembered it himself. "The deprivation was starker for us, perhaps, than for any other race. It may be for that reason we were provided with a grander vehicle. All left the garden

with pieces of the garden, but some went with mere clods of that holy place. I have heard that you, yourselves, had to walk out."

"Oh, from the garden? Yes, I guess so," I said.

"We floated out of the garden that was in the middle of the waters," Hamadryad recited. "We floated away on an aromatic, many-colored mountain-island that was fruitful beyond description. Oh, by the red dew of Olivet but it was fair! And we were kings yet, though fallen. We forced our slaves for continuing ransom to how and transport and set up great idols of ourselves.

"But then we drifted. We wanted to go one way. Our slaves, the cats, wanted to go another; and theirs was the agony, but theirs was also the movement. To them had been given, beyond ourselves, the terrible mentality and spirit to move stones and mountains and islands. So we drifted in the direction selected by our slaves, and it wasn't a random direction. Then pieces began to break off our beautiful island of exile."

A feline chill had entered the room. Hamadryad shivered and shriveled, and he seemed unsure of himself.

"Which pieces broke off your exile island?" I asked him.

"Oh, hundreds of pieces until what is now left is quite small and not is green as it might be. Madagascar was the largest of those early pieces to break away, and it drifted back partly toward the direction of our origin. It is still there as a mystery and a sign; it doesn't belong in the contemporary world. You know, of course, that 'Cats and Monkeys Island' is the literal meaning of Madagascar?"

"I know," I said. But Hamadryad had risen full of passion, red and purple of feice, shaking and gibbering.

"Get back, get back, go back into it!" Hamadryad howled suddenly and furiously. And what had brought on such a tempest of passion?

Mr. Caracal had come into the room, and the footfalls of the corridor had come with him. Mr. Caracal was the thing that had been in the corridor invisible. And yet he was a highly visible, suave, silky man with steep ears.

"Go back into it," Hamadryad howled. "You have no right to be out of it!"

But Caracal grinned with fastidious contempt. He looked as though he might tear Hamadryad apart. There was a terrible battle being fought somewhere, in doubtful arena, and Caracal was defeating Hamodrynci in furious conflict.

"Is Mr. Caracal a club member?" I asked Jane the beautiful bartender. "He is making one of your clients very unhappy."

"I'll not interfere with that one," Jane disclaimed. "You never know who is going to end up top cat."

"This is rebellion!" Hamadryad screeched. "Your time hasn't quite come."

Caracal was advancing on Hamadryad, and it really seemed as if he would eat him alive ind complete as he trembled there. Somehow, Hamadryad left the Sun-Deck Club then in a stormy scene. It is likely that both of those odd persons left.

Something intervened anyhow, and I didn't see Mr. Hamadryad again for several years.

3

Madagascar, I had found, didn't really mean "Cats and Monkeys Island." Hamadryad had made that up, and I had agreed with him so as not to seem ignorant. And there are no holy records of earlier expulsions of other races from the Pleasure Place. Well, perhaps somewhere there are earlier and less holy records of such.

Following as I do the coconut trade, I happened again to be at that most unproductive base of it, Rapa Nui on Easter Island. I was in Drill's Marine Bar. I had been asking about and thinking about a certain shadow that for countless ages has been on the face of the Earth. I was worried that Easter Island, now drifting at the wild speed of more than three

hundred feet a year, had begun to enter that shadow or blind spot. And it had begun to. Several pieces of beach were already under the shadow, and they seemed void of life, void of light, void of meaning. Only irrational things could happen in those umbrageous places. But if they happened, they would happen for the whole world.

Could there really be such a blind spot on Earth? And why had it seldom been noted in the past? I asked the proprietor Drill about it, and he stroked his nose as he answered.

"Yes, the spot is indeed there and it has always been there," Drill told me. "And why has it seldom been noted? The reason that it is little noted is simply that there is nothing noteworthy about it. No wind blows there, and no wave moves. Yet there are frozen or motionless waves risen up there in their crests and furrows, and these unmoving wives have a deep meaning.

"The sun and the moon do not shine on the spot, and the stars do not. No birds fly over and no fish swim under. There is no luminescence in the depths there, and no gegenschein in the high air. Compass needles wilt and sag for there is no magnetism. In the area of the spot there is no dry land except, it is said, at the changing of the aeons. No planes fly over, for it would be all blind flight. No ships or boats traverse that shadow, for it is not on the way to anywhere. It is on no way, no route, no current, no wind. Nothing drifts in or out of the region ordinarily, though there is strong rumor that our own island drifts into it now. It is the blind spot on the globe where map-makers often put in notes or scales or explanations of Mercator's projection. So you can see that there is really nothing noteworthy about the spot. Except one thing."

Drill shook a bit of sharkskin pepper onto the back of his hand, and he licked it off with his long and perhaps prehensile tongue. There is no real pepper on Rapa Nui; but grated sharkskin looks like pepper, and it is much cheaper if one grates it himself. "What is the one thing?" I asked, as was expected of me. "The furrows and crests of the frozen or motionless waves, they have a design; perhaps it is the original of all designs," Drill said. "As the spot is the shadow of the thumb of God, so these undulative configurations are the shadows of the whorls and loops of God's own thumbprint. Those designs have all been recorded, and they are in the old archives and chants. You can see the value of this."

"No. What is the value?" I asked.

"Why, we have positive identification," Drill said. "If ever a false God should come over our earth, we would know the difference."

"The spot is moving over our land now," said Choi, who was Drill's sweep-out boy. There was something about Choi that was too clean, too ordered, too sleek, too suave, too cruel, too efficient. His abilities were plainly beyond those of an ordinary sweep-out boy. "And the land becomes furrowed as the spot moves over it. The farrowing of the land takes thegame patterns as that which the motionless waves had shown. And something else is revealed by the furrowing, is literally uncovered by the furrowing -- it is the resurrection of the implicit stones."

"What stones are tbese?" I asked Choi.

"The basalt stones that were implicit in the Earth from the beginning," Choi said. "The stones that will become the idols of the now masters when they are hewed and carried and set up in place by the terrifying, soul-wringing labor of someone, not of ourselves."

How would there be basalt stones on Rapa Nui? How would a sweep-out boy on Rapa Nui use words like "implicit?"

There was the sound of some sort of scuffle outside of Drill's Marine Bar. There were the -- now somewhat troubled -- two sets of footfalls in the outer corridor: those of a splayfooted person in soft buckskin boots and also the blurred double footfalls of a barefoot person. And I heard the angry voice of Hamadryad: "You will wait, beast! You will not take over one instant before the time!" Hamadryad howled. There was a chilling animal chortle -- it was insane, and it echoed the terrible, ordered mind-set of the insane. There was a

thudding, ripping blow. And there was a quavering scream -- Hamadryad's. I felt with an awful sinking that Hamadryad was dead. But presently he came into the Marine Bar. He was somewhat bloodied about the left shoulder and arm, but he was almost serene.

"It is a mistake to treat slaves with too light a hand", he howled softly, "but it is likewise a mistake not to recognize the day when it arrives. I'll not intrude my own troubles on others though, especially since the turn-over will be pretty general. Ah, a Final Catastrophe, Mr. Drill, and the usual for lunch."

"Certainly, Mr. Hamadryad," Drill said, and he began to assemble the Final Catastrophe. A Final Catastrophe is green, still-fermenting palm wine served in a large wooden bowl. It is sprinkled with sharkskin pepper and it has hull-bore worms in it to give it liveliness. It always contains a cormorant egg smashed in its shell and afloat in the liquid. The Final Catastrophe is a specialty of Drill's Marine Bar and is found almost nowhere also in the world.

"We overdramatize ourselves gnd our affairs," Hamadryad howled easily as the sweep-out boy Choi, a little later, was cauterizing his bleeding arm and shoulder with boiling hot ships' tar, using a big brush. Choi had a new glitter and avidity for this task. He sniffed blood; he sniffed pain. One was tempted to believe that there was a touch of cruelty involved, tempted to suspect that the tar didn't really have to be that hot.

"Actually, a final catastrophe is not as final as all that," Hamadryad added. "We eschatological persons are accused of turning all our tales into end-of-the-world tales. Really they are not. They are merely end-of-the-era tales, or end-of-the-episode tales." Was it in inere sympathy with Hamadryad that my own left shoulder began to ache and stir and heave? A great pain there had roots running down into my heart and lungs and liver and up into my head. Something was very wrong about this new pain in my shoulder, this new weirdness, this new desolation. A shoulder should not go to the roots of being like that. And there was something very wrong with the behavior of our island. It gave a great bump and jolt so as to produce sudden seasickness and disorientation. The island must have moved fifteen feet further into that blind spot that is the shadow of God's thumb.

Hamadryad shook kunai-grass seeds into the Final Catastrophe as seen is that drink was set in front of him. Kunai seeds are very like Aladdin's Sesame, very like broomcorn spikes. Hamadryad paid for the drink with a nui d'argile, a local clay coin of which five hundred are required to equal one Chilean peso. It was really not enough for the drink, but Drill was some sort of Kindred of Hamadryad -- and one always enters a great turnover broke and in debt.

"Our remnant island, our vestigial home comes under the shade almost at once," Hamadryad said. "All the islands of the world -- all the mains also -- are only pieces broken off and drifting away from the paradise. Yet this our own island was once special among the bright ones."

Chui the sweep-out boy had begun to tear my shirt off me in strips and rippings. This wasn't ordinary behavior even in Drill's Marine Bar, but I was now in too much pain to object. It was as if a sword were going out of my shoulder, and that hurt much more going out than going in. Then, with great delight, Chui was applying boiling hot tar to my disturbed area.

"They love it," this Choi reveled. "It's a joyful malediction to them on their going out to take control. The tar brush is symbol of all such things."

"All what such things?" I asked with irritition. My shoulder was on fire, but there was something involved with my shoulder that was enjoying the fire.

The island give another lurch. Still more of it had come under the somber shadow.

"The scatter-heads, those incontinent dreamers who believe that there is an Astrology, say that the world has been in the age of Pisces," Hainadryad stated, "and that now it will, or has already, entered into the age of Aquarius. What bubble-headed fools they are! They know neither the constellations in heaven nor the constellations on earth! The world has been, for the last long era, in the glorious age of the Monkey; and now it will -- Oh, why must such things be! -- enter the tyrannical and meticulous age of the Cat." Hamadryad

snufrled, and a tear ran down his long nose.

Drill brought Hamadrynd's lunch, the stomach of suckling pig distended with its first milk. Hamadryad sprinkled it with sharkskin pepper and also with kunai seed, spilling much of both from his shaking hand. Then he dined. "-- my last meal as a free person," he yowled softly.

Myself, I had that disturbed and bottomless feeling that sometimes accompanies typhoid fever, the feeling that there were two of me -- one standing just a little apart from the other. But how should I suddenly have the typhoid? Or was the typhoid itself a mere fragmented premonition of something to come? (Ah, the island gave another jolt and slid still more into the shadow; soon it would be darkness at mid-morning.) Was the typhoid -- it might be a collective name for many phonomena -- a premonition of a thing that might be in the process of arriving at this very moment?

"All of your theories are cataclysmic, as are the happenings and appearances of this day in this place," I said, "but how are they relevant to the more substantial world in its more reasonable daylight?"

"Is it not shockingly relevant that the Monkeys are out and the Cats are in?" Hamadryad asked sorrowfully. "You will now have over all the world the careful, stalking cruelty and the tufted-eared deceit."

"Is that worse than what we have had?" I asked him. He had now become very nervous.

"Abysmally worse," he croaked. Hamadryad hadn't a good appetite for his last meal as a free person. Painfully, agonizingly, he was moving little flecks of sharkskin pepper and kunai seed about on the table, moving them with mental anguish but not touching them except with his mind. "Oh, I'll never be able to do it," Hamadryad whimpered. "How then will I be able to move things a billion billion times heavier? Oh, it will be an agony of the spirit to perform such labor, and the doom is for such a long aeon!"

I myself was feeling as torn-up as ever I had in my life. The spooky duality was still on me. I was suffering a sundering identity crisis. There was one me located approximately in my proper body. There was another me situated somewhere behind my left shoulder. Which one was valid was unsettled. Everything in my minds was unsettled for a puzzling while. And the island on which we were staying had now developed the nervous, choppy movements of a small boat caught in a rip tide.

"What is it that those in the ascendant have and that the slaves usually lack?" Hamadryad asked in a tired, analytical howl. "It is presence," he stated.

"Presence?" I asked. "I thought that presence was the one thing that the poorest and most abject slave shared with the rich and mighty. Everyone is present somewhere."

"No, they are not," Hamadryad maintained. "Many species and races seldom show real presence. Your own shoulder-slaves do not. My own slave in the corridor --" Hamadryad shuddered a bit here "-- does not. Presence is an attribute of a complete being. Many have not been complete. Now we enter a region and an era when perhaps many of us will regress to incomplete beings. It's frustrating to be incomplete."

"And invisible?" I asked.

"And invisible," he said. "It's a sad state. Many who have not experienced it do not realize that to be invisible is to be in total darkness both objectively and subjectively. In our new, sad state, we will be seen only in our work, in the hewing and tansporting and setting, in the homage and ransom."

"What will we hew and transport and set?" I asked Hamadryad. "And to whom will we pay homage and ransom?"

"The great cool cats and the huge idols of them," he said fearfully. "We will be compelled -- awl, awl, rawl, rawl, howl!" and Hamadryad was seized by terrible pain and transformation.

A presence came into the room. And an absence gathered itself whimpering

together. Mr. Caracal was the presence that arrived in the room. He was no longer an invisible slave in the corridor; he was a person present -- felix and feline -- a person of whom great idols would be raised out of the implicit stones. And Mr. Hamadryad was the gathering absence.

And I felt that I also had gathered myself into a weak absence and that that absence was slinking out of my body to skulk and slave invisibly somewhere -- and I wasn't much good at moving heavy objects by mental anguish. Oh, the torture that might he ahead! But at the same time I had become a person of great strength and vitality, and I was about to take over and infuse a body that I found tottering there, an old body of my own.

Hamadryad was now no more than a long-nosed shadow in boots that were not part of him. Then he moved out of his fancy boots, and he had baboon feet. He had stopped out of an old sign of his freedom. He was now a freebooter no longer, but a slave slipping into invisibility.

Odd that I had not noticed before that Hamadryad was a baboon. But he was a baboon, a drill, a man-drill -- and a vanishing one. Odd that I had not before noticed that the long-faced statues here an Easter Island were baboon-faced. And that thousands of great-faced carvings eleswhere in the world were baboon-faced. But the baboon is much more manlike in face than are the other monkeys, and the monkeys much more so than any other creatures. And, while the monkey era had still obtained, men and monkeys were pretty much interchangeable.

Something of myself had gone out of my body and now whimpered invisible at my shoulder. But something of a more real me had come in with great strength and poise. Mr. Caracal winked at me. Mr. Chui winked at me, and he was much more than a sweep-out boy now. But Drill had disappeared to be an invisible slave for a long era.

Now I am clear and clean, and cool and cruel. I am in command of myself and of my own sector of the world. I am a cool cat with no more of the monkey resemblance. The statues to be raised by slaves from the implicit stones will resemble me. We have high-handed hatred for our right now, We have so many of such spacious things for our right now.

Have you noticed how much calmer the world is now that we have instituted certain measures of discipline? Have you noticed how much cleaner the world is now that we have made "cruelty" no longer a dirty word? Surely I and mine had once been scatter-brained, petty, inefficient and human. Is there not something intolerably monkeylike in the word human7 That is all past. Now I am divinely mad, but cool and cruel in my disposition; no longer scatterbrained; all my brains now are neatly in one brain-pan.

Once I traveled in coconuts. In the old way of it, that was to be a monkey traveling in monkey-nuts. The coconut complex -- was it not Adam Smith who wrote it so? -- had been the last refuge of free enterprise in the world.

Fortunately we have broken up that refuge. We have organized coconuts, the last of the monkey-business. We have organized coconuts into the World-Wide New Era Great Cat Coconut Cartel.

Holy cats, we have organized it all!

## THE MAN WITH THE AURA

"Nor is that the worst of my troubles, James," said Thomas Castlereagh. "Not only has my conscience begun to gnaw me, but my doctor tells me that I will be dead within a month."

"Good God, Thomas! I thought you were in perfect health," his friend James Madigan cried out in real alarm.

"Not perfect, but, James, I'm of sound body for a man of my age."

"But your doctor said --"

"That he intends to kill me. I've given him reason."

That was the evening that Thomas Castlereagh told his full story to James Madigan. Halfheartedly he had tried to tell it several times before. He hadn't been believed. He had gained the reputation of being a delightful man with a certain outre humor.

He wasn't. He had no humor at all.

But he had everything else: robust pink-faced health; gold-edged security and impregnable wealth; familial abundance in his later years as recompense for his earlier sorrows; and the glowing regard of every person in America.

Castlereagh served on many committees and national forums. His heading-up of any body guaranteed its integrity and success. No president felt properly inaugurated unlless Castlereagh stood by his side. His was the most sought-after endorsement in the country. He was Respectability.

Any description of the man would be trite beside the man himself. His face had become the Face of America at its best.

Rumley had done him. Cassell had done him in the magnificent portrait now in the Great Portraits Room of the Tate Gallery. Arestino had done him. But the finest portraits could give no real indication of the man himself. Anyone in his presence was always pleasantly shaken by the experience. Words cannot give an account of it, though the Castlereagh voice and words were a large part of the effect.

Castlereagh's three sons were respected and notable. Charles had much of the father's business ability and of his pervading charisma. John Thomas was a doctorate professor, and the author of an exciting text, Theoretical Extrapolated Mechanics. Robert Adrian was a gifted artist. All inherited in part from the father's amazing gifts, but all would stand in his shadow forever.

And Castlereagh's wife was Letitia, an international beauty known equally for her wit and sparkle and for her nearly too perfect beauty.

And the graciousness and grace of the man failed in nothing. He had brought a new dimension to goodness. He was perfected in fame and fortune; and perfection is not perfect if it ever falls in anything.

Castlereagh's visitor of this night was James Madigan, a Cabinet Member, Secretary of Crime Prevention. But Madigan was in a bleak mood, even in the golden presence of Castlereagh.

"Thomas, the country, the society, is in the worst shape ever," he deplored. "The very idea of honesty has become comical. We have been afraid to publish the revised crime index for the last six months; I doubt if we will ever publish it again; it's horrible. The very appearance of character has all but vanished from the human face. Perhaps that is why you yourself are so remarkable, Thomas."

"Coals of fire, James! But they don't burn me much. I'm well insulated."

"What, Thomas? I believe that I catch a glint of your fine humor there, and I certainly need it tonight. How the crimes do weigh on me!"

"Ah, the crimes!" said Castlereagh. "Murder and arson aren't important in themselves. The effect on a man becomes serious only when followed by a certain hardening. But a man who has done these things to the point of ennui and who has built upon them may eventuffly become a little coarse. I've seen it happen to others. Who can say that I am immune? Drink, James."

They were drinking brandy together. The words of Castlereagh seemed delightfully humorous. It was the puckish twist of the mouth, it was the laughing eyebrows, it was the dancing gray of the eyes, the complexity of the voice.

"I enjoy your piquant humor, Thomas," said Madigan as he savored and sipped the drink that had an aura beyond all others. "There is something beyond hilarity in the idea that you could ever be criminal, or coarse. But even your drollery can hardly distract me tonight. When I was younger I believed that there was nothing darker than a crime of sheer passion. Now I know that there is something much worse. Do you know what it is?"

"I know it as well as I know the face behind my face, James. But it is you who are in full eloquence. Go on."

"It is the crime without passion, Tbomas, the crime almost without interest. The most vile things are done daily in the most offhand manner. It is a thing colder and more horrifying than sadism. If only I could discover the roots of it! If I could find one clear stripped-down example to study. Thomas, I might develop a specific against this venom."

"I can give you one, Madigan. I will give you a chance to study at close range a man who has had more opportunities for evil and has made more use for them than anyone in the world. Listen, and believe. It is important to me that someone finally believe.

"Madigan, I am about to tell you the story of my life. I realize that those are the most fearsome words that one man can ever say to another, but do not be alarmed; I have the virtue of brevity.

"I was named Tom Shanty, James, and not Thomas Castlereagh. I've come a ways from the shanty to the roal castle which is the meaning of Castlereagh. The name, you see, James, is one element of the aura. I was a sickly boy and the most luckless ever; and perhaps the most dishonest. The police suspected me of every misdemeanor in our neighborhood, and they were right to suspect me. My appearance was against me. I was a fox-faced sneak."

"You, Thomas? Mr. Distinction himself? This is good. On with your tale."

"I was fox-smart and fox-mean. But a fox is hunted uncommonly, James, before he learns his trade. I was unsuccessful in all my jobs and all my thieveries, and was always poor. I worked for a dishonest photographic portraitist. We collected for these, but we did not deliver them. The samples I showed always made the sale. And this means experience was the begining of my success. The touchups really were fabulous. My employer was a genius at this -- when he chose to work at it. I myself am now a compendium of his best touchups. I learned what the face of respectability and distinction looked like.

"I worked for a dishonest electronics man. We did bad work for high prices on TV, VVV, and Replica sets. Being fox-smart I picked up technical knowledge. I learned what things may be translated into waves, including things not commonly thought to be translated.

"I worked for con men. I was bad at this, and my masters were good. I understood quickly why this was so. They had natural advantages for it, and I did not. I had decided to create these advantages for myself unnaturally. More brandy, James?"

"Thank you. It's a droll old brandy you serve, and a droller tale you serve up. Go on, Thomas."

"I spent time in the pokey. My face and my aspect were always against me. They drew the finger of suspicion correctly to me everytime. Then I became that lowest life-form, an unsuccessful inventor.

"I married a quiet and rather short-witted girl who was quietly repelled by me. My luick worsened. There came the day when there was no prospect of any job, honest or dishonest; and there was nothing to eat in the house. Little Fox-face had come to the bottom of his burrow.

"But on that lowest day I bad completed a crude model of my oddest invention. I named it the aura machine."

"An odd name, Thomas. And you sold the invention and began your rise?" Madigan asked.

"I didn't sell it. I never did sell it, for it's priceless. It's made me quite rich. I installed it and let it work for me."

"Just what did you do with your invention, Thomas?"

"Oh, when my device seemed to be working all right, I went out and forged five large checks in the crudest possible manner. That was the first test of my invention, and it stood up well."

"Thomas," smiled James Madigan, "I feel better already. There is something in your goblin humor that always sets me up."

"With the funds acquired from the forged checks I took out twenty thousand dollars' insurance on my wife," Castlereagh said. "I waited three days for the papers to clear. Then I killed her."

"You are the most amazing man, Castlereagh," Madigan said. "You are the cathartic I need. No man but you, even in the retrospect of forty years, could jest about such a matter without crudity. But coming from you, it is the all-saving humor."

"I have no humor, Madigan."

"I've studied that early case, Thomas. I'm as baffled by it as you are. There was no clue at all to the murder of your your wife, and no suspect. You and she were alone in the house and nobody could have entered. It remains one of the classic puzzles to this day."

"It puzzled me a little too, James, until I looked in the mirror again. My device was working remarkably. My face no longer resembled that of a fox-faced sneak. It was my same face, and yet how different! My luck had changed, had been changed by a fairly simple device. The tide has been running for me ever since."

"But later, Thomas, you suffered great disasters that would have sank a lesser man."

"All the disasters suffered were tricks of my own, and all turned me a profit. With the funds from my wife's death I started a business. It was a crackpot business and it should have failed, for I was and am incompetent. But I had my new contrived luck that made competence unnecessary."

"Thomas, you pile drollery upon drollery. You're a bright patch in my life."

"My invention was working well for me. No, James, the business was in no way concerned with its manufacture of sale. By a series of clumsy frauds I prospered. It was a proud milestone in my life when I caused my first suicide, one of many I was to cause."

"Humor is the key, Thomas. Let our bleakest moods be bathed in its golden light and somehow we will find the strength to go on. The tale becomes richer and richer."

"Then I embarked on arson, that most harebrained and easily detected of frauds, on a large scale. I acquired a block-long warehouse, an ancient shanty of a building, and filled it with old crates and trash. I insured it heavily. I had twenty drums of kerosene openly battled in one night and strategically placed. And after dark I upturned them all, gave them a quarter of an hour to soak the timber, and walked out the front door. James, that was the crudest piece of arson ever pulled, and it was not even suspected. My invention was working fine for me now. I collected. I had made my first million dollars; and the story went out that I had suffered the loss of five times that amount."

"Castlereagh, you are better than this old brandy. You warm my cockles and give new life to my tired heart. Your 'invention' I know will be a wowser when you come to your punch line. No tongue but yours could twist out so delightful a rhapsody."

"It is my invention again that makes you find the story delightful. When I look at my reflection, James, I am even able to hoodwink myself. The man behind such a face as mine cannot be other than a great and respected man."

"Richer and richer," chuckled Madigan.

"I married again," said Castlereagh. "Hers was not really a great fortune, but it was a comfortable seven-figure accumulation. I saw it comfortably settled on myself. I gave her half a year, for she was a pleasurable creature. Then I killed her."

"Ah, you hide that old tragedy behind your mocking humor also, Thomas. I am familiar with the case. It was one of the most baffling --"

"Sure. No clue at all, and no suspect. I was alone in the house with her, and nobody could have entered. There were no fingerprints but mine to be found anywhere, even in the powder on her throat. She was throttled by persons unknown. Quite an impossible murder.

"Well, James, I stayed with proved methods, but always on an expanding scale. Who Would suspect a man whose face mirrored the integrity of Lincoln, the clear fire of a young Jefferson, the humor of Lamb, the honest thoughtfulness of Browne, the scope of Plutarch, the urchin-humanness of Francis, the serenity-in-power of Octavius? My next arson concerned eighty acres of surplus government buildings acquired for a sour song and a

sweet face. It took me thirteen days and three thousand drums of kerosene to set that one up properly. But I collected fifty million dollars worth of insurance on it. It was bruited about, however, that I had lost half a billion; and the nation almost went into mourning."

"I will remember my personal desolation at your great loss," said Madigan. "I doubt if any other man would have had the heart to surmount it, or the grace to joke about it later on."

"One more grand trick, and then I'd have all the money that mattered. I built me a nationwide all-embracing fraud. I cleaned thirty million investors, small, medium, and large on that one. Then, as an experiment, I let my mask slip a trifle, muted my peculiar device a little. A few of the fish saw behind it then. They even took me through a series of courts."

"I well remember those craven character assassins, Castlereagh," Madigan said. "No man but yourself would be able to find humor in it, even now."

"Oh, they had me cold at every turn, James. The transperency of my fraudulent machinations was breathtaking. But I turned my device on to the full. My invention, ah, luck, working again at full efficiency. And once more I had my wonderful face. It had gone so far that it had to go all the way, and of course I won. There were tears in the eyes of the Chief Justice when he embraced me after it was all over. I had tears in my own eyes, but I would not want to have the salt in them publicly analyzed."

"The entire nation wept in gratitude at your vindication; and now you are able to joke absurdly about it. Ah, deep humor and tears are very close together, are they not, Thomas?"

"Jerked by the same pair of strings, James. Then I put the cap on it. I set up the Castlereagh Fund for the Study of Bott's Disease."

"Kicked off by an anonymous contribution of thirty million dollars! Anonymous! But, of course, everyone knew that the contribution was yours."

"Sure, everyone knew it was mine, even if it wasn't. It was my own publicity that pointed the big finger at me. But it wasn't mine. The man who gave that thirty million was rather a shy fish about giving. He gave in the dark through me, By an irony, his name has come to be a byword for miserliness. By a double irony it was myself who hung that tag on him. But I treat that fund with respect; I only milk it for the earned interest every year. I call it my toothpick fund. If anything named Bott's disease really comes around, maybe I'll be able to run the trick through again."

"Thomas, what a fund of deep drollery you have! My fit of depression is all but gone. But seriously, Castlereagh, what is this business about Doctor Forester? He must be unbalanced. You mean he has actually threatened you?"

"Forester has done a little work in emanations himself. I went to him for a skin rash, and he discovered parts of my device embedded under my hide. He caught on pretty fast. He learned that my projected personality was an artificial one. He learned a few other things as soon as he started thinking. Now he says he's going to kill me. I've been fooling around with his wife pretty seriously, you know."

"You and Maisie? Oh, that is the joke of all jokes. For a moment I thought that you were serious."

"I am. Madigan, if a man says he will kill me, then that man is already dead. If I have any talent at all it is for anticipating an event. The murder of Doctor Forester in this present month will be a curious one, and it will reach to the level of your own office; but you will not be there for it. It will be a crude one. I always kill crudely. James, I talk and talk, but you have no ears for what I say."

"No ears for your humor, Castlereagh? I haven't enjoyed anything so much in months. I am rejuvenated and recharged. Thomas, come to the high point of itl What is your 'Wonderful Invention'?"

"Wait, James, I must make a phone call. And then I must mix for you a special brandy." And Thomas Castlereagh went to do so. He returned after a short interval. He gave Madigan the brandy.

"And what did you add to my brandy to make it special, Thomas?" Madigan asked.

"Oh, the oldest venom of all, conium maculatum. It goes we11 with all wines and brandies. Strikes direct to the heart. Taste it and thank me for it."

"I taste it I thank you for it," said Madigan.

"Thank me that I have spared you the burned almond taste, at least. I hate such cliches in poisonings. Ah, the marvelous invention? It is simply the Aura Machine. I was fooling around with electronics which I luckily misunderstood. And I was studying bodily emanations and auras as the expression of personality. I stumbled on a way of modifying my own aura.

"I found that the aura, and its great effect upon the ambient, were really very simple things that might be simply reproduced. Those who speak of personal magnetism are correct. There is a strong magnetic element; also a strong element of the electrical corona effect; and there is another emanation that works on the sublimal sense of smell. Quite simply, I could make my own aura! I could make it to project any personality and appearance that I wished for myself... I made to project the personality and appearance of Respectabilty, Distinction, and Utter Rectitude. I fabricated such an artificial personality for myself that nobody, under any conditions but the most fantastic, would ever be able to believe any evil of me.

"Could such a simple thing work, James? It could. A duck call is a simple device, and a duck is a complex one. Yet a duck will be fooled by a duck-call sounded by a man. A duck will even come to the artificial call in preference to the real, if the artificial is made with sufficient care. I employed all the art I was capable of in making my own device; and mostly it has sufficed.

"It didn't take much: a subcutaneous device which I inserted myself; a selenium plate set into my head by a quack butcher; an apparatus embedded in my throat to give my voice what I wanted; a power pack; a harmonic booster. I tried it on my lowest day, as I have told you, and it worked. At first I was a little afraid of overdoing it. Then I discovered that there is no way of overdoing the respectability bit. People saw my face, not as it was, but as a respectable one. I became the man who could do no wrong. It was a grand trick, and I worked it down to the nub."

"Thomas, you slay me!"

"True. You finally understand. No, you do not. We both forget that I have no humor. Madigan, my device was so good that it could even fool an ordinary camera. However, I devised a camera with an astatic filter that cuts the emanating aura. It's good for a man to remember sometimes what he really looks like. I still have the face of a fox-faced sneak."

Madigan's chuckle had become like an earth-wave. "It's like something out of those odd little magazines with the surealistic covers, Thomas. Have you ensured that your -- as -- marvelous invention will not die with you?"

"Sure. I've willed the secret to a small group of cutthroats sometimes in my employ. Their looks are against them. They remind me of me. They need it. And when I am gone, they will carry on the evil work that is so close to my heart."

"What a wonderful man you are," said James Madigan. "From what deep well do you draw your flowing humor. Thomas, I feel giddy! I'm suddenly ill. Call my man for me. I may not be able to get home alone."

"I did call your man, James, just before I poisoned you, and told him that you were dying. He'll be here shortly. I had to tell my story to someone, and I could not let that someone live if he believed it. And after all, who will suspect me of poisoning you, just because we were drinking together with no one else present when you were given the needled brandy? My thing will hold. It will be another of those most baffling crimes ever."

"Ah, your wonderful humor, Thomas! But I am quite sick."

"Dying, I tell you. Dammit, man, can't you get it through your head that you're dying before you die? I want you to believe me! It's less fun when you don't believe me. James, I kill you! Act like a man being killed!"

"You are such a wonderful man, Castlereagh. If I am somehow called away, and it seems that I am, I'll miss you woefully."

"Believe me that I kill you, Madigan! It's no fun if you don't believe."

But James Madigan died with a blissful smile, happy in the presence of his golden-hearted friend. It was enough in life to have known him.

"I had better take the other one tonight also, and have it done," Thomas told himself. The fox-face flickered there for a brief instant, as it sometimes did when he was alone. "And then I'll turn it up as far as it will go, and damn the headaches. This one will take everything I've got."

These were two of the most mysterious murders ever. The poisoning of Madigan was clearly murder; and the bloody bludgeoning of Doctor Forester could have been nothing else. And yet they seemed impossible of solution. There was no clue. No nothing.

The drink of Madigan had been poisoned, that of Castlereagh had not been. And yet they had been together for the long evening, and no one had intruded. And the affair of Doctor Forester was truly weird. Thomas Castlereagh, taken by a strong premonition, had gone to the home of his close friend the doctor and been admitted. Something happened then, a thing so shocking that Castlereagh does not retain the memory of it. From his attempt to intervene, apparently, he was covered with the doctor's death blood, and he held the death weapon in his own august hands. Whatever fell intruder did the thing remains a mystery.

These foul murders cry to Heaven for vengeance, but we of Earth are baffled when we try to answer that cry. All is riddle.

A certain commentator best encapsuled the feelings of us:

"The sympathy of the nation and the whole world goes to Thomas Castlereagh. So great and good a man, and he suffered such sorrows in the past! And now to be deprived of his two closest friends in a single night! The heart groans."

## AND NAME MY NAME

It was said our talk was gone or rare
And things with us were ill,
But we're seven apes from anywhere
A-walking up a hill.

They came to those Kurdish highlands by ways that surely were not the best in the world. They came with a touch of furtiveness. It was almost as if they wished to come invisibly. It had been that way the other times also, with the other groups.

There were seven creatures in most of the groups coming, and there were seven in this group: two from the Indies, two from Greater Africa, two from Small Africa (sometimes called Europe), one from Little Asia. There was no rule about this but there was always variety in the groups.

"I never believed that the last one was truly valid," said Joe Sunrise. He was the one from Little Asia: he was big and brindled. "Yes, I still regard the last one as an interloper. On, he did show greater power than ourselves. He set us back into a certain place, and since that time we don't talk very much or very well. We don't do any of the things as well as we did before. I suppose he is master of us, for a little while, and in a skimpy way. I believe though that that 'little while' is finished today. I believe that he will be shown as no more than a sad aberration of ourselves, as a step backwards or at least sideways.

"But it will be a true stage of the sequence today, as it was in our own primary day, is it was when we named the world and all its fauna, when we set it into its hierarchy."

"It comes to us from the old grapevine," said Mary Rainwood, the blondish or redish female from the Indies, "that the Day of the Whales was a big one. For showiness it topped even our own takeover. The account of it is carved in rocks in whale talk, in rocks that are

over a mile deep under a distant occan; it is an account that no more than seven whales can still read. But there are several giant squids who can read it also, and squids are notoriously loose-mouthed. Things like that are told around.

"There are others that stand out in the old memories, though they may not have happened quite as remembered. And then there were the less memorable ones: the Day of the Hyenas, for instance; or that of the present ruler (so like and yet so unlike ourselves) whose term is ending now. I for one am glad to see this one end."

"There is an air of elegance about the New One," said Kingman Savanna, the male delegate from Greater Africa. "He also is said, in a different sense from the one who now topples from the summit, to be both very like and very unlike ourselves. The New One hasn't been seen yet, but one of real elegance will be foreknown. Ah, but we were also elegant in our own short time! So, I am told, were the Elephants. There was also something special about the Day of the Dolphins. But about this passing interloper there has not been much special."

"What is this new event and coming blocks us out still more?" Linger Quick-One asked in worry. "What if it leaves us with still less speech and art. What can we do about our own diminishment?"

"We can grin a little," Joe Sunrise said with a certain defiance. "We can gnash our teeth. We can console ourselves with the thought that he will be diminished still more."

"He? Who?" Kingman asked.

"The Interloper: he under whom we have lived for this latter twisted and foreshortened era. The Days of the Interlopers are always short-lived, and when their day is finished they tend to lose their distinction and to merge with the lords of the day before. "

"They with us? Ugh!" Mary Rainwood voiced it.

There were seven persons or creatures going in this band, and Joe Sunrise of Little Asia seemed to be the accepcd leader. They walked slowly but steadily, seeming to be in some pain, as if they were not used to wearing shoes or robes. But they were well shod and well wrapped; they were wrapped entirely in white or gray robes such as the desert people wore, such as fewer of the highland people wore. They were fooled, they were girt, they bore packs and bundles. They were as if handless within their great gray gloves: they were almost faceless within their hoods and wrappings.

But two things could not be hidden if one peered closely at them: the large, brown, alert, observing eyes (these eyes had been passively observing now for ten thousand generations); and their total hairiness wherever the least bit of face or form gave itself away.

Well, they had a place to go and they were going there, but they had a great uneasiness about it all. These seven, by the way, out of all the members of their several species remaining on Earth, still retained speech and the abstracting thought that goes with it. And on what dark day had these gifts been lost by all the rest of their closest kindred?

And such was the case with almost all of the so different groups moving towards the meeting place. Such was the case with the elands and the antelopes, with the hogs and the liippos, with the asses and the zebras, with the eagles and the cranes, with the alligators and the gavials, with the dolphins and with the sharks. They were small elites representing large multitudes, and they retained certain attributes of elites that the multitudes had lost.

2.

Came Polar Bears on bergs past Crete,
And Mammoths seen by Man,
And Crocodiles on tortured feet,
And Whales in Kurdistan.

There had been all through the Near East, and then through the World, a general hilarity and an air of hoax about the reports of the 'Invisible Animals.' There were of course

the Bears that walked and talked like men and were reported as coming out of the Russias. One of these bears, so the joke went, entered a barroom in Istanbul. The bear was nattily dressed, smoked a cigar, laid a hundred lira note on the bar and ordered a rum and cola.

The bar-man didn't know what to do so he went back to the office and asked the boss.

"Serve the bear," the boss said, "only don't give him his ninety lira change. Give him ten lira only. We will make prodigies pay for being prodigies. "

The bar-man went and did this, and the bear drank his drink in silence.

"We don't get many bears in here," the barman finally said when the silence had gotten on his nerves.

"At ninety lira a throw I can understand why you don't," the bear said.

There were hundreds of these talking-animal jokes in those day. But they had a quality different from most jokes: they were all true exactly as told.

Then there were the invisible African Elephants (how can an African Elephant possibly be invisible in clear day light and open landscape?) coming up across the Sinai wastelands and going on for a great distance across the Syrian Desert. They were seven very large African Elephants and they spoke courteously to all who stood and gaped as they passed. They were the only African Elephants in the World with the gift of speech; the others had lost it long ago. No one would acmit seeing these out-of-place Elephants, of course. That would be the same as one admitting that he was crazy.

There were the great Crocodiles traveling in labor and pain over the long dry places. There were the Zebras and Giraffes snuffling along out of Greater Africa, and the blackmaned and the tawney-maned lions. There were the Ostriches and the Cape Buffalo and the huge Boa Snakes (the Day of the Snakes had been a very long time ago). There were not large groups of any of these, five or seven, or sometimes nine. All were rather superior individuals of their species: all had the gift of speech and reason. All had a certain rakishness and wry humor in their mien, and yet all went under that curious compulsion that is the younger brother of fear.

No person would admit seeing any of these 'Invisible Animals,' but many persons told, with a peculiar nervousness, of other persons claiming to have seen them. There was somebody telling of somebody seeing a band of Irish Elk: no matter that the species was supposedly extinct for several hhundred years; reportorial jokers would never be extinct. And it is true that these very few Elk said that they were the very last of their species.

Many persons were said to have seen two floating islands going past Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean. One of these floating islands was loaded with various animals from South America; the other was filled and painfully crowded with sundry animals from the North American continent. At least half of these animals had been believed to be extinct. Some of then, must have kept themselves well-hidden for centuries to be able to appear now even as 'Invisible Animals.'

But even odder things were coming across the plains of India and Iran. They were hopping and leaping animals. Actually their motion, when they were in full speed, was like that of the hind quarters of a galloping horse, a horse that had no forequarters. There were the big Kangaroos and the smaller Wallabies and such. But what were they doing? With them were many other creatures from Australia and New Zealand and Tasmania and the Impossible Islands.

Ah well, then what about the Polar Bears riding on a small ice-berg that floated past Crete and on towards Little Asia? There were Seals riding on this also, and Sea Lions were sporting in the lee of it. Oddest of all, there was a light but continuous snowstorm over this berg only and the circle of graying frothing water around it, and over no other place.

But Whales in the Kurdish Highlands? What? What? Yes, the rivers had been very high that year. They had cut out new channels here and there and left parts of their old

channels in the form of a series of lakes. But Whales in the Highlands! It's true that nobody told about it without winking. And yet it was told about.

And how's about the Angel out of Heaven who walked and stood in those high plains and who seemed to be in some sort of pleasant trouble? It's true that he said that he was not an Angel. He said that he was a Man only and was named Man. It is true that he looked like a Man and not an Angel (nobody knowing what an angel looked like). He looked like a Man, a Man of a very superior sort. But even this is a presumptive statement, since no one had admitted seeing him at all personally.

Even so, Whales in the Highlands, and a new special Man named Man! And a thousand other prodigies. Could it all be the report of jokers?

3.

To us, the bright, the magic set,
The World is but -a crumb.
If we be not the People yet,
When will the people come?

But there were seven other very special humans met together in that same part of the world; met together, perhaps, by a sort of contrived accident. Nobody could deny that they were human; and yet one of the things they were discussing was the report that their humanity might be denied that very day or the dollowing day.

They had met in a private club room of the International Hotel in Mosul. They were making ready for a journey beyond Mosul. Which way beyond Mosul? Well, that was the thing they were discussing with some puzzlement on their own part. It would not be North or South or East or West or Up or Down from Mosul. It would just be beyond, a little bit beyond Mosul Town.

The seven special humans were Anatole Keshish, a Turkish-Greek-Armenian intellectual of easy urbanity; Helen Rubric, the great lady and puzzle forever; Toy Tonk, an Eurasian girl who constructed philosophies that were like flower arrangements; Hatari Nahub, that charismatic Negro man who transcended continents and cultures; Lisa Baron of the light-haired and light-eyed peoples, and she was light-minded and light-tongned beyond the others; Charley Mikakeh, who was six kinds of American Indian, with a few touches of French, Irish, dark Dutch, and Jewishness in him; Jorge Segundo, who was all the Latins in the world in one man but in whom the old Roman predominated (there was once a wise man who said that we tended to forget that the old Romans were Italians, to believe that they were Englishmen, but they weren't).

These seven had brilliance dripping off them like liquid jewels, an image which we cannot express rightly in words, not even their own fragmentary words.

How these seven had been selected for a mission that they understood hardly at all is a puzzle. But they had gathered here from all the world without a word of instruction or suggestion from anyone. It was only a sort of psychebiological urge that had told them to come exactly here exactly now.

"We are met here and we hardly know why," said Jorge Segundo. "We know each other not at all personally and only slightly by reputation. We are called here, but who is the caller? We come like lemmings."

"The Lemmings came today," said Toy Tonk, "but only seven of them, and they not at all in a panic. Nor are we, though perhaps we should be. This is perhaps the 'Childhood's End' as foretold by the Clarke in the century past. Will this now be 'The Second Age of Man'? And will ourselves seem children in comparison to the man (so far he is reported as singular in all ways) who comes?"

"This is perhaps the New Morning, the Epiphany of one more of the 'Nine Billion Names of God' as phrased by the same Clarke, and we will either be ourselves magnified,

or we will be reduced to something less than children," Lisa Baron said lightly. "But we do not know anything is happening."

"I stood and talked to a camel this afternoon," said Charley Mikakeh, "and you say that nothing is happening? 'What do you make of all the new and strange animals passing through?' the camel asked me. 'It's a puzzler, is it not? And what do you make of myself talking? I and the very few others of my species have not done that for a very long time, not since the mushroomns still had prepuces as a normal thing, and yourself began to walk upright. It's an off thing, Ape, is it not?" 'I am Man and not Ape,' I told the Camel, somewhat stiffly, I'm afraid. But the very fact that there was this conversation with a Camel indicates that something is happening. "

"Perhaps only inside your own head, Charley," Abatole jibed. "I have had conversation with a variety of animal species myself today. All say that it is unusual with them; not .it in common for their species to be able to talk. Yet I find it less strange than that we seven, previously unknown to each other, should be gathered here and talking together."

"Oh, we are the seven magic people," Hatari said rationally, though he now had a not quite rational look in his eyes. "Every age of the world (and I believe that our own has been the pentultimate age) has its seven magic people who come together by psychic magnet at a hinge time. We are the spokesmen for the rest. But if we are the spokesmen, what will we say, and to whom?"

"If we be people indeed (And we never doubted it till this day) then we will speak it to our own variant (this mysterious Shining Man), and it will be given to us in that moment what we should say," Helen Rubric was murmuring with her eyes half closed. "But I am very edgy about all this, and I believe that we are really coming to the edge. There is something wrong with the setting and the set."

"What do you say, Helen?" Jorge asked. "What is wrong with the set?"

'"The set is off; it is gone wrong. Both the picture and the sound seem doubled, Jorge."

"Cannot it be fixed? But what am I talking about? I do feel for a moment that we are no more than animated cartoons on a screen. But this isn't a TV set; it is something larger."

"Tgis set is the whole-world set, Jorge," Helen Rubric muttered. "And it has gone too far wrong to be fixed by ourselves. It may be fixed by this New Fixer who comes. But I feel that we ourselves are diminished and detnoted, that we are put into a shadowy box now and confined to a narrow corner.

"I gazed upon my own double today and talked with her. She said that her name was Mary Rainwood. She seemed to take a saddened and sisterly view of me. She is an animal of the species Orangutan; and if we are sisters under the skin then hers is under the thicker and hairier skin; I might say that hers is the harder skin to get under. I know her species, but of what species am I an animal?

"It was odd that she was able to speak. She says that it only happens in the last seven days of an age. It seems equally odd that I am able to speak, and I really wonder whether I have been doing it for more than seven days. I believe that our own era has been a very short one and a deponent one."

It was something like a ski lodge there in that private club room of the International Hotel of Mosul. Very cozy there by the open fire at night after a strenuous day on the snow slopes. What open fire? What snow slopes? That was all illusion.

It was more like a cave they were in. Open fire or not there was a flickering and a shadowing on the cave walls. And the talk among them became more an more shadowy on that last night of the Age.

It was morning then. It hadn't been such a long evening and night, only a few hours. It hadn't been such a long Age, no more than thirty or forty thousand years. They went out in that morning to a place a little bit beyond Mosul. Seven magic persons on either the last or the first morning of their magic.

4.
Yours: -- nervous sort of apish lives,
Derivative the while:
And, somehow, derro-concrete hives
Have not a lot of style.

The Shining Man hadn't arrived from anywhere. All ways of coming had been watched by some or other of the creatures. And yet he was there now on the crown of the animated hill. He was very much as all the creatures had supposed that he would be, before they had seen him at all: not really shining, not of imposing stature, with an inexperienced and almost foolish look on his face, not complex, not at all magic; competent, though, and filled with an uneasy sort of grace.

He was not nervous. Nervousness, of course, was not possible for such all excellent one as he was. But he was in some pain, for he was already in light travail.

The animated hill wis merely a wide low hill (higher, though, than the high hills around it) covered with creatures. They were in tiers and files and arrays, they were in congregations and assemblies and constellations. Creatures almost beyond counting, enough seemingly to cover the Earth, and they did very nearly cover the wide hill.

The man appointed and named them, speaking to them with an easy donlinance, and then sending them away again, species after species, speechless again for another era, yet having their assigned places and tasks for a new age of the world.

Earth-worms, beetles, damsel-flies, honeybees, locusts, cicadas came and went. They had slightly new assignments now in a world which would be at least slightly different. Shrikes and eagles and doves and storks came through the crowded air. They spoke; sometimes they argued; they were convinced, or they accepted their assignments without being convinced. But they winged away again, speechless now once more, but far from soundless.

Time became diffused and muluplex, for the man imposed and directed thousands of species while the Sun had hardly moved. Space also was extra dimensionable, for the wide low hill could not have served as staging space for so many species in the normal order of things.

"We will be the last ones," Lisa Baron said to her magical companions. "As we are the highest species, the lords of the world, so we will have the final instruction and appreciation. Ourselves, the first age of mankind, will receive condirmation and approval from this aberrant creature who (however unlikely he seems) ushers in the second age of mankind. I beg you all, confer with him straight-faced and in all seriousness. Consider that his office is more important than himself. We are the giants and he is the dwarf, but he is higher than ourselves for he is appointed to stand on our shoulders. "

"We will not be the last ones," said Jorge Segundo. "Carl you not see that all these confrontations and instructions are simultaneous? And yet we wait. It is as if he notices all the others an not ourselves; he is probably jealous of our basic stature. But do you not see that even the trees and grasses come and go, speaking with him in their moment, and then going away speechless again to their own places. It is the unnaturing of the ecology that happens now, the preternaturalizing of the ecological balance. The natural world was always out of balance. There could not be a balanced ecology before or without man. Well, but why did we not bring the balance in our own time? Are we not men?"

The whales went away, greatly pleased and greatly relieved about something. And yet, all that the man had done was bless them and say 'Your name is Whale.'

There were long conversations with some of the species, and the man was forced to become eloquent with these. But the long confrontations did not use up great quantities of time. All these things were telescoped and simultaneous.

"Your name is Lion," "Your name is Buffalo," "Your name is Donkey," the man was saying. The man was tired now and in more than light travail. But he continued to name and

assign the creatures. There was much discussion and instruction in each case but they did not cosume much time. "Your name is Swine," for instance, was a total statement that contained all that discussion and instruction. The palaver was like a scaffold that is disassembled and taken down when the building is completed. "Your name is Carp-fish" was such a completed structure with very much of stress and synthesis having gone into it.

"Your name is Ape," the man said, smiling in his pain.

"No, no, no, we are men," shouted Joe Sunrise, that big and brindled ape from Little Asia. "We are not ape. It is the miserable half-creature there who called us ape. Can he be right about anything?"

"Not of himself, and surely not about himself," the man said. "But he hadn't this knowledge of himself. He is only an air and a noise. Remember that you yourself had the day when you named the names: You named lion and buffalo and mammoth and others. This half-thing also had his shorter day. It may have sounded as though he said, and perhaps he did say 'Your name is Ape.' I do say it. 'Your name is Ape.' Now go and fill your niche."

There was much more to it, as there was to every confrontation, yet it consumed little time. There was lamentation from Mary Rainwood and Kingman Savanna and Linger Quick-One and others of their group. There were hairy visages and huge brown eyes staining with tears. But the apes were convinced and almost at peace when they finally accepted it and went away, speechless again but not noiseless, shedding their robes and wrappings and going hairy. They were confirmed as apes now, and they would be more fulfilled apes than they had been before.

It seemed that there was only one group left. Really, it had seemed to every group that it was the last one left; and yet every group had heard the naming of every other group, for it was all simultaneous.

"Well, come, come, my good man," Anatole Kashish said to the man, and he clapped his hands for attention. "Now that you have disposed of the animals (and you did do it neatly, even though you were a little too wordy about it sometimes), it is time that we had our talk. We will clue you in on the world situation. Then we will be willing to listen to your special mission and message. I believe that we have been waiting for the message a long while, though drankly we expected it to be brought by a more imposing messenger."

"You haven't any name," the man said with an almost bluntness. "Your particular species vanishes now as a separate thing. It has never been a real species. It hasn't either body or spirit; only air and noise. Several of the creatures were correct in calling you the interlopers, the half-creattires. Be submerged now! Be nothing!"

"No, no, no, we are men," Jorge Segundo cried out very much like the brindled ape Joe Sunrise had cried out the same words. "We are the lords of creation. Ours is the world civilization. We are the First Age of Mankind."

"You were the Second Age of Apedom," the man said, "and an abridged and dedective age it has been. I intuit that there have been other such unsatisfactory half-ages or no-ages. Ah, and I am responsible for getting rid of the clutter you have left."

The magic had suddenly gone out of the seven persons or erstwhile persons. Pieces of it that had fallen off them seemed to shine like jellyfish on the ground.

"We have fission, we have space travel," Hatari Nahub protested. "We have great cities and structures of every sort. "

"I intuit all this," the man said. "You are a hiving species, but your hives and structures do not have the style of those of the bower-birds or the honeybees or the African termites. I have wondered a little, though, how you build up these ferro-concrete hives that you call cities. Do you accrete them by deposits of your regurgitations or your excrement after you have eaten limestone and iron ore? It's a grotesque way, but the blind and instinctive actions of such hive creatures as yourselves always seem grotesque to thinking creatures such is myself. Such mindlessness, such waste in all that you do! The ferro-concrete and wood and stone and chrome hives-colonis that you construct for the billions of inmates, they are more

strange, more mindless, of less use than would be so many great ant-hills. Go now, you mindless leaving folk. You tire me."

"But we have civilization; we have the electromagnetic complex and the nuclear complex," Charley Mikakeh challenged.

"And the fire-fly has a light in his tail," the man said. "Go. Your short day is done. "

"But we have all the arts," Toy Tonk claimed, and she was very near the art of tears.

"Can you sing like the mockingbird or posture like the peacock?" the man asked. "What arts do you have? Go now."

(This was not really a long argument. The crows had argued much longer, and just for the jabbering fun of it. Besides, this was happening at the same time that all the other decisions were being given.)

"We will not go. You have not namied us yet," Helen Rubric spoke.

"It will be better if I do not speak your name," the man said. "You will shrivel enough without. Go back to your hive cities and decay in their decay. Your speech now becomes gibberish and you begin your swift decline. "

"Why, I know who you are now," Lisa Baron exclaimed. "You are the Genesis Myth. In dact you are the Partheno-Genesis Myth. Is it not strange that no language has a masculine form of parthen, and yet it appears to be the oldest. Now I know why the Myth is in pain. From your side will it be? I am a doctor, among other things. May I assist?"

"No," the man said. "You may not. And know you something else, female of the unnamed species: every myth comes true when enough time has run. There was a great myth about the earthworm once. There was even a sort of myth about yourselves. And you, creature, have a little more than the rest of your kindred. It seems a shame that you have already come and gone before the scene itself begins."

"We have not gone, we will not go," Anatole Kashish insisted. "Everyone is of some use. What can we offer?" Then his tongue had lost its cuunning forever.

"You can offer only your submission and retroregression," the man said.

"Ah, but tell us finally, what is our real name?" Hatari Nahub asked. Those were the last true words he ever spoke.

"Your name is Ape," the man said. "Really your name is 'Secondary Ape.'"

There were fair and dark visages, and blue and gray and brown eyes shining with tears. The seven followed the other seven away, speechless forever, shedding their robes and wrappings, knowing that the blight was already upon their already obsolete world-hives, knowing that their minds and talents were dimmed, and then not really knowing anything ever again.

## ROYAL LICORICE

From Catfish crop and Mud-Goose tears
And Cimmaron mud River:
For fifty cents a thousand years,
And for a brick for-iver.
-- Boomer Flats Ballads

Black Red had been sixteen years at stud. This was after a strict colthood and eight years of competitive horse racing. Now he had become a very slow and undependable stud. He was one old horse.

He gnawed a clump of prickly pear. He had been a stupid and rock-headed horse from his youth, and now that his eyes were shot he would eat anything. His owner chewed on a length on big bluestem grass and contemplated him. It was too bad to sell, for nine dollars for cat meat, a horse that had earned dive million dollars. But what else could be done with the old animal?

But Black Red smelled a brother horse, an old flyer like himself, and he raised his head. So did the owner, and he saw in the distance a rare contraption: an ancient horse pulling an ancient medicine wagon that had once known gay paint; and the driver was more than ancient; he was timeless.

Then the contraption had bridged the distance too quickly to be believed, and it came to a halt in that grassy lane across the rail fence from Black Red and his owner.

"I, sir," said the driver of the contraption, "am selling Royal Licorice, the concoction that will halt and reverse aging in any creature. Buy it and use it, and you can have for your horse restored youth and great length of days. I sell it for fifty cents a small jug and a dollar a large."

"Why don't you use it yourself, old man?" the owner of Black Red asked.

"I do. Would you believe that I am more than a thousand years old?"

"No, I wouldn't, but you look as if you were. And your own horse?"

"Would you believe that he also is more thin a thousand years old? Why do you hesitate? I don't make a lot of this, and I offer it only by chance as I go. It's by your happy chance that I've met you here today, sir."

Black Red neighed hopefully.

"See," said the peddling man. "He wants it. Your horse is smarter than yourself, sir."

"Not at all. Some of my horses may be, but Black Red is a rock-head. In his own day he his way by his great speed and strength. He'd never have made it by his wits."

Black Red had reached a very long neck through the rail fence, grasped the small jug of Royal Licorice in his uneven teeth, and then swallowed the whole thing on one brave, horsey gulp.

"Will it hurt him, do you think?" the owner asked. "It won't matter really, for he's about at the end of his line. But I like the Roman-nosed fool, and I'd not have him suffer a choking death."

"It will hurt him not at all," the timeless peddling man said. "The clay of the jug dissolves at once when it reaches the stomach. Watch now! The change is startling when you've never seen it before. You have the finest and fastest colt in the world here, Sir. Watch."

Black Red gave a great snort, a youthful snort. He took off through the short cropped Blue-Stem with a clatter of hoofs. He ran, and he changed. His was a great colush gallop, and he now had the movements and appearance of a fine colt. When he was a half mile off, he half-turned as if going into the backstretch. He stretched and he ran, and the owner was seized with the shouting madness. That man knew speed when he saw it, real speed, winning speed. And the big colt was growing more glossy and more beautifully muscled by the second. He was dark cherry color. He was heroicany swift.

"You owe me fifty cents for the small jug he took," the peddler said.

"Yes, here," said the owner. "I don't believe it, but my eyes have never lied to the before. Where can I find you if I want some more of it?"

"Oh, I'll be around before he needs it again."

"What's your name, old fellow? Or should I say Thousand-Year Young fellow?"

"They call me the Licorice Man."

01d Cyrus Slocum was throwing rocks at a fence post. This was up in the gypsum hills where old Cy had his ranch. It wasn't much of a ranch, but the rocky, bitter gypsum of it was in accord with the man himself.

Slocum wasn't really unhappy. He had money; he had his stingy land (as stingy as he had used to be with a bingle); he had his memories; he had his good right arm, a little mellow now it's true; he had a few cattle.

Cy Slocum (you may not remember it about him if you are young, for the first time) had been about the greatest baseball pitcher ever. But the end of his career had been more than forty years before. He had been a six hundred game winner. He had once pitched

ninety-nine consecutive scoreless innings; he had maintained an earned run average of .92 over a five year period. He had had it all.

And even now, as an old man, Slocum was hitting that fence post resoundingly. he would angle on a knee high slicer that just caught a bit of the post. He would hit it dead center with a should-high fast rock. And, when he threw his change-up, that fence post seemed to lean weakly towards him in drustration.

"I could have been half way to second, and you skylarking there on the mound," came a voice, friendly but full of timeless authority. "What? Do you no longer use the eyes in the back of your head?"

"I remember you from somewhere," Slocum said as he turned to see the ancient man with the venerable horse and medicine wagon. How could it have supped up on him when it had to clatter up that rough and rocky gypsum road?

"It was the year you first tried out with the St. Louis Browns," the timeless man said, "and what antiquarian remembers the old Browns now? You ran athwart a barnstorming bunch of bearded men. "

"The House of David!" said Slocum with friendly awe in his voice. "Now they were ball players and they beat many of the major league teams. But we took them three to nothing that afternoon. I two-hit them."

"It's another and more outsized bunch of bearded blokes that I meant," said the ancient traveler.

"Now you open an angry wound," Slocum almost moaned. "That afternoon-mare of a game has stuck in my undermind for this much more than half a century. They called themselves the Flats, I believe it was. Off name, off bunch. They had half a dozen real giants; must have been over eight feet tall, some of them. The Flats, the Boomer Flats they called themselves."

"Yes, we had some pretty good-sized fellows on our team," the travelling man said. They were the Uncles, the Old Bachelors, the Bashful and Silent Ones. "

"You'd unwind pretty long," Slocum said, "but not that long."

"I'm six six," said the traveler. "I was a little taller then, but I'm not one of the Uncles. I'm the little shrimp who played third base."

"Eiggten runs they tagged me for in that first inning," Slocum remembered blackly, "and the man kept me in there and let me suffer."

"It was fortuitous," said the traveler. "You made every mistake that a young pitcher could make. But most of them you never made again. 'Twas luck you met us. Slocum, how would you like to have your arm back again, at its strongest, and at the same time keep your wits at their wisest? How would you like your youth back without losing a drop of your later acquired wisdom and savvy?"

"Wouldn't that be something, fellow? Who are you?"

"I'm the Licorice Man. This horse here is named Peegosh. He's better than my regular horse. He belongs to the Comet; but the Comet isn't traveling this year, and Peegosh wanted to amble the country with me a bit. What I sell is Royal Licorice; fifty cents a small jug, a dollar a large."

"I'll take a small one," Cy Slocum said. They transacted. Then Slocum took a great swig of the stuff. He began to throw rocks at a fence post again, but now he was throwing at one three posts down the line. Hitting it too. And he was throwing like a young man.

"It works, doesn't it," Slocum said.

"Sure it works. Always does. And your hair is turning black again.

"I know it. I can feel it." He continued to throw. How that young fellow could throw those rocks!

The indomitable old dame had been driving an indomitable old Duesenberg. Both of them had been restored, polished and groomed in amazing fashion, and both looked good. The old dame and her old car had received a special award at the Antique Auto Festival

Southwestern Division show. And the award read: For class, which doesn't have to be defined. There was no money attached to this award as there was to the first and second and third prizes. That didn't matter. The old dame didn't need it. She was pleased about the whole thing. She purred along in the sporty Dusie on a fine little country road, she remembering, and the snazzy little old Dusie remembering.

Then they were passed by a long-legged, fast-ambling horse that pulled a flake-panted medicine wagon. Listen, nobody passed the old dame and the old Dusie like that! A horse and wagon sure does not.

She nouced, however, that, while the hoofs of the stilt-legged, stripling horse struck sparky fire at every step, yet these hoofs did not quite touch the roadway. That horse was going along six inched in the air. (Don't mention it, though; there would have to be explanations or denials.)

Then the horse was reined in ahead, and the old dame stopped the Dusie beside the wagon. An old, tall, raffish gentleman got out of the wagon and came over to her.

"Ma'am," he asked, "aren't you Flambeau La Flesche?"

"Sir," she said, "I am the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord, a fancier of antiques and myself an antique. "

"No, no," the man insisted. "You used to be in vaudeville. After that, you were a movie star."

"And now I am an old character actress," she said, "playing that old character, myself. You really remember?"

"Sure. Some of us used to dress up and take the train out Boomer over to Tulsa whenever you played it the Orpheum. You are Flambeau La Flesche, are you not?"

"I was. The publicity man who coined that name for me is buried in a potters field somewhere, I hope. He couldn't even spell Flesh. But now I am the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord. What are you chewing?"

"Royal Licorice Plug Tobacco."

"Well, don't be ungallant. Cut a plug for me too. I'm a country girl originally. You're from Boomer, are you? That dump!"

"No. No. I said we used to take the train out of Boomer. But I'm really from Boomer Flats."

"I apologize. They're as different as dusk and darkness, are they not? And the elixir you are selling, is it also called Royal Licorice?"

"Yes. Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder. You catch on fast, Flambeau."

"I always did," she said, and she spat a beautifully straight stream of black Royal Licorice tobacco. The Licorice Man almost hesitated in offering her the benison of returning youth. She was one dame had grown old gracefully. But he was peddler deep in the long bones of him so he didn't hesitate very much.

"Flambeau, it goes at fifty a small jug, a dollar a large one," he said with his easy finesse.

"All right, I'll take a small one then." She bought it. She took a thoughtfull drink of it.

"What's it made out of?" she asked. "Catfish, mud-goose tears, Cimmaron River, Royal Licorice chewing tobacco."

"Mud-goose tears? Tell me, Licorice, what can make a mud-goose cry? What's the one thing that can do it? This had better be good."

The Licorice Man looked around durtively though there was no one else within a mile. Long-faced drollery had taken over his phiz.

"It's a little raunchy, Flambeau," he said then. "I'd better whisper it to you."

"I'll use it," she said a while later is she wiped the smeared remnants of laughter from her face. "Raunchy, I'll say. But lots of times we used words in my skits and movies, and raunchy tales go well with me." She took another thoughtful drink of the elixir.

"Yes, I do feel something," she said. "Wouldn't it be funny if I could come back that way, all the way? I'd give them all fits if I had my girlhood again. And never was the competition shabbier. The little babes these days, they have so little talent that all they can do is peel it down to the buff. Me, I had class, so I never had to do that. I always kept my garters on. They called the the Golden Garter Girl."

"I remember, Flambeau."

"Oh, it's working all right. I can feel it. Say, Licorice, pour a big jug of that into Dusie's tank. He'd like to be young again too, not merely restored."

The Licorice Man poured a big jug of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder into the tank of the snazzy little car. Flambeau paid him. Then she took off in the Dusie, leaving the smell of burning rubber and returning youth to drift above that fine little country road.

Tell all the boys that Flambeau La Flesche is back.

Did you tell them all?

Sure, tell those in the graveyard too. Then especially. It will give them a lift, and those who have proper clothes will come to see her.

Ex-President Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson was fishing along Exendine Creek on the Ex-Presidential Ranch in Kaw County Oklahoma. He was himself of a dead-fish complexion now, and so shrhunken that the great cowboy hat and the sharkskin boots fitted him illy.

The Exendine Creek was only four feet wide at this place, but old Ex had cast his line far beyond its banks and had tangled it in some sumac bustles sixty feet on the other side of the creek.

Old Ex believed that the sumac bushes were Republican congressmen out to thwart him. He cursed them, and he chopped off their appropriations. Some days this would intimidate the bushes and cause them to release the line, but today they held it fast.

A man with in animal and wagon came bumping along.

"Are you registered, friend, and will you vote right?" Ex asked the man in what had once been a great voice.

"I am and I will," said the man. He was the Licorice Man; no use keeping it a secret from you; you'd find him out anyhow. And the Licorice Man was untangling Ex's line hrom the bushes.

"And the donkey, is he registered?" Ex asked.

"He's a horse and not a donkey," the Licorice Man said. "He is registered, but how he votes is his own secret. Reel in, man."

"I know that a donkey will always vote my way," Ex said, reeling in his line, "but I never trusted a horse. What did you do with the fish that was on my hook?"

"Don't you one-up me, Hiram Andrew Clayborne," the Licorice Man said.

"How would you like to be restored to your youth and to your faculties? Then you could run again. You have just nine days to the for the first primary."

"There's no restoring needed for me," old Ex said. "My wits are as they always were. "

"True, true," said the Licorice Man. "Sad but true."

"And I still have my same fund of fine stories, and I still have my great name. I always say that I am the only Apostle who ever became president. There was all earlier president Andrew Johnson. it's true, but he wasn't the Apostolic type. But I have the Andrew Johnson in my name somewhere. Andrew, as you know, was the brother of Peter. Boy, look up chapter and verse for me quickly! I wonder where that boy has gone. He's never around any more. And Christ once said 'Peter, Son of John' so that was his name, 'Son of John,' 'Johnson,' get it? And I, as Peter's brother, am Andrew Johnson, the only Apostle who ever became president."

"Yes, you still have your same fund of stories," the Licorice Man agrecd. "And you still

have your great name. But there are restorations needed. Your voice is cracked and broken. Your eyesight is about gone. You are stooped and old and toothless and hairless and deaf, and you smell like a goat. As you are, you just don't inspire condifence."

"Have I aged? Is it true? that I have aged?" old Ex asked.

"It's true. Now, what I can do is..."

"How much?"

"Yours is a hard case. Nothing short of a big jug will do it. One dollar."

"Have you figured excise tax in that? Ex-Presidents are exempt from excise taxes, you know. I had that regulation passed myself."

"Seventy-one cents, then,"

Old Ex fished out the seventy-obe cents from somewhere. He took a jolt from the jug; then another; then another. He began to fill out to the size of the great cowboy hat and the sharkskin boots. He began to talk in the high manner.

The horse Pegosh was restive. So horse, man, and wagon, took their bumpy farewell. Behind them the Apostolic voice of Hiram Andrew Clayborne rose in cracked and broken thunder. And then the cracks were healed by the miracle of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder.

The strength and timbre came back to that voice. The power came back. It was a restoration, a resurrection. It was a new manifestation in all its former glory. It was itself again; the Go1den Calf. Country, look out!

And there were other persons restored and reyouthified in those crisp late winter days. But if all that happened was told, there'd not be paper enough in the world to record it all.

2.

For both, the year bloomed pulsey red:
Contraries and Compliants.
A Springtime of the Ghosts, they said;
A Springtime of the Giants.

-- Boomer Flats Ballads

The wonder colt Red Licorice seemed ready to sweep the big four that year from his bruited reputation. And this was when the public had not yet seen him run. There was a big noise about him from the men who knew these things. No unknown was ever so widely known so quickly.

He was possibly the last colt ever sired by that grand old champion Black Red. And Black Red, full of years md honors, had died only a short time before this, according to his owner. He had been buried at a private ceremony, very private; but an imposing stone, red granite with black obsidian inset, had been mounted over the grave. There were now several hundred visitors a day who came to that grave, and these visitors were told that the horse buried there now lived again in his son.

Red Licorice was the absolute image of his great sire. Early films of Black Red as a colt were run, and you would almost swear that this was the same animal that now trained daily at the Red Hills Barn. The long low gallop, the laid-back ears, the rhythmic hooved thunder, the snorting that sounded half-horse and half-wolf, the red-black mahogany gleam, the bowed neck that was almost bull-like, the very long and large (and, some said, empty) head, the flowing tail and streaming mane, these were all identical in the father and the son.

But Red Licorice had sheared three seconds of the mile and a half time of Black Red, on the same practice track, under the same almost perfect conditions.

Then Red Licorice won four warm-up mile and a quarter races, and he won them easily, this against the best colts in the world in what was billed as the Year of the Great

Colts. Red Licorice set four new track records in doing this and three of them had been held by his father.

Derby time came, too soon, too soon. The steep interest in the affair wa still climbing. But it would be a Derby to be remembered as long as Men and Derbys last. Red Licorice took the Derby in really sensational fashion, an now this magic colt had taken the fancy of all race-dom. As rock-headed as his father had been, he also had his father's outrageous talent as a ham actor. How that big colt could cavort about a track!

Here were memories being made as one watched. Big Blue-Stem grass of the pastures where the colts were raised; black loam and red clay mixed and mingled and managed into the fine straightaways; smell of hot horses in the springtime and the summer (smell composed of clover and green oats and manure); weathered grandstands, and the blue-green infields at the tracks; winged money flying with the winged horses; the Sign of Equus and the Summer Solstice; these were ever the images of the year for millions of fine folks. And one magic colt could always turn it into a magic year.

Cyrus X. Slocum the Third had shown up in training camp in Phoenix, unsolicited, uncontracted, unknown.

Yes, he was the grandson of the original Cy Slocum, he said. "You can't trade on even a great name," the manager told him, "you would have to make it entirely on your own." "I know it, I know it," young Cy said. "Just let me pitch. Let me pitch and I'll show everyone." Well, he did look and move like an athlete. He did look very much like those old pictures of his grandfather. He had a strong personality, a strong arm, and outrageous condifence. "And it never hurts things for a player to have a great name," the club's publicity man said. So young Cy was given a try-out in the training camp.

They always kept the wraps on the pitchers for a couple of days at first, but Cy was ready to blast loose.

"Shape up my arm slowly?" he asked. "Man, my arm is always in shape. Haven't we any heftier catchers than those? I'd blow them clear out of the park. You don't have a steel back-stop here? I like to warm up with a sixteen pound shot at regular distance, but hard as I throw it it'd go right through anything here."

Cy was scolded somewhat for standing against the centerfield fence and throwing half a dozen balls clear over the grandstand, very high above home plate and still rising till they went out of sight.

"Not only will you throw your arm away with that showboating," one of the coaches told him, "but balls are too expensive to toss half a dozen of them away like that."

"Nah," Cy said. "The balls aren't gone. I was throwing my famous return ball then. I put a little twist on it when I throw it, and it comes back to me."

A small dot appeared in the sky far above and beyond the grandstand. The dot grew, it came as fast is a bullet, it grew to baseball size and it zanged into Cy's glove there by the centerfield fence. And the other five balls followed it quickly.

"A long time ago I -- ah, I mean my granfather -- used to lob the ball up to the batters," Cy said. "It would come almost all the way to a batsman, near enough to draw his swing most of the time. Then it would zoom back into my glove, I mean to my grandfather's glove. I finally quit throwing it though. The umpires got together and decided to call them balks instead of strikes whenever I threw my return ball even if the batter took a full swing at it."

"The old-timers say that your grandfather told tall stories too," the coach commented.

Cy pitched in inter-squad games, three innings one day, six the next, nine the day after that. The batters couldn't even touch him. He pitched about fifty inter-squad innings and never gave up a hit. The reporters were making a great to-do about this bright new rookie with the bright old name.

The team played the Giants who also trained in Phoenix then. They threw Cy at them in the first game and he no-hit them. Three days later he did it again.

He burned his way through all those exhibition games. He had a great collection of pitches of his own; and every good pitch that he saw he mastered instantly and added to his

repertoire. He had the strength and speed of youth. He also had, from somewhere, such maturity and wisdom and judgment as could hardly be acquired in less than a lifetime.

The regular season began.

"Now we'll see what this early-blooming crocus can really do," a few of the unsold critics muttered.

Young Cy Slocum, pitching every third oay, won his first thirteen games without a loss. There would be no limits at all to such a career as was opening up before him.

"How old are you anyhow, Cy?" a reporter asked him one day.

"Eighty-one," Cy said promptly. Then he corrected himself. "No, no, I mean eighteen. I have a speech affliction; I sometimes get my numbers transposed."

Flambeau La Flesche the zoom-zoom girl had zoomed to the top of everything with electronic swiftness. She was on Live; she was on 2-D, 3-D, and 4-D (you have to be smarter than hell to even know how to watch 4-D; only Mensa members are allowed to apply for tickets to see it); she was on Voxo; she was in five simultaneous musical comedies; she was on Vodvil and Sound in the Round; she was in the Old Time Electric Theatre; and she was big in Metranome. Already she looked like a shoo-in to take the Nobel Prize in the Centerfold Division. Few were the media in which she had not quickly become outstanding.

But had there not been a Flambeau La Flesche a long time ago? Had that other young girl had not been identical to this both in name and appearance? Yes, even in voice.

"I suspect that I'm the same kid, only refleshed," Flambeau told an interviewer. "I'm reincarnated, that's what I am, and you have to have the right kind of flesh to do that. That's want it means. I'm very carnal. That's why I reincarnate so easy. "

Really, what else can you say of Flambeau? She did have the flesh, she did have a spirit as torchy as her name. She did have all the forms and resonances. She was everything, just as her preincarnation jad been everything so many years before.

And as she found, as had the previous she, that there were only twenty-four or twenty-six hours in the day; she could never remember which, but there weren't enough. Then she had a hot idea to save everyone money and to save herself drudgery and time.

"You, moguls, why don't you just dig out the old movies that I made in my previous life," she said. "I haven't changed any since then. When you have class you don't have to change. Just get them out and fill in the scratches and cracks and run them again. Nobody can know that it isn't me, because it will be me."

They did it. It worked. They ran all those old ones and they were explosive hits.

On, the names of those two timing great movies are like music:
Louisiana Haystack, Popsie, The Cremation of Betty Lou, Zephyr Jones, The Day the Lilac Bush Burned Down, Nine Dollar Dog, Three Fish Out, Little Audrey, Crabgrass Street, Slippery Elm, Spider Spider Down Inside Her, Lady Bug Bongo, Accolade and Accolade Revisited (This latter had been titled Son of Accolade the first time around).

What Drama, what Comedy, what Music, what Memories!

But Flambeau wasn't quite so happy with it that second time around. "I knew that the competition nowadays was nothing," she said once, "but, after all, what is there to compete for? The Accolades aren't what they used to be. And Accolade Revisited has an emptiness and irony that wasn't, at first, intended. The thing about us excelling types is that when we ascend to great heights it is all the same as if we stood still and the world went down hill. We must have excelled too much; the world sure has gone down."

"Miss Flambeau," another interviewer asked her, "we know that you are an old car fancier, but many of the big three restorers are puzzled and jealous about the restoration job you've had done on that old Dusenberg. It's alinost as it were new. What's the secret?"

"It is new," Flambeau said. "The secret is to buy a dollar jug. A fifty cent jug is all right for people, but it just isn't enough for a snazzy speedster like that. "

But the interviewer didn't seem to understand her.

"Why don't we produce The World Under Lousiana Haystack again?" she asked her producer. "That was a movie a girl could really put herself into."

"But, Flambeau, The World Under Louisiana Haystack was never finished," the producer said. "There were difficulties with it."

"Let's finish it then," she said. "The diffictilties are the best part."

They set about the task of finishing it. There were real difficulties. The resolution of these difficulties might take all things to the end of this account, or to the end of the world, whichever came first.

"This is a job that calls for another jug," Flambeau said. "It may even can for a dollar jug this time."

Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson (great nephew of Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson) had won the first of the Presidential primaries, that of Massachusetts and Connecticut Plantations. So he was off and running ahead.

He took Florida State Conglomerate. That was expected. He took Los Angeles State, and that had not been expected. It was a big one.

Johnson was speaking well and often, nine times a day. It was the Golden Guff itself, and no one could do it like your Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson. In this, he reminded old-timers and historians of his own great uncle the President Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson. That Ex-President, by the by, was unavailable for comment or for appearance.

But the young Johnson campaigned energetically and wantonly, if not always well. He wore a scrape and grass sandals when he caimpaigned in the Chicano districts, though the Chicanos did not wear these things and many of them had never seen them before. He was decked out in Navajo bead-work and a Sioux war-bonnet when he spoke at a supermarket in Indianapolis. Indianapolis really meant Indian City, didn't it? Johnson went equipped with skullcap and nine phrases of Yiddish into the adjacent Jewish suburbs. He wore a miter and alb and carried a crosier when he went into Irish Catholic neighborhood; and he offered what he said was holy water from Exendine Creek. "Nine doctors out of ten state that it is ihore efficacious than Lourdes water," he declared, "and it contains eleven more affitives." He wore a zebra-hide cape and crocodile-tooth necklace when he entered the chocolate suburbs. "For our common African heritage," he would say. "One of my ancestors was Postmaster General for the Pharaoh Ra-ta-ta."

He opened a wild but calculated blood-letting against the other candidates of his own party. "They have turned the House of Our Fathers into the Outhouse of our Fathers," he would roar in his golden roar. There was nothing gingerly about his attacks; he left no stone unthrown in his assaults. What matter? He could always unlet the blood, he could always unthrow the stones again when there might come the proper time for it. Often he hummed to himself that old healing melody 'Will you love me in September as you hated me in May?' Of course they'd all love him in September, if he won the nomination. Their heads would roll else.

He won the primary in Chicago Metropolitan, a high-number delegate state. He won it narrowly by means of a little over a million votes that came in or were discovered very late, the morning after the voting. They had been unaccountably overlooked in the tabulations of the evening before.

He most handily won the primary in Missouri Valley, that grand old state with its capital it Omaha. He had lost a few along the way, but we will not mention those. He was leading, it was believed, and he should increase his lead in what was still a close race.

Then it came, a threatening and chilling storm of a cloud no bigger that a man's thorax. While yodelling at Swiss Colony Wisconsin, Johnson's golden voice broke; it broke into a cavernous old-man cough. Several rude persons laughed. This could go badly. There is nothing so contagious or epidemic as laughter. Johnson got his broken voice temporarily fixed at nearby Koffkoff Wisconsin, the cough drop capital of the world. But he knew that the

fixing was only temporary.

"I'll have to get hold of that Licorice Man," C. H. A. Johnson told himself. "I'd better get another big jug of it. That'll come to seventy-one cents, taking the exemption for excise tax. I'll have to find a way to afford it."

3.

Deprived of elixir, a Horse,
A Pitch, a Pres, a Lassie;
And three erupted crass and coarse,
And one was kind of classy.

-- Boomer Flats Ballads

There would have to be confrontation. And just how does one go about arranging a confrontation with a vagabond peddler like the Licorice Man who has no regular residence except the misty, muddy, half-mythical place named Boomer Flats?

One uses intuition; one uses deduction; one uses that other thought process whose name is at the moment forgotten. And one does not eschew luck. (Is eschew a real word? It sure does sound funny, and it sure does look funny.)

Young Cy Slocum had pitched in Dallas the day before, and he had lost three to nothing. Never before in his young career had he allowed three runs in one game. He had tired. And new gray hairs had been peppering his youthful head for several days now. He needed another jug of the Royal Licorice and he needed it quickly. He got permission to drive up to his ranch in the gypsum hills. He borrowed a car and drove. He stopped at his ranch only an hour or so. Then he drove it random. His receptors were open to any kind of signal.

Half a dozen miles from his own ranch, on the fringe of the Big Blue-Stem country, by the side of a little country road where the gypsum begins to merge with honest limestone, Slocum saw an angry young colt who seemed not quite so young as he should be. This colt was widely known, and his name was Red Licorice.

With the colt was his owner, a man whom Slocum had known casually for a dozen years.

"Are we looking for the same thing, Cy?" the owner asked.

"I think so," said the young, but not quite so young as he should have been, Cy Slocum.

"Red got a package hrom that devilish old codger," the colt-owner said. "It was full of either pills or dung-beetle rollings. Red took a few of them. They didn't have the same restoring effect on his as the original elixir had had. They had all effect quite otherwise, unique, and unpleasant. I can't stand a horse when he gets too smart. "

Red Licorice snorted his contempt for his owner, for the old codger who had sent him either pills or dung-beetle rollings, and for the woozy world itself.

Eleven new, beautiful, qualified, turreted, bulletproof cars approached in caravan. They stopped by the pitcher, the colt-owner, and the angry young colt. Out of the cars bound presidential candidate Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson, a speechwriter, a lawyer who as also bodyguard, a chauffeur, and twenty-one security men.

"Disperse, all of you!" the head security man ordered. "We are commandeering this area. an important meeting will take place here soon."

"I think so too," the colt-owner said, "but I'll not be commandeered into or out of anything."

"You are standing in a public roadway," the head security man said. And the road was built with mixed funds that included five percent Federal monies. Theredore, we as

Federal men can commandeer this region."

The colt-owtier took one step backward.

"I'm on my land now," he said. "Let's see you commandeer me."

"It is all right," Candidate C.H.A. Johnson said. "I know the colt and both the men. All three are solid citizens."

"Careful, careful," the speccli-@vriter said. "You'll put your foot in it some way."

(Johnson wasn't supposed even to say Good Morning unless he read it off a piece of paper handed to him by his speechwriter.)

A golden-haired young, or almost young, lady came over the hill in a Dusenberg car. The Dusenberg also was almost young, but it had developed a bad cough. It stopped and died there.

"So, that's the way it is," said the almost young lady. "A sharp young pitcher (but not quite as sharp as he was for a while) who is his own grandfather; a rock-headed colt who's had to run on his father's hoofs; a presidential candidate trying to stand out of his great uncle's shadow, but whose shadows grow longer when evening comes and they will swallow a man. Who are we kidding? We are all second-timers. We are all in the same barkentine. But the Licorice Man will be along in a moment. I heard the hood-beats of the horse Peegosh; the hoofs never quite touch the road, you know."

And the Licorice Man, the Medicine Wagon, and the horse Peegosh had arrived suddenly in clattering silence (the clatter was on a different plane; these weren't normal people, not the Licorice Man, not the Wagon, not the horse Peegosh).

"Quickly, quickly, a large jug," slid candidite Johnson. "that will be seventy-obe cents, figuring the excise tax exemption."

"Careful, careful," the speechwriter said. "You'll put your foot in it some way." The speechwriter rapidly wrote out something on a sheet of paper and handed it to Candidate Johnson.

"Quickly, quickly, a large jug," Candidate Johnson read dutifully. "That will be seventy-one cents, figuring the excise tax exemption."

"My equine associate would like a dollar jug of the elixir this time," the colt-owner said. "I'm afraid that the effect of the fifty cent jug has worn a little thin."

"I'll have to take a stock of it to last me through the season," Pitcher Cy Slocum said. "And I'll have to have a firm guarantee of sufficient supply every springtime. You let me run short, Licorice. They tagged me for seven hits yesterday, and that's something that never happens."

"I'm not sure that I want any more for myself," said Flambeau La Flesche. She was the golden-haired almost-young lady. "If I ever do want it and want it bad enough, I could probably make it myself. After all, I know the one thing that makes a mud-goose cry, and I'm probably the only reanimated one who does know. I never did use that story, Licorice. Really, it was a little too raw to tell.

"But Dusie here needs a jug now. This poor car has been suffering all sorts of ailments for the last several days."

"No, you'd not be able to make it yourself, Flambeau," the Licorice Man said. "Licorice can mean so many different things. I alone use the genuine licorice, and I alone know which it is. Do you believe it is the lykyrriza or wolf-roof? Or that it is the glykyrrhiza or sweet root? Try them and see."

"Enough of this," said Cy Slocum the pitcher. "You have customers waiting while you jabber. A large dollar jug, please, and enough more to carry me through the season."

"There's only one jug of it left," said the Licorice Man, "and I'm going to pour it into the car Dusie. There won't be any more of it. I'm going on to other things."

"Aw horse hokey! " snorted the horse Red Licorice.

"There's got to be more of it. Say, how come that horse can talk?" Cy Slocum asked

in angry puzzlement.

"I sent him some smart pills," the Licorice Man said. "That's what I'm working on now. Anyone else want to try some smart pills?"

"No, I sure don't. I'm plenty smart now," Cy said emphatically. "I want the elixir! "

"Smart pills are the one thing I don't need," declared the candidate Johnson. "I've got more smart than anyone I've ever seen. I want some of the youth elixir. I want all of it!"

"Would smart pills make me smart enough to do the tough scene in The World Under Louisana Haystack? " little golden-head asked.

"No, Flambeau. The World Under Louisana Haystack should not be finished. Accolade Revisited shouldn't have been finished either, you know, and it was. Too bad. Here, try these. One is a smart pill. The other is a dungbeetle rolling. Take one."

"They look just alike."

"Not to a really fine eye."

Flambeau La Flesche took one of the offered pills, plopped it in her month, chewed it and swallowed it. The Licorice Man dropped the other pellet into the tank of the Dusie and also poured the world's last jug of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder in there.

"Thanks," said the Dusie, setting its motor to going with the sweetest purr ever. "I needed that."

"You gave Dusie the smrt pill," Flambeau said. "Then I ate the dungbeetle rolling."

"I want a jug of that elixir!" pitcher Cy Slocum swore, "or I'll spill conman brains and horse brains and wagon brains all over the road." With his terrific speed he began to rifle fist-sized rocks at the contraption. They didn't reach it. There seemed to be an airy but impermeable shield around horse and wagon and Licorice Man. They were a special case, and the rocks fropped back from them harmlessly.

"Fire on them, security men," Candidate Johnson barked with his full golden voice. "Withholding the elixir is a warlike act against myself. Fire on them! "

Twenty-one men raised service revolvers and fired all together in one grand volley. And twenty-one bits of long lead bounced back from the airy shield and rolled around in the roadway.

"Give me a jug or I'll kick the three of you to pieces!" Red Licorice swore madly in horsey hate. And he began to let fly hoofs at the withholders.

"Watch it, horse-face," the Licorice Man said rather testily.

"Watch it, junior," the paint-flaked medicine wagon said.

"Watch it, buster," the horse Peegosh neighed. "Two can play that kicking game, and I've never been bested." Peegosh, it was now seen, had hoods of flame, and they did not quite reach down to the roadway. Neither did the wheels of the wagon, or the feet of the Licorice Man.

Nobody ever heard such a display of shouting, bawling, snorting, neighing, and just plain bad manners as followed. It was enough to make one ashamed of being a man or horse. Slocum beat on the airy shield with now bloody fists and shouted vile obscenities. Pray that his youthdul admirers never glimpse that side of the man! Johnson belched sulphur-flame and gave that merchandising conglomerate very hell as he ordered volley after volley to be fired into it. And the ignoble Red Licorice was the worst of them all, cursing in man and horse talk, stomping, gnashing, making dirty noises. That horse should never have been given smart pills.

The only bright spot was the golden-haired Flambeau. "I kind of liked that rolled-up dung-beetle ball," she laughed. "When I am next the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord I will obtain a quantity of them and serve them to my guests. So few of that set are country people, they won't know what they're getting. Now back to being the old character actress and doing the indomitable dame bit. Toodle, all."

She zoomed away in the Dusie. She was a pleasant golden blob in the far distance. Who else ever had the finesse to grow old gracehully twice?

She had class.

## THREE SHADOWS OF THE WOLF

There was a sheep-killing wolf about, and that redneck sheriff Otis Pidgeon would have to do something about it. It was a big wolf (everybody seemed to have seen it except the sheriff) and stories were clustering about it. The folks swore that it was a big gray wolf, not a red wolf, and that was impossible. One would have to go north a thousand miles to find a gray wolf. So the people were mistaken. But it wasn't like them to be mistaken about a country thing like a wolf.

The people also said that the big wolf might have a pack, that he might have three shadowy followers. But, if so, the three were really shadow wolves; they didn't leave tracks.

It was a gray wolf with a white slash at the crown of his head. Ribaul said that the wolf would weigh two hundred and fifty pounds. Ribaul was a Frenchman, and so the sheriff automatically divided his figure by two. That would still be a very large wolf. It loomed up gray, and it disappeared like a ghost. It killed and carried off sheep.

Royal Parish was almost the only sheep-raising parish around there, and even in Royal the sheep were raised in only a small district around Yellow Knife. And that was where Sheriff Pidgeon was raised too.

Pidgeon was a tall and gaunt young man with bulging blue eyes. He was a man who went ash-white when he was angry or terrified or embarrassed; it might be said that he blushed white. He was the most suspicious man in Royal Parish. For this reason he had never married, never courted a woman, nor formed any close friendship, nor deposited money in a bank, nor loaned or borrowed, nor trusted weather or fate. He was the right sheriff for Royal Parish, but likely not for any other place. The people in Royal had very dirty quicksilver in them and only a suspicious man could keep up with them. But what Pidgeon was suspicious of now was the strange wolf.

Ragley said that the wolf stood as tall as a shetland pony, but the lies of Ragley had always stood as tall as a jack pine in a brush thicket. Kenrad said that the wolf had ears like a panther, jaws with the snap of a gator, the muzzle of a moose, and a gait like a high-shouldered ox. Pidgeon was smart enough to know that no wolf looked like that. He was even sharp enough to understand that Kenrad had unwittingly described himself.

It was Ragley with the monstrously mobile features and the equally mobile heart who came through strongest on the wolf. Ragley was a widower with a thirteen-year-old daughter Clela. He was a liar by profession, and he farmed a little on the side. But Ribaul was the only one who described the wolf as if he even knew what a wolf looked like. Ribaul had been a roustabout and an animal tamer. He described the wolf as impossibly large, but he described it as a man would who knows just how a wolf is put together.

"I will tell you this, Pidgeon," storekeeper Scroggins said. "You had better get that sheep-killing wolf before there is a man killed. This same thing happened a few miles south and it ended in a man being killed."

"Anything can end in a man being killed," Pidgeon said, "but it's usually another man and not a wolf that kills him."

"If you know where to draw the line between them, Sheriff," Scroggins said. "Did you hear me, Sheriff? I said 'if you know where to draw the line between them.' I'd get to the bottom of this if I were sheriff for fifteen minutes."

Pidgeon was suspicious of all of them there in the store: Scroggins, Ragley, Kenrad, Tadler, Corbey, Boston, Danby. "All right, Scroggins," Pidgeon told him. "You are sheriff for fifteen minutes. Let's see you handle it."

"Just pin a badge on me and I'll get to the bottom of it."

That got a sore spot. "You know the parish voted against an appropriation for a badge,"

Pidgeon said. "Nobody remembers the last sheriff to have a badge."

"Sheep disappeared from three more flocks last night, Pidgeon," Danby said.

"Scroggins here will have it solved in fifteen minutes."

"Not without a badge I won't. But there's some queer stories about that wolf."

"Who's starting them, Scroggins?" Pidgeon asked.

"Why, Pidgeon, I would say that the wolf is starting them," Tadler broke in. "I would say that there's a wolf hair behind every one of those wolf stories. They say that the wolf might not be exactly a wolf all the time. He disappears from a place and he travels mighty fast."

"Yes, he's in three different places too fast for any wolf," Pidgeon said.

"Maybe he rides a motorcycle, Sheriff," Ragley jibed.

Pidgeon went angrily out of Scroggins' store and applied himself to looking for the wolf. Well, there was this about him: he left big and obvious wolf tracks at the site of every killing and theft. He always left at least one slashed sheep. But the tracks couldn't be followed from one raid to another. They just died away.

Pidgeon drove his pickup truck up a back road to the site of the Tadler raid, and he pulled off the road. Tadler's place was full of outcroppings. The sheriff had been told where the raid had been, and moreover a dog was waifing to take him to it.

"Ah, you're nipped a bit, Little Harry," Pidgeon said to the dog, "but not as much as if you'd made a real fight out of it. There's a saying that a good sheep dog will stand to any wolf, but neither of us believes it. A dog smart enough to be a good sheep dog will know when he's outpowered. You have any opinions about that, Little Harry?"

Little Harry the sheep dog was abashed, though he and Pidgeon were friends. But he did lead the sheriff to a killed sheep, and to live sheep reposing around it. They ignore one of their dead fellows after he's cold.

"Killed in neat wolf style, isn't he, Little Harry? And not too much of him eaten. And there is no sign at all of the four missing sheep.

"Dammit, Little Harry, you should find some way of telling me what happened here." There were plenty of tracks of a very large wolf, but they didn't lead anywhere.

"All right, Little Harry, which way did he go?" Pidgeon asked.

Little Harry showed him, leading him across the rock croppings that held no prints. Then there were prints in the mud, and the wolf went onto the road itself. "He doesn't leave tracks on the road," Pidgeon said. "All right, which way did he go?"

Little Harry lay down in the road with the air of having done all that was asked of him. He could not be urged to go further. Pidgeon left the dog, got in his pickup, and drove to the site of the Boston raid.

It was six miles there. Boston had suffered thirteen sheep disappeared, and one killed and partly eaten by a wolf. This site also was near the road and did not require much walking in the rough country. It had been a considerate wolf in this. There were marks of several trucks here, Boston's, Tadler's, Danby's, Corbey's; they had come to investigate when the news had got around. There was one other heavy truck that may have been there first.

Pidgeon knew Boston's sheep, and he knew that the thirteen missing ones were the best ones. Pidgeon found and pocketed two small pieces of brass. He could have found more of them if he had looked long enough. Well, they were at least a small part of the explanation.

Pidgeon went to the site of the Danby raid, glad again that the wolf was so considerate as to raid close to the road. It was about eight miles from Boston's place. They had all been here before him, all the trucks of the gathering angry men. Had the unidentified heavy truck been here also? Couldn't be sure.

One sheep was killed and partly eaten, and nine sheep reported disappeared. And here was a dead dog. He, at least, had stood to the wolf, but he hadn't had much luck with it. Dandy George had been a fine large animal; he'd been killed by something larger.

Pidgeon didn't find any brass here, and he didn't intend a long search for it. There were no wolf tracks except around the dead sheep (very plain, as though left there on purpose), and

around the dead dog (barely discernible on the rocks there, as though the site was not of the wolf's choosing). Pidgeon found more tracks. The wolf had gone up onto the road.
"One of the fellows said maybe the wolf used a motorcycle," Pidgeon mumbled. "He didn't, but maybe he used a truck. That wolf had a lot of man in him."
There are very few wolves who will go down and slay one sheep, and then stand off and kill a number of them with a rifle. And then pick them off cleanly, carrying, not dragging.
Pidgeon went to get Ribajil, the French bum and his part-time
helper. Their connection had begun several months earlier when Pidgeon had locked Ribaul up in their little jail for cause. Ribaul had been living in a shack on rough land that belonged to a French farmer. Soon after the arrest, Pidgeon gave Ribaul part-time employment and the run of the place. Ribaul was a handy man, a big oaf with a head like a giant potato. He was strong as a mule, and like a mule he would refuse when he felt himself overworked; But Ribaul could track.
"Hopping Hajistones!" Sheriff Pidgeon swore. "You fat-faced fool!"
The French bum Ribaul had nudged Pidgeon's arm and made him miss a shot. It was too late to shoot again. The wolf was gone, and so was a night's work.
"You splay-footed French fool, you'd better have a good reason for that."
"No, no reason, Mr. Pidgeon, just a notion," big Ribaul said in a little voice.
"I had a perfect shot. Why am I afflicted by a fool?"
It was just before dawn, about eighteen hours after Pidgeon had got Ribaul to help him track the wolf. They had stayed with it all that time. Ribaul could track, but there was a lot of hocus in his methods. They had driven the back roads along the west end of the parish. The wind had been strong from the east, and Ribaul swore that he could catch a whiff of a wolf when within a mile of him.
"That's the way they work the bloods, Mr. Pidgeon," he said.
"Track and backtrack till you pick up the scent. Then close in on it. Pass it by to the other side till you lose it again. Then box it in."
"You aren't a bloodhound, Ribaul, though about the eyes and
dewlap --"
"I can't pick up a scent as quick as a good dog, but I know better how to close in when I have it. I'm smarter than a lot of dogs."
Well, maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. They had the wolf boxed in several hours before sundown. They could drive no closer to it, and their box was a double section of land, a wild thousand acres, very rough.
"Sometimes the wolf has followers," Ribaul said, "three other wolves who trail him, but sometimes they are only shadows. And there is a man who sometimes has three followers. They will be men for a while, and then they will be only shadows."
"Rot, Ribaul," Pidgeon said.
They walked and cross-walked, always to the windward of the wolf. Ribaul had a high loping walk and Pidgeon had trouble staying up with him.
"We're crossing the same country a lot, Ribaul. You're sure
you're onto him?"
"The wolf moves too. He is a smart one. He began to move a couple of hours ago." They were going along a clear hogback ridge when Ribaul stopped.
"The wolf scent is completely gone, Mr. Pidgeon," he said.
"How could that happen, Ribaul?"
"I'm afraid to ask myself how it could happen. Now I get a scent. Ah, I don't know how to say this. What I get now is a man scent instead of a wolf scent."
"Well hickory-handled hell, Ribaul! Let's go after the man then!" They went after him. But a man is harder to follow than a wolf is. He hasn't the same pungency to him. Pidgeon and Ribaul separated at a rock cone with jack pines growing out of it; it was a place where crows roosted. Ribaul went around it to the north, and Pidgeon to the south. Pidgeon heard Ribaul whistling and he called to him to be quiet. Then he heard him no more.

Pidgeon was coming into the throat of a draw a quarter mile beyond there when he picked up a scent. It wasn't a man's scent. It
was a wolf's. Strong!
"Ribaul, this way!" Pidgeon called. There was something in the
brush, large and low, heavy gray and flash-white. "Ribaul, this way!" Pidgeon called again. It wasn't possible for a shot yet. The thing moved just often enough and far enough td prevent that. And it couldn't be seen clearly.
"Ribaul, you fool, down this way!"
Ribaul came from the north out of a tangle of rocks and brush. "He's in the brush just beyond us, Ribaul," Pidgeon said. "Even I can get the wolf scent here."
"Yes, he's changed again. He's wolf now. I've been watching him a long time. He's a wolf now, but for a while he seemed to be something else."
"What are you talking about, Frenchy?"
"It's hard to get the outline of a thing in the brush."
They went after the animal then, never losing him again, never quite getting in a position for a shot at the canny beast. It was a
ten-hour, frustrating, foot-smashing, weary chase. But the wolf wasn't hard to follow even in the dark. It was a gray wolf that sometimes flashed white in the clear night. A dozen times they were near to having shots, but every time the animal melted away and had to be picked up again.
It didn't really move fast, but it was tireless, and it kept them at a dogged run most of the night. Several times, as if by mutual agreement, both parties stopped and rested. The wolf with the white slash on the top of his head was always to be seen, and the men never took their eyes off it in the pulsating dark. Pidgeon got a close look at it only once, and the wolf seemed to look at him with a man's eyes.
"He's an odd one; Ribaul," Pidgeon said. "A wolf that sometimes travels in a truck and hunts with a rifle, he isn't the kind of wolf you meet every day."
"Only a special kind of wolf can do that. And I won't say what it's called."
"If you don't want to look down the wrong end of a rifle barrel at a cross-eyed sheriff, you'd better say what it's called. What kind of wolf might do that?"
"Loup-garou?"
"What's its name in English?"
"I don't know. I never heard it in English."
They went after the wolf again for what was left of the night. Pidgeon, using Ribaul as his left hand, working with definite aim, pinned the wolf against the very wide, clear slope he couldn't have
missed. It was then that Ribaul, who should have been a hundred yards away, nudged Pidgeon's arm. The shot went high, and the wolf was away.
"Ribaul, you open-ended idiot! If you've only a notion, it better be a good one."
"Mr. Pidgeon, I'm ashamed to say what it was."
"You made me miss the wolf! Why? Why?"
"I had a sudden notion that he wasn't a wolf at all. I looked at his eyes, and at the blaze on his head, and I wasn't sure whether he was a wolf or a man. If you'd have killed a man, there'd have been trouble."
"Ribaul, couldn't you see what he was?"
"I could see every hair on him. I could even see the pulse move at his throat. But he looked like a man that I know. He is a man sometimes. He is loup-garou."
"Tell me what that is, Ribaul, or, trouble or not, I'll kill me a man right here."
"Oh, he's a wolf part of the time. And sometimes he's a man. If I am wrong, then I have caused you to miss a wolf. If I am right, then I have saved you from killing a man."
"Let it go. Since it spent the night mostly on its own terms, it may have brought us near where it dens."
"A male will hardly den this time of year. Just lay up somewhere in cool rocks."

"Let's find out where. I'll take the draw. You take the thicket. I'll show you that I'm not such a bad tracker myself."
And Pidgeon wasn't a bad tracker. He picked up deep and firm wolf tracks almost at once. The hair was prickling on his neck with the feeling that the wolf intended to leave tracks that could be followed. There was a big old truck half-hidden in some shrub in the rocky meadow just above the draw. "Ah, the wolf's own transport," Pidgeon grinned the words to himself.
It was moist in the draw, and the wolf, from his tracks, was very heavy. It would have gone far over a hundred and fifty pounds, and whoever heard of a wolf that big?
The draw narrowed sharply, and the wolf kept to it. The soft, white lime sand on its floor left very clear tracks, show tracks, the biggest wolf tracks ever seen, and the clearest.
The wolf at a slouch-walk leaves the hind foot ahead of the front-foot track. It is a five-toed track of the front foot, and a four-toed track of the hind foot (one of the back toes is small and rudimentary, and it does not track). The front paw is always the broader of the two. This wolf had very heavy front paws, almost as broad as those of a mountain lion.
It was the coolest hour out of the twenty-four, and almost daylight.
Front foot, back foot left; front foot, back foot right, Pidgeon found himself chanting it. Front foot, back foot left; front foot, back and that is where the sequence stopped --
Stopped completely. Pidgeon stood erect and closed his eyes for a moment. Nothing that he'd ever known had prepared him for this.
"The light is still pretty dim, and besides I'm tired," he told himself, but he lied when he told it. He reasoned with himself a moment, and then he picked up the
trail again.
Well, it was a back foot, in a manner of speaking. In other circumstances there wouldn't be anything frightening about such a well-known sort of print. But the print wasn't that of a wolf's back foot. Nor was the next one, nor the next. The wolf tracks had turned into man tracks.
Well, the world has to have its back broken
somewhere.
Pidgeon followed the tracks of the man till the draw ended in a rock spread and no more tracking was possible. Pidgeon called to Ribaul. After a while the Frenchman came to him from an upper thicket. Ribaul took it all in with quick eyes, and he rubbed his head.
"Was Jules Lamotte here with you?" he asked Pidgeon. "Why didn't I see him if he was here?"
"I haven't seen Lamotte for several weeks," Pidgeon said with
difficulty. "I haven't seen him a dozen times in my life. I hardly know him. Are those his tracks? They may be old tracks. I believe that he lives near here. He may have made those tracks yesterday on his normal business."
"He does live near here," Ribaul said. "And his tracks were not made yesterday. They were made short minutes ago."
"I didn't see him, Ribaul. What kind of man is he really?"
"He has a laugh with hair on it."
"That's no crime, though perhaps it should be. And what else?"
"He's a man who has mutton, and does not keep sheep. And this
is his place we come to."
Jules Lemotte was a big, sharp-muzzled man, with a sudden slash of white in his mouse-gray hair. He met Pidgeon and Ribaul in
his kitchen doorway.
"You are halfway welcome," he said. "Did you kill the wolf?"
"No, the wolf still escapes us," Pidgeon said. "Didn't you see us, and the wolf? We found your tracks, just where we lost those of
the wolf, fresh tracks."
"I have not been out of my house last night or this morning."
"Then someone else has been wearing your feet," Ribaul challenged.
"What? Both of them?" Lamotte asked with a touch of harsh humor.

"Yes. Or all four," Ribaul said.
"Can you explain what he means, Mr. Sheriff?" Lamotte asked.
"Ribaul believes that the wolf is loup-garou. I understand that it's French."
"It's a child's story, and not necessarily French," Lamotte said. "Madelon, make breakfast for two new-come ones! Madelon! Do you hear?"
"I hear," she called from within, and she came to the kitchen. "Oh, for them," she said. "All right."
Pidgeon had never seen Lamotte's wife before. She was a good-looking woman. She made a heavy country breakfast for them and they were soon sat down to it.
"How is it that you have mutton, Lamotte?" Pidgeon asked him. "I did not know that you had sheep."
"I do not. How is it that I have coffee? I have no plantation."
"Who are the three men in the picture there on the wall?" Pidgeon asked.
Lamotte looked at it puzzled. "Oh, my brothers, I suppose," he said. "I don't remember ever seeing that picture before." Why should a man say "my brothers, I suppose"? They were three bristly men in the picture, and they looked enough like Jules Lamotte to be his brothers.
"They say you left your old place because of some kind of trouble," Pidgeon said.
"They don't even know where my old place was," Lamotte answered. "Yet they're partly right. A settled man doesn't change his abode in midlife if everything is peaceful."
"Yours is one of the places that the wolf hasn't bothered, Lamotte."
"What could he bother here? I raise grain and cattle, not sheep."
"Did you hear anything, Lamotte, during the night and dawn?"
"You two men clattering around the rocks out there, trying to clatter quietly."
They ate pancakes and drank a little morning whisky and were not really unfriendly.
"Is that your big truck in the rock pasture?" Pidgeon asked.
"Yes, I seldom use it though."
"Does anyone use it?"
"Why would anyone use that big old truck?"
"Have you an enemy, Lamotte?"
"I think so, yes. Or a friend who intends to kill me."
"Will you tell me who it is?"
"No. It's a private matter. You are welcome to stay. I must go
check on a calf." Lamotte went out of the house, walking stiffly as though he had perpetually sore ankles.
"He lied to you, my husband," Madelon Lamotte told them some time after Jules had gone. "He said that he had not been out of the
house the night past. Yet he did leave yesterday, and he was gone the whole of last night. He arrived back in a daze, but only just before you two came. I feel that he isn't well, even he isn't sane. it's though he had two different natures."
"Which two different natures, Mrs. Lamotte?" Pidgeon asked. But Jules Lamotte came back in then, and Madelon did not tell what she meant
Later that day, after he had slept for a few hours, Pidgeon got certain equipment and then drove and walked to the last draw in which he had tracked the night before. He had to know whether those tracks would appear different by daylight.
They didn't. The only things that struck Pidgeon in a different light were his own tracks of the night before. How he had skittered about when he came to the spot where the tracks changed! What a wild little dance he had done! But all else was as he had remembered it. There were the wolf tracks; and then there were the man tracks. There was no other ending to the wolf tracks and no other beginning to the man tracks. If one set didn't turn into the other in full stride, then evidence was meaningless. Pidgeon took pictures of them from different angles, thinking that the various shadings might tell something. He also went and got pictures and tire tracks of Jules Lamotte's heavy truck. Then he drove to Yellow Knife

and went to the store.
All of them were there, Scroggins the storekeeper, Kenrad, Ragley, Tadler, Corbey, Boston, Danby. The store was the club, the place where they talked and played dominoes and checkers.
"I've been out with the French tracker after the wolf," Pidgeon said.
"We will help you skin him," Tadler grunted. "Let's see how big he really is."
"We can't skin it till we kill it. I bad one shot. Ribaul made me miss."
"Why'd he do that?" storekeeper Scroggins asked.
"He said that it was loug-garou and that if I shot it I'd be shooting a man."
"I say shoot it anyhow," Tadler harangued. "Get rid of the wolf no matter what he turns into. I say shoot every man that even looks a little bit like a wolf."
"Then I'd have to shoot several of you here present," Pidgeon said.
"It's mostly the French that turn into wolves," Ragley told them. "The French are superstitious; they believe in that stuff. Down in Beauregard Parish one time there was a big wolf came into the country with a funny look in his eyes and a white blaze on his head."
Pidgeon was startled. Had Ragley known that the present wolf had a funny look in his eyes and a white blaze on his head? Another
man had come into the store quietly.
Pidgeon didn't look around, but he knew that it was the man with the funny look in his eyes and the white blaze on his head. There was also the impression of several other men now standing outside the store.
"The hardest thing, when a man turns into a wolf, is right at the ankle bone," Corbey said.
Corbey was a crafty old swindler and he was about to wrap his tongue around something rich. "It hurts there at the ankle. You see, what appears to be a wolf's knee has its bend opposite to a man's, but that is really the same as a man's ankle bone, not his knee bone. The wolf's real knee is hidden up in the haunch. When a man turns into a wolf his ankle bone has to expand about eight inches. You find a man who turns a lot and you'll find a fellow who always has sore ankles.
"The rest is easy. Watch one change sometime and see how slick
he does it. He kind of softens his skull, and part of it flows forward and part of it flows back. Then he lets his eyes roll around to the sides of his head. He sharpens his muzzle and does all the other little things. Then he goes down on all fours just like he was unhinging himself. He begins to shiver: that's the way he brings the hair out of his hide. After that he lacks just one thing for him to be a total wolf."
Well, someone had to ask it.
"What's the one thing he needs to make himself into a total wolf," Pidgeon asked, "after he has gone down on all fours and shivered his hair to the outside of his hide?"
"The tail," said Corbey, and licked his lips. "It sounds like a cork popping when he brings it out. The tail's the last thing to go back in too. And after he changes quite a few times, man to wolf and wolf to man, why his tail gets where it won't go all the ways back in anymore. I maintain, Sheriff, that there's a way to put this knowledge to test."
What was Corbey getting at? There was dark lightning bouncing around that store. There was musky excitement beginning to rise, and the feeling got riper by the minute. Something was brewing, and it was these fellows' kind of thing.
"Men, this becomes a community effort," Corbey was crowing. "Sheriff, we got to get every man-jack in the neighborhood together and make them strip. Sheriff, one of those men is going to have a tail!"
Coruscating coon dogs! Was Corbey kidding? Dammit, would the laughter never come? What was holding off the howling glee? One or two of them may have quaked a bit, but they would not be caught in open laughter. They were all long-faced and serious.
"Sheriff, I believe that it's your duty to set the example," Ragley gruffed.
"Drop your pants, Sheriff!" Boston barked. "We'll have first look at you."
Were these men serious? They looked murderous in their intensity.

"I'll not be first," Pidgeon said. "I stand on privilege. I'll be last."
"Nobody leaves alive till he's been examined and certified," storekeeper Scroggins stated harshly, and he produced a long gun from behind his counter. "Who'll be number one, do the manly thing,
and prove he's not the wolf?"
"By damn I will!" Ragley swore. Ragley was never a backward man. He dropped his pants. The examination was thorough and minute. Clothed or stripped, Ragley was curiously shaped, awkwardly articulated, sometimes coming to points or knobs. But he didn't have a tail.
"You, boy," Scroggins called to an eleven-year-old who looked in. "This is a man's meeting for men only. Boy, go out and round up every man in the neighborhood. Tell them to come to the store and be examined right now."
"Whaffor?"
"Tell them that we're going to nail down the wolf. Tell them, boy, that we're going to find out which one of them wears the tail." The boy left running.
Boston dropped his pants. No tail. Then it was like a dam bursting the way the pants and overalls came down in a sudden flood. The new men were already coming in. There must have been thirty of the finest men in Royal Parish who dropped their pants within thirty seconds. Tadler, one of the prime inspectors, was near-sighted and he had to get very close to the work. But he was conscientious and he never left a man till he was sure. No tail in the lot. Ribaul came in.
"Ribaul, have you a tail?" Scroggins thundered at him, gun in
hands.
"No. I never learned how to grow one." But Ribaul submitted when it was explained to him. He didn't have a tail either.
"And now you, Sheriff Pidgeon," Scroggins said in his gun-barrel voice.
"This isn't happening. This can't be happening," Pidgeon moaned.
But Pidgeon submitted, in that most shameful moment of his life. And, to the disappointment of many, he didn't have a tail either. He'd made all the fuss over nothing.
"And what are you waiting for?" Ragley asked the big Frenchman who was standing there. It was the man with the funny eyes and the white blaze on his head, the man Jules Lamotte.
"For tobacco, salt, coffee, rubbing alcohol, nails, several things," big Lamotte said. "I've no more time. Your games should be
finished by now."
"How about some mutton, Frenchy?" storekeeper Scroggins asked.
"No. I have plenty of mutton," Lamotte said. Scroggins, the gun under his arms, filled the Frenchman's order from a written list.
"Why don't you drop your pants like an honest man, Frenchy?" Ragley asked. "Don't you get the idea? Didn't you hear us and see us?"
It was like an explosion the way Lamotte laughed, like a wolf laugh, a laugh with hair on it. There were three big men waiting in the doorway for Lamotte. Pidgeon believed that they were the three men in the picture in Lamotte's kitchen. Lamotte got his things.
"What's the rubbing alcohol for?" Ragley asked him.
"I have sore ankles," Jules Lamotte said quietly, "always sore
ankles." Lamoffe left them there, going out with his high-gaited walk.
And if he had a tail, it was still in his pants when he left.
"He's your man, Sheriff," Kenrad said. "He's your wolf."
Pidgeon looked after Lamotte. Then he was startled. Lamotte was walking alone. The three men were not with him, and there was nowhere they could have gone.

Pidgeon walked out. A ways further on, he met and spoke briefly with Clela Ragley, the young daughter of rough Ragley himself.
She had an idea about using a wolf bait. Pidgeon went on about other things. He would

solve this yet. After you've been a fool a couple of times, it gets easier. So he made a fool of himself again after dark.

Pidgeon met Clela Ragley by the road in the dark that night. She went into that rough double section of land that seemed to be the hold of the wolf. And Pidgeon followed her at about fifty yards.
And the wolf was there.
Turpentined tomcats, how he was there! The whole air was full of the wolf. Pidgeon was downwind of it, and now he moved to full windward of the wolf. It was very near, and Clela was upwind of it. She waited in the clear, and Pidgeon watched what would happen. He had a rifle cradled in his elbow, and he wondered what he would do if it was a man and not a wolf that they flushed. Pidgeon again had the feeling that the setting was contrived, that the wolf was announcing his presence as powerfully as possible. Whom was baiting whom here?
The wolf came out of the rocks and moved towards Clela. There was confusion as the animal seemed to have three shadows following it. Pidgeon could see its shagginess before he could make out its form. There was the feel of menace, of murder in the making. Pidgeon caught the white blaze on the head of it before he could make out much else. It erected itself curiously, and so did its three shadows.
And Pidgeon was quite surprised to see that it was now a man on two legs, though losing none of its fierceness or shagginess. It was the wolfish Jules Lamotte with a rifle on his arm. Oh, and that white blaze on his head!
Pidgeon slipped his own rifle onto ready as he heard the sudden rough voice of Jules. He watched Clela put her hand to her mouth and totter, trembling like a staked-out lamb. He'd kill Lamotte if he touched the girl. Man or wolf, he'd kill him!
Lamotte came within a foot of the girl, and Pidgeon could see Clela's eyes widen to great balls of white. Then suddenly the fire was banked and the storm died.
"This is a very rough place to be at night, young lady," Lamotte said in a tight voice. "Your father wouldn't care if you were abroad here, but you should care. I all but shot you. I might not have made sure. Walk on down the road, young girl, and then follow it to your home. I'll keep watch on you as you go. Ah, but I see that I'm not needed in this. Is it not the sheriff who slips up so clumsy and heavy-footed behind me?"
"I'm the sheriff, Lamotte," Pidgeon said. "And what are you doing here?"
"Walking on my own land. That's all you need to know. Why are you here?" Lamotte seemed to have invisible or shadowy supporters with him. Not to be seen now, though, and not certainly to be smelled either as men or wolves. Present to extra senses or to imaginations.
"I'm hunting a wolf-man," Pidgeon said. "I came near to killing you for him. It mightn't have been a mistake if I'd done it."
"And I also lacked only a little of killing," Lamotte said, "and you interrupted me. Yes, you were very close to the wolf-man, Sheriff. So was I. But this time it was you and the girl who nudged my elbow and prevented my shooting. Why do you hunt with an agneau?"
"With what?"
"With a little lamb staked out. Is that how you hunt a wolf-man?"

On the next day there came new evidence against Jules Lamotte. Ribaul brought Madelon Lamotte to Sheriff Pidgeon. "Mr. Pidgeon, Mr. Pidgeon!" Ribaul called from outside. Ribaul never knocked. He followed the country custom of standing in front of a house and calling out. Pidgeon opened the door to them. "I'm here. Come in," he said.
"I will leave her with you," Ribaul said, and he left. "It is only to talk to you a little," Madelon spoke when she was inside. She was very fair for a country woman, and her hair was the color of polished walnut.
"I hope that you can tell me something to clear things up," Pidgeon said.
"No. What I tell will clear nothing up. It will tie it all in knots like snakes. It is possible that I am

mad, Sheriff. If that is so, then lock me up at once. Better to be locked up than torn to pieces. Better to be a mad woman than a dead one. But I am selfish: it is of my husband that I must think. For myself I no longer care if I am mad, or even if I am dead. It is the wolf in everything. Everything that I eat or drink has the wolf in it. I see it everywhere, I see it in our yard and house. But wait! Before I speak more, promise that you will not kill him."
"Not kill the wolf?"
"Not kill my husband Jules. Promise that you will not kill him."
"I promise nothing. Tell me what you came to tell."
"I see the wolf in our yard. I scream for my husband. When he
comes, the wolf is gone, and he says that I only imagine it. Then I see it again and I say 'Look, Jules, look!' But then my husband is gone."
"They are never both there at once?"
"Never. And Jules says that he does not see the wolf at all, but I see it a dozen times. Jules goes out at night. Oh, if I only know where he goes! Then I begin to smell the wolf, strongly and all the time. And in my own house! Yesterday I come on the wolf face to face in my own house, in the room that we call the cool pantry. I screamed, I ran to my own room, I blocked the door with a trunk. I lay on the bed in terror. I am a country woman. I have seen wolves. Another wolf I would chase like a big dog. This is not like another wolf. I hear it pant at my door. I hear its feet go back and forth. Its teeth scrape the balks of the door and they seem to splinter and tear. Then I feel a change as if it is two things at once.
"Then it opened the door as if the trunk against it was a toy. It opened the door and came in. It stood at my bed, and I am too frightened even to open my eyes. 'My poor Madelon,' said my husband Jules, for he was the one standing there. 'What has frightened you? Have you dreamed of the wolf again?'
"He is there, my husband, and there is no wolf. 'I have seen him, Jules, in this very house,' I say. 'You know that is impossible,' Jules tells me, and he comforts me. But as I looked I saw something, and I froze. His left hand was only becoming a hand again. The claws were going back in and the fingers were coming out. The heaviest part of the hair was disappearing. It had not been a hand a moment before. Is that possible?"
"No. That is not possible," Pidgeon said. But what was possible? "Mrs. Lamotte, are you afraid of your husband?"
"Not when he is my husband. Only when he is the wolf."
"Go back and stay with him today and tonight. Tell him not to
leave his house at all for any reason. If the wolf shows in the open tonight, we will kill it. And if the cornered wolf turns into a man, we will still kill it."
She left then. She still had her bearing and her beauty, for all her distraught state. Pidgeon had wanted to ask her one more thing. But how do you go about asking a woman whether her husband has a tail?
A little later in the day, Clela Ragley came to the sheriff.
"I have proof now for sure," she said. "Jules Lamotte is the wolf."
"Have you really anything to go on? Anything tangible?"
"I think he got pretty tangible with me. I dreamed of the wolf and the man just before dawn this morning. It was a real liver-twister of a dream. He was Jules the man and he came at me. Then he was Jules the wolf as he closed in. He fastened on my shoulder with those terrible teeth, and I only awakened in time or I would have been done to death by him."
"Clela, you half-pint witch! Won't you ever grow up! I want
tangible evidence."
"Is this what you call tangible?" she asked. She showed it to him with a sudden motion, and it set him to shaking. He wasn't sure
whether it was Clela herself who had this effect on him, or the horrible wounds. She'd been bitten and mauled pretty badly where she dropped her sack dress off her shoulders. They were deep, tearing bites that had gone livid, two of one sort and one of another. They could be deadly.

"Clela, where did you get those?" Pidgeon asked in amazement.
"I told you," she said. Pidgeon wouldn't accept it. He'd close his ears and not hear such stuff. Clela was talking some more, but he only heard the end of it.
"After you kill him, Sheriff," she said, "then cut off his head and bring it here and see if it doesn't match the bites. That way we can be sure."
The wolf had struck again the night before and many sheep were missing. So it had to be the wolf hunt all the way now.
"Why do you cut those funny notches into the lead part of your bullets?" Ribaul asked Pidgeon before they started out.
"So I'll know which shots I shot," Pidgeon said. "I want to be clear on that."
They went after the wolf as night came on, four of them in one bunch, Ribaul, Ragley, Pidgeon and Kenrad. These four men could track. They knew the country, and they knew animals.
"I hear, Ribaul, that you were once with a carnival," Ragley said as they went along in loose skirmish. "I hear that they paid to see you and thought you were a new kind of animal."
"Were you with a carnival, Ribaul?" Pidgeon asked. "How did Ragley know?"
"I was with a carnival. I was not on exhibit. I worked. I cared for animals. I had a tame bobcat and a tame coon and a tame bear."
"Did you have a tame wolf?" Ragley asked.
"No. There is no such thing as a tame wolf."
"Why are you carrying the stake and the maul, Ribaul?" Kenrad asked. "Are they your idea, or the sheriff's?"
"What matter? He says it doesn't hurt to have them, so long as I'm the one to carry them."
"You'll have to catch the wolf, Ribaul, before you can kill him with those."
"They are not to kill the wolf with. They are to make him stay dead."
The wolf was there all right, in a general area. For a long time it did not seem to move at all. It waited for them to come. Then, as though by sudden decision, it began to move. So did the men, with absolute sureness now.
They hunted without dogs, and they were quickly onto the wolf much closer than they could have got with dogs. They had the wolf boxed into the same rough double section of land where Pidgeon and Ribaul had hunted him before. They had him in the poke, and there was nothing left but to pull the drawstring.
It was clear moonlight, and they had him. If he had broke to the open, he would have to display himself for an easy shot against the clear hillside. If he stayed in the thicket, they would beat him out. If he holed in anywhere, they would burn him over and dig him out. He was big and dangerous, but they had him tight.
The wolf broke to the open hill, and be turned as if at bay. And it was as if three shadows of him turned also. He was as big as a grown puma. He'd go more than two hundred pounds. He actually sparked fire off his raised hackles, as a lynx at bay is said to do. He had his high white blaze and his eyes of a man, and he looked at them with fevered hate.
Ribaul and Ragley must have hated to let it go to another. But it was the sheriff's case, and so it was his shot. Sheriff Pidgeon shot the wolf clearly, right at the edge of that white blaze on the head. And one shot did it.
"Now he turn to a man," Ribaul said. "Watch him turn as he dies. See how he begin to shiver and turn. This will show that he is 1oup-garou."
But he didn't turn. He'd been a wolf, and he stayed a wolf.
"He's dead," said Pidgeon.
"That lays one ghost, for me at least."
"Here is the maul, here is the stake," Ribaul said. "Use them, Sheriff."
"You really believe in that, do you, Ribaul?" Pidgeon asked.

"That if you drive the stake through the wolf's heart he'll stay dead? I believe it."
"Somebody find where that hellish noise is coming from," Pidgeon sputtered, "and put a stop to it." There had been an awful wailing going on since the wolf was shot.
Pidgeon drove the stake of bois d'arc wood in through the chest of the wolf at the line just behind and under the front shoulder, so as to go through the heart, or at least to make the fiction of going through the heart. It was a very tough wolf and it took some driving. But the stake had been sharpened as only tough bois d'arc wood can be.
Staking the wolf became like an orgasm to all the men.
"He'll stay dead now," said Ragley.
"Then why doesn't that damned noise stop if the wolf is dead?" Pidgeon asked. The noise was coming from the farmhouse of Jules Lamotte. Pidgeon's feet recognized the approach before his eyes did.
They had been less than two hundred yards from the house when Pidgeon had killed the wolf. They went to it.
The kitchen door was open and there was a light inside. It was
Madelon Lamotte standing in the doorway with her hair streaming. The hellish noise was her screaming. It went on and on to chill your blood.
Pidgeon got there first, white-faced and with a crazy clatter as he caromed off objects in the dark kitchen yard.
"Mrs. Lamotte! For the love of God what is wrong? Mrs. --"
But Sheriff Pidgeon never finished, nor did he get all the way
through the kitchen door. He staggered back with crimsoned vision. He went down crazily and hard.
"Killer!" screamed Madelon Lamotte. "Murder my husband! I'll --"
Pidgeon had risen dazed and made for the door again, there to be met by a second impact of sound and another shredding blow. It was Madelon who clawed him like a lioness and left a bloody swath as she swung. She had felled him twice. She had nearly taken his head off, and a great part of his face was surely left beneath her fingernails.
Ragley and Kenrad had her restrained in some fashion after a while. The screaming fell to a series of splitting sobs.
"Now what is this?" Pidgeon demanded. "Hold her, dammit!"
He wasn't sure how badly he was injured. He could barely see.
"You lick-spit sheriff, you kill my husband!" Madelon howled.
"Kill me then, men, but give me two seconds with that white-faced fool first. We see who kill who Ragley had her pinned down then, and Kenrad went deeper into the house to see what had happened. He didn't have to go very deep.
"In here, Sheriff," he called then. "In the little room off the kitchen here. It's worse than you think."
Pidgeon followed in. Jules Lamotte lay dead in that little earth-floored room off the kitchen that is called the cool pantry. He had been shot in the head, right at the edge of that white blaze that so resembled that of the wolf.
What was even more weirdly wrong was that Jules Lamotte had a
stake of bois d'arc driven through his chest and into the dirt floor of the little pantry. And Madelon was still spitting fury in the kitchen. It seemed wild to try to reason with her in her state, but it must be attempted.
"Tell me who did this thing, Mrs. Lamotte," Sheriff Pidgeon begged.
"You vile pig, you did it! Spitting hypocrite, you killed my husband! Right in that room. Just minutes ago. You shot him, and you drove a stake through his heart. Let me at that sheriff, man!"
"I couldn't have," Pidgeon said weakly. "Ragley, hold her! Where is Ribaul all this time?"
"But I am right here all this time," Ribaul banged out the words. "Here, let me hold her. I have a way with wild animals. She'll not get loose from me."
Back in the cool pantry Pidgeon swooped down on dead Jules Lamotte and began to do a

thing that was illegal, outrageous, really mad. Kenrad and Ragley tried to stop him, but he was not to be stopped. Working feverishly he began to cut into the starred head of Lamotte with a jackknife. He went in after the shot that had killed the man. He grasped a meat cleaver from the pantry wall and used it as a pry and wedge. The shot had spent itself in smashing through the bone at an angle and was barely inside the brain case. Pidgeon brought it out and held it in his hand.
"It's my shot," Pidgeon said. "I marked my shots before starting out tonight. I wanted to be certain of what ones I shot."
"Well, then, it's certain that you shot this one," Ragley said. "It's certain that you killed Jules Lamotte."
Pidgeon left the Lamotte farmhouse and took Ragley and Kenrad back to the wolf-kill site. Pidgeon wandered back and forth, and the other two looked at him puzzled.
"What are we looking for?" Ragley asked.
"For the spot where the wolf was killed!" Pidgeon said wildly.
"We're standing on the spot, Sheriff. Those are the scuff marks. There's the hole where your stake went through the wolf and into the ground. Wipe the blood out of your eyes, Sheriff. She near took your eyes out with her claws."
"Sheriff, are you crazy?" Ragley asked. "You saw Lamotte dead. How could the wolf be here and he there? Lamotte was the wolf. Lamotte is the dead wolf now."
"No. A wolf is a wolf and a man is a man," Pidgeon insisted. "There has to be a dead wolf around here somewhere."
"You can find out tomorrow, Sheriff," Ragley said. "It's going to be another hot one tomorrow. Give that sun seven or eight hours on this rock pasture, and you can find the wolf if he is here. The buzzards will be turning in the air over him and shuttling down on him. A dead wolf would get real ripe in the sun if he was here. But he isn't. We all know who killed the wolf and the man with the same shot. Let's call it a night."

Well, a man had been shot to death, and Pidgeon himself was Pidgeon's only suspect. But why, leaving the unnatural stories out of it, should anyone want to kill Jules Lamotte? Possibly for his gold coins. Likely Lamotte hadn't any gold coins, but one of the stories was that he had piles of them somewhere. Or possibly for his more-than-handsome wife. Since he'd seen her in a fury, Pidgeon had known that Madelon might have enough fire in her to draw a man to murder.
Or Lamotte could have been killed because he was really stealing the farmers' sheep. But there were wild elements left over from all these motives. Why couldn't Lamotte have been killed in a
rational manner?
"Where is the wolf?" Pidgeon quizzed himself. "Where is my maul that drove the stake or stakes. Why was only one of my marked bullets shot? Oh, I remember the maul now."
They had told Pidgeon that his maul, overlooked at first, had been found on the earth floor of the cool pantry in Lamotte's farmhouse, right beside dead Lamotte.
In the hot afternoon of the new day Pidgeon went to check on the buzzards. The sun should have done its work. The wolf, if he still lay in the rocky pasture, would be ripe. There were a couple of buzzards wheeling near where it should be. Not quite near enough
though. They seemed rather to be above the Lamotte farmstead.
There were two of the buzzards in the air and two of them down on the eaves of a low shed not ten feet off the Lamotte kitchen. They were gazing with mournful intensity at that near part of the house called the cool pantry where Jules Lamotte (not yet removed, for the wheels turn slowly there) lay dead.
There was a strong wolf scent and man scent mixed. Ragley had said, "Lamotte is the dead wolf now." Was Lamotte right?
Ragley, Scroggins, and several other men came out of the Lamotte house. Pidgeon knew that Scroggins was acting in his office of coroner, and that the others had been acting as

sworn witnesses.
"Pidgeon, I'm glad you're here," Scroggins cried. "We've decided that it would be best if you arrested yourself for the murder of Jules Lamotte and then appointed an interim sheriff to handle things."
"No. I won't do it," Pidgeon said.
"We decided that it would be next best if we sent for the nearest other sheriff to come and arrest you. Who would he be?"
"Sheriff Bartholdy across the river in Calvados Parish. I think I will go and have a talk with him right now."
Pidgeon went across the river to Calvados Parish. He went to the house of Bartholdy, walked in, and found the man. Sheriff Bartholdy gestured a welcome. Then he left the room. He came back with two bottles of white wine, a can of worms, a pail of minnows, and two fishing poles. He carried them all out to Pidgeon's pickup. The two men loaded in, and Pidgeon drove to a good spot on the red banks of the Red River. They fished there.
"I don't know whether you have heard of it, but there is a puzzling little murder up in my district," Pidgeon said finally.
"Take your line out of the water," Sheriff Bartholdy said. "No
man can pay attention to two things at once. Have a drink of the white wine. It loosens the wits. Tell me about it. Who was murdered?"
Pidgeon told about Jules Lamotte being murdered. Bartholdy knew Lamotte from of old. Pidgeon told about the nightmarish coincidences, loup-garou stories, wolf tracks, sheep kills, tail hunts, young wife tales, marked bullets, a rifle shot and a stake through a wolf, a shot man and a stake through the man, various things.
"It that all?" Bartholdy asked then. "What is the puzzling aspect that you mentioned? Why do you not simply arrest the two murderers?"
"But eveiything is puzzling about it, Bartholdy!" Pidgeon screeched. "There's the dead man that I couldn't have shot. The stake through his heart that I couldn't have driven. My own marked bullet in his head. Being French, you would be superstitious. So I thought that you might understand about the unearthly aspects of the case. The werewolf stuff, I mean, and all that, and the wolf turning into a man."
"Are you out of your mind, Pidgeon? I never heard such nonsense."
"I tell you that there was a wolf. And there was the man."
"I don't mean that. You said 'Being French, you would be superstitious.' You'd have to be out of your mind to say a thing like that. There can no more be a superstitious Frenchman than there can be dry water or green horses. Think about the implications of that for a long time. Then your little problems will have solved itself."
Pidgeon thought about the implications for quite a while.
"Not a bit superstitious, Bartholdy?" he asked once. "Not a
bit?"
"Not a bit," said Bartholdy. "There can be stupid Frenchmen. There can be Frenchmen who rustle sheep. There can be Frenchmen who love other men's wives. There can be evil Frenchmen. But there cannot be superstitious Frenchmen."
"If that's so, then I don't live in the same sort of world as I'd supposed."
"No, not quite the same sort, Pidgeon."
Pidgeon thought about the implications some more. Then he rose with a sigh.
"I never like these things," he said, "but I guess I'd better go make the arrests."
So sheriff Otis Pidgeon drove back to Royal Parish and arrested Ribaul and Madelon Lamotte for the murder of Jules Lamotte.

"How'd you figure it out, Pidgeon?" Ragley asked as Pidgeon and Ragley and Clela Ragley walked over the rock pasture of the events area. "Checked perfect, did it?"
"All but the three shadows," said Pidgeon. "There were always three shadows of the wolf, and of Lamotte. I don't understand them. As to the rest, well here's how I did it. There were a

pair of those folks who thought we were easily foxed up here. And because they thought so, they will hang for it. Who was it, I asked, who was clear enough of superstition to use superstition on us? It had to be French folks. You see, Ragley, the French aren't superstitious. But we are."
"Sure we are. How's a redneck going to get any savor in his life if he doesn't spice it up with superstition? The French now, they use garlic instead. Yeah, I can see how they don't have to be superstitious."
"So, Ragley, when everything points to something happening that simply could not happen, then I ask 'Who's trying to make it seem like it happened?' So I pick out stories that will make a lot of things come clear if the stories are lies."
"Whose stories are that?" Ragley asked.
"Those of Madelon Lamotte. And those of Ribaul."
"She tell you some rousers, Sheriff?"
"She told me a couple of rousers, so convincingly that --"
"I always said it was a mistake for a young man to be sheriff," thirteen-year-old Clela said. "They're too easy taken in by fancy women."
"So I go back a little, Ragley; I asked myself who it was that
started all those werewolf stories in the first place? Ribaul, that's who. And Madelon fed kindling to the fire. I myself saw wolf prints turn into man prints, but who was it made me see them?"
"How did Ribaul do the tracks, Pidgeon? That's a stumbler."
"I don't know. He just grins (with his neck in a noose he grins) and says 'A trick, Mr. Pidgeon, a trick.' But with a tame wolf under his control, and husky as he is, he could have leaped down into the draw and had it jump onto his shoulder, or some such. Those tracks were made earlier, when it was still wetter in the draw; it was Ribaul who made me believe that they were more recent or immediate. And Ribaul's old shack was on Lamotte's rough land right near. He kept the wolf there. No wonder that wolf smell always came on so strong when we were near it. It was Ribaul all the way, that old carnival faker who tamed animals. He said that a wolf couldn't be tamed, but he lied."
"But Sheriff, Ribaul isn't smart enough to put all that together."
"He isn't. Madelon is. Ribaul had a tame wolf, but Ribaul was the tame wolf of Madelon Lamotte. He followed Madelon and Jules up from south of the river last year and conspired with Madelon to kill Jules. Madelon wanted the younger Ribaul, and Ribaul wanted the farm and money and Madelon. Ribaul was doing a pretty good business in shot sheep while he set the trap for Jules and for the town of Yellow Knife. To rub it in, he hauled the shot sheep in Lamotte's old truck, and all the suspicion fell on Jules. He gave Madelon at least two shot sheep, and she wouldn't tell Jules where she got them. But that was when Jules started to go man-hunting at night. The wolf took out the throat of at least one sheep at every place, and ate a little sheep shoulder."
"When did Ribaul shoot Jules?"
"It was Madelon who shot her husband, in bed. Then she dressed
him and carried him to the cool pantry."
"How was it done with your marked bullet?"
"Ribaul was my helper and had access to my things. He saw me marking the lead shots. He marked one as close to mine as he could,
and he substituted it for one of mine. I can tell now, though barely, the one that has his notch instead of mine on it."
"How about the stake?"
"Ribaul cut two bois d'arc stakes as near as possible alike. He gave one to Madelon when he gave her the marked bullet to use. The maul marks don't mean anything. Some one made me see maul marks clearer than they were. Bois d'arc splinters a little bit, but it doesn't take a good mark. The blaze on the wolf's head was a fake. Ribaul had to put it on fresh every time he let the wolf out, but he had sure to look like Lamotte's blaze. And every

wolf looks at you with man's eyes. Notice it next time you trap a wolf. It startles us every time we see it, and then we forget. I had already told Ribaul that I intended to shoot the wolf right on the edge of the blaze, and he knows I'm a good shot. Madelon didn't have to be a very good shot to shoot Jules in the same place at very short range. Madelon was listening for my shot, and she set up that screaming to draw us to the house and away from the wolf, so Ribaul could get it out of the way."
"When did you find out that the wolf was in that shed not ten feet from dead Jules?"
"Damn, I keep seeing three shadows following us even now. It can't be all imagination. Oh, I found that out quite late. I should
have known it this noon when I saw the buzzards perched on the eaves. There was the smell of ripe man and ripe wolf together, but I thought it was werewolf."
"Sheriff, why did Lamotte really use so much rubbing alcohol?"
"Like he said, he had sore ankles. But not from turning into a
wolf. I believe that Corbey's account of how a man turns into a wolf was borrowed from a Ribaul account. And Ribaul already knew that Jules had sore ankles."
"Then that's all of it, except for the three shadows."
"Yes. But I can't solve the shadows of the wolf, or the shadows of Jules Lamotte. Madelon says that Jules didn't have any brothers or kindred, that there were no such three men visiting him or in the neighborhood at all. She says there was no such picture on their kitchen wall. Well, it isn't there now, and I can't find it. But there's one other loose end, and either you or your daughter here knows the answer. Clela, where did you get those horrible fang marks?"
"I told you once. Say, why don't you cut off Jules' head and bring it to me? Then we'll see whether the teeth match the teeth marks. Cut off the wolf's head and bring it too. I like to have a lot of heads rolling around."
"Oh, that, Sheriff. Well, Clela here is a violent young girl and she is sometimes plagued by a personal sort of spooks," Ragley said. "Most such spooks just pinch kids and leave them black and blue, but Clela is more violent and she has more violent spooks. The particular devils that haunt her slash her up pretty bad sometimes. It happens to all the women Of our family. She'll outgrow it in a year or two. They all do."
"Ragley, you are a prize liar, but sometimes --"
"But sometimes you can't be sure that I'm lying? And you never can be sure when Clela is. Let's leave it like that."
"Oh, it's real," Clela said. "Like your three shadows. They're
real too."
Ragley and Clela, both laughing, left the sheriff then and turned towards their own place. And Sheriff Pidgeon walked alone for a very little while. Then there were three bristly men walking with him. Pidgeon was nervous at the sight of them.
"What are you three men doing here?" Pidgeon asked them. "When did you come back?"
"We came for the burial of our brother Jules," one of the men said.
"But you weren't at the service. And you weren't at the graveside."
"Yes. We were both places."
"Madelon says that there are not any three such men as you," Pidgeon said, trying to make them not be.
"Madelon is only at this minute dead in your jail," said the spokesman of the three, "with man bites and with wolf bites in her throat. She dies for that lie, and for other things. We will not be
disowned."
One of the men unhinged himself and went down. He turned rapidly. Yes, the account was true. The tail came last of all, and it popped like a cork when it came out. Pidgeon continued to feel very nervous as he walked with two strange men and one strange wolf
in the shaggy daylight of Jules Lamotte's rock meadow.
"You are the pieces left over," Pidgeon said. "Ribaul explained most of the details, but he

didn't explain you. He said he didn't believe in your sort of shadows."
"Ribaul is at this minute dead in your jail also, man-bit and wolf-bit. He dies for his unbelief, and for other things."
"For what other things?" Pidgeon asked with a little bit of boldness.
"For knowing too much, and for not knowing enough," the spokesman said. Another man unhinged himself and went down. He turned quickly. Yes, there was a terrible stretching of the ankle bones. Yes, he shivered his wolf's hair to the outside of his hide with convulsive movements. Yes, the tail came out last of all. Pidgeon was shaking like a quicken tree as he walked with one strange man and two strange wolves.
"Ah, I turn off here," Pidgeon said. "I have some business in this other direction."
"Turn off as much as you will," the man said, "but your feet will continue on course with us."
And Pidgeon's feet did continue on the course with the man and the wolves. Then he knew that it was all over with him.
"Why?" he asked. "Why me?"
"As with Ribaul, you know too much and not enough. And we like to work by threes."
"Well, then, how will you do it, as man or as wolf?" Pidgeon demanded shaking. And his feet wouldn't run.
"Ah, they'll find two gashes of one sort and one of another on you," the man said, and he fastened into Pidgeon's throat with long and tearing teeth. Pidgeon was down on the ground then, and the two wolves had moved onto him to consummate the work. The last bristly man, streaming with Pidgeon's blood, unhinged himself and went down. And turned, Pidgeon watched the turning listlessly as his death closed in on him.
The terrible lengthening of the ankle bones, the softening of the skull with one part of it flowing forward and another part of it flowing backward, the eyes rolling around to the sides of the head, the shivering that brings the wolf hair to the outside, everything that marks the transition from man to beast!
And then there was only one thing needed for that third of the shadow-persons to turn himself into a total wolf. But Pidgeon's vision and life were interfered with, and he never did get to see the tail appear.

For All Poor Folks at Picketwire

"We ought to have a bigger place for the children to play in the summertime," Lemuel said one day. "How many do we have now?" Lemuel was a bent young man with bright and slightly peering eyes.

"Five, Lem, five," Griselda said. This Griselda was something of a looker.

If Lemuel Windfall hadn't always seen so far ahead, he might have been one of the very top inventors of the world. But isn't foresight a good quality in an inventor or in anyone?

Sure it is, but it's not good if you rub it into the ground. It is possible to be too foresightly. Lemuel could see ahead both into the immediate and to the ultimate use of whatever gadget he might devise. And he could pretty well weigh it out in green money how much it could be turned for. It would have been wonderful if he'd let it go at that; if he'd gathered each harvest in as it came to season, and had put his bills of expectation on their proper spindle till they had realized themselves. But Lemuel always saw forward, past the use and application of a device. He saw forward to its obsolescence And what is the use to activate a device or a potential or a condition if it is going to be obsolete in a decade or two?

"For the money, that's what's the use," the wife, Griselda, would say. "We can use the

money right now, and I don't care whether it will be obsoleted next century."

"But why should we be bothered for money?" Lemuel would always ask. "Surely it's always an advantage in any circumstance to reduce the number of moving parts, and money in this life is made up entirely of moving parts. And didn't I invent instant money just a fortnight ago?"

"Indeed you did, Lem," good Griselda said, "but you didn't go into production on the stuff. You looked into the future, and you discovered that it would be a short-term (not over fifty years' duration) affair. You said that ethical backlash and other difficulties would blow the whistle on it by then. Look, Lem, I'm reasonable. I'm not even asking for instant money today. I'll settle for thirty-minute money. I'll give you just thirty minutes to raise some household cash, and that's the limit. Thirty minutes, Lem. Did you hear me?"

"Yes," he would always say. Then he would put a few working drawings of something under his arm and would go down the street to Conglomerate Enterprises or Wheeler-Heelers and sell them for whatever he could get in thirty minutes.

"I could get more for things if I had the time and fare to take them to Le Conglomerat in Paris," Lem would say wistfully. "They've written me that they'll pay well for any new thing of mine, and they say that their offer will stand forever, for a reasonable ever. I could always get more if I had fifteen years to deal instead of thirty minutes."

"Lem, everything that you've ever sold, you've already had it on the shelf for at least fifteen years." Griselda would say with weary patience.

"Yes, I guess so," Lem would admit.

"And remember that you've promised me a trip to Paris."

"Yes, and I'll give it to you yet, Grissie."

And there was a worse hitch in the Lemuel mental and fabricatory process. He didn't like to produce anything unless working conditions were just right. And he had the sad conviction that nowhere in the world were conditions ever just right.

"I should have a workshop that's in a total vacuum," he would say sometimes. "That's the least of the conditions."

"You should have your head in a total vacuum," Griselda would counter.

"Why, such a thing would implode my brains," Lem would state, "and what would be the compensating advantage?"

"You never know, dear. There might be useful side effects."

"Yes, I should have a workshop in a total vacuum," he'd dream and beam, "and dust free, and in a place completely without gravity. And it should be without the quality of temperature; neither medium, nor very high, nor very; low temperature will serve; it must be without even the idea of temperature. And it should be beyond the power of hard radiation of every sort, beyond the fury of excessive ultraviolet rays or actinic rays or triatomic oxygen. 'And all baleful beams,' as the psalmist says. And my place of enterprise should be beyond the temporal cloud, and I do not mean anything so simple as time-stand-still, no, nor eternity either. There must not be duration; there must be only moment. No duration is ever long enough to get anything done.

"And my workshop should be spared the effect of every magnetic field, of every voltage differential, of every solar wind. And it should not have any topography at all. Perhaps it shouldn't even have location, or shape, or size. Griselda, if I had a workshop or factory so situated and appointed, all processes would become easy, and there would be scarce a limit to what might be achieved. Hey, I could make coal then! Oh, but there's plenty of coal. But in this little workshop here, and in the bigger workshop whose name is World, with all their disabilities of gravity and magnetism and electrical field, and baleful rays and temperature and existence in time and space, and subject to indexing as to shape and size and color and aroma, why, it just doesn't seem worthwhile even to try any work here."

"But, Lem, if you hadn't gone tilt-brained and thought up all these objections, then you could believe that you had the finest place in the world, and you could do the finest work

anywhere. Say, there's a title to a piece of land in Colorado that came in the mail today. A Mr. Jasher Halfhogan sent it to you. As far as I can tell, the little piece of land is on a small creek named Picketwire, and there isn't any town near it anywhere."

"What? What? Oh, how fortuitous can it get!" Lemuel cried with real enthusiasm. "On Picketwire Creek in Colorado, you say? Why, that's almost the same thing as having no topography at all. Nuggets of gold and orichalcum on my head! I guess that this is just my lucky day."

"But shouldn't this man have sent you money instead of a title to a no-good piece of land?"

"Of course he should have, Griselda. What luck he didn't! He should have sent me a great lot of money, and I suppose that there are persons who would prefer money. Oh, this is lucky! There is bound to be advantage come of it. One of the requirements of the ideal working place is that it should be unlocated and of no value. May the years teach me enough wisdom to find advantage in this thing! And in the meanwhile, it might be a nice place to turn the children loose in the summertime. How many of them do we have now?"

"Six, Lem, six. They are six of the reasons that I'm often after you for money. And remember that you've promised me a trip to Paris. That takes money too."

In a different year Griselda said, "Do you know how much taxes we got a bill for on that stupid piece of land in Colorado, Lem? Eighty-five cents. It must be some place."

"It makes one feel cheap, doesn't it, Grissie? I'll see what I can do about getting the taxes raised. Jasher Halfhogan goes out there pretty often. I guess that I should find out a little bit more about that piece of property."

"I guess that I should find out a little bit more about that man Jasher Halfhogan," Griselda said. "He has some kind of hook into you. Jasher Halthogan sounds like a name that you'd invent. And that funny-looking old man looks like someone you'd invent too. I'm asking you seriously Lem: did you?"

"No, not consciously I didn't invent him, Grissie. And yet I did invent him a little bit, I suppose. And he me. We are all formed by feedback and interaction. We see more than there is in other people, and we ourselves are seen for more than we are. And we grow to match our seeming. Don't you like Jasher?"

"I've never met him, Lem. Every time I've seen him he was scurrying away like some night ghost that was afraid of being shone on by sunlight. Well, if he's a Halfhogan, what would a Wholehogan be?"

"You really don't know, Griselda? Sometimes you astonish me," Lemuel said. He was a bent man who had recently slipped into middle age without much noise. "But as to the Colorado land, Jasher says that it's a gateway to a whole new life. It has something to say to me in the future, I know. And meanwhile, it might be a nice place to take the children some summer. How many do we have now?"

"Seven, Lem, seven." Somehow Griselda had remained one of the really good-lookers.

There finally came a year when Lemuel thrived in his erratic discoveries and enterprises in spite of his being forced to work and invent in places and circumstances of matter and atmosphere and gravity and magnetism and electrical manifestation and temperature and baleful rays and time and space and shape. Money seemed approximately sufficient. But always Griselda had something to worry about.

"I won't say that I don't like your friend Jasher Halfhogan," she said once. "I'm sure that he means well. I have met him now, you know, just a few years ago. Once, I believe, I saw him attempt a smile. It didn't work. But I do believe that he's a bad omen for you, Lem. A little buzzard recently whispered
to me that he'll be the death of you yet."

"No, he'll not cause my death, Grissie," Lemuel said seriously. "Though the

neighborhood children of whatever age hoot at him and call him Mr. Deathman and Mr. Soul Broker, yet I believe that they misunderstand his role. He will not cause my death. 'Twill be a mere synchronicity. He wants me to locate by that entrance in Colorado some year soon, to go to that little property of ours. That's one of the entrances to the next step in living, he says. And it would be nice to visit it, Grissie, before we die, or soon after that, in any case. And it might be pleasant to take the children there for a little vacation. How many do we have now?"

"Eight, Lem, but they're all married and moved away. I believe that it's too late for us to arrange such a trip together. In the next life, maybe."

"Maybe so, Grissie. It's good to think about." Lem was a bent old man now, and he hadn't intended to let himself get into such a state. And Griselda was still a good-looker, now and forever. "Colorado seems to loom pretty big in the next life," Lem was saying. "I'm feeling a bit doddery lately. I may ask Jasher Halhogan what he thinks about it all."

So the next season, when Jasher came through town again, Lemuel asked him about several things. "I'd like someday to visit that little Colorado property that you once deeded to me for services rendered," Lem said. "I have high expectations for it. And I'm reaching the age where I need something of value to concretize my expectations a little."

"Oh, the property itself is worthless, Lem," Jasher said. "Don't set any expectations on its value."

"But, Jash, you once said that it was a gateway to a whole new life."

"So I did, and so it is. But even a broken gate that's not worth half a dollar may be a gateway to a whole new life. It's the location that's important. Lem. There are a few other localities equally important, and they all give ingress to the same place. But it would he impossible to put any of them into right context without the services of a special informant such as myself. The place is analogous to a mail drop, Lem, in that it gives communication to places almost without limit. Rather think of it as a world drop or a life drop. It's better to take these things under guidance and control than to go at random and in ignorance. Besides, I get a commission on you. I work largely on commission."

"I never did know what you did. Jasher," Lemuel said. "I'm not one to wonder about a friend's occupation, but my wife often speculates out loud about yours. She says that you'll be the death of me yet."

"No death is foreordained, Lem. I'll collect a fee on yours when it does happen. but that's only because you're in my territory. Lemuel, do you have any particular later life desires or aspirations? We may be able to do something about them."

"Oh, yes. And what desires I have left do seem to get a little bit stronger with age. In particular, I've always believed that I could accomplish things almost without limit if I had the proper working conditions for discovering and processing and manufacturing. I have found, Jasher, quite a few things that had to have been fabricated in more nearly ideal circumstances than are found on Earth. Or at least they had to be patterned and triggered in more favorable circumstances. These things have been passed off by most persons as natural or quasi-natural phenomena. But they're not natural. I know manufactured things when I see them, and many of these things are manufactured. Aye, Jasher, but they're pot made under the disabilities that afflict our local planet.

"I want to make such things also. I want to make them in such profusion that they will be mistaken for natural or quasi-natural phenomena. I want to make them so nearly perfect that they will be almost unnoticed in their excellence, and so tremendously large that they will escape scrutiny and stand like invisible and accepted giants. I do not want money or recognition for these services that I am burning to perform. But, Jasher, the sites and circumstances for such doings are simply not to be found on this world."

"It may be that they are to be found with one foot on this world, Lem," Jasher Halfhogan said, "or with one tentacle. The world puts out some very long and tricky tentacles, a few of them so tremendous that they do escape scrutiny. So I will bet that we

can find good site and circumstances for your workshop or whatever. Just what specifications do you have in mind for it?"

So Lemuel Windfall explained to Jasher Halfhogan just what he would need for the minimum. And Jasher nodded from time to time and mumbled, "I think so. Yes, I think so." Lem listed the things that he had often poured into the erratic ears of his wife and into the stoppered ears of the world at large. All about the avoidance of atmosphere and magnetism and gravity and baleful rays. "And somehow Griselda must get a trip to Paris out of it," he said.

"You're making it easy for us, Lem," Jasher said. "You're going right down the line with all our specialities. Lem, I know just the place for it. When will you be ready to go?"

"I'd go quickly enough if I knew where I was going and what I'd find," Lemuel stated with the confidence of one who doesn't expect his hand to be called.

"You'll find just the conditions that you have been speaking of, Lem. But can you handle it, or will you go right past the place? I've never been certain that you have enough of the cantankerous metal in you, and without it you'll have too easy a passage to discover these conditions. Have you the need to be compensating enough that you must create things in such profusion and perfection? For it does go by need, and I simply don't believe that you have a strong enough need in you. Lem, I don't believe that you have been a bad enough man to be called to the extraordinary ransom and prodigy."

"Have I not been bad enough?" Lemuel crooked his voice at Jasher. "Let me tell you about it, low and into your ear here." And Lemuel talked into Jasher's ear in a serious and hushed voice until all the blood was drained out of Jasher's face.

"Stop, stop! Yes, you've been bad enough, Lem," Jasher croaked with distaste. "I was wrong to doubt you. How soon will you be ready to go? It's to your little land in Colorado. It's a better entrance than most places to the whole new circumstance and life."

"I'll be ready to go by nightfall, Jasher," Lemuel said.

And that was almost the last that anyone saw of Lemuel Windfall around the old place. He cashed in his chips, as they say. He lowered his flag, so the colloquialism has it. He had his ticket punched, as the phrase goes. He went West, as the older fellows say. He shipped off to Colorado, as the proverb has it.

His wife, Griselda, put on widow's weeds when he was gone.

She had always been an impatient woman.

2.

More energy has been spent in explaining the presence of coal deposits on our Earth, and more especially in explaining petroleum deposits, than in almost any other thing. Probably more energy has been spent in explaining them than in forming them. But it comes to nothing.

One authority insisted that the carboniferous gluts of our world came from the tails of comets that sideswiped the Earth. And this is one of the most nearly intelligent of all the explanations that have been put forward!

There is one geologist who says that petroleum is formed only between layers of bituminous shale, and that it is formed in such case by great pressure and heat. That is a little like using cheese for the jaws of a vise intended to exert tremendous pressure. Bituminous shale just isn't the rock for the job. And trying to explain the presence of petroleum is child's play compared with trying to explain the presence of bituminous shale.

There is another authority who maintains that petroleum and natural gas are largely due to the resinous spores of rhizocarps. Savor that opinion for a moment, reader, and you must conclude that there is at least one authority running loose who should be confined.

In every case, the temperatures sufficient to form coal or petroleum are somewhat

higher than the temperatures sufficient to vaporize the entire Earth. One exasperated authority stated that all such deposits must have been made by kobalds or gnomes laboring under the roots of mountains. He was righter than he knew. But the question remains: how could any circumstances on Earth serve to trigger such deposits and results? And the answer is an easy one: they couldn't.

-The Back Door of History
Arpad Arutinov

But there is a condition, neither on Earth nor off it, not in any place, really, where circumstances could trigger such results. This is a condition lacking the quality of location (Jews, close your ears! Greeks, harden your
Hearing! Covenanters, avert your senses lest you be affronted by it!), a realm of ransom and recompense and incredible self-assigned labor, a scene where such accumulations of carbonaceous matter are indeed patterned and planned and instigated.

-The Back Door of. History
Second Revised Edition,
Arpad Arutinov

There were new cargoes and traffics appearing, new potentials, and circumstances; but it was only Conglomerate Enterprises and Wheeler-Heelers and Le Conglomerat and such like firms that guessed that the new things weren't really natural or even quasi-natural. The new things were manufactured - these canny companies recognized this quickly enough - and they weren't exact]y manufactured on this world.

The conditions here just weren't right for them. And, as it seemed to the men of the several discerning firms and conglomerates, the new cargoes and traffics and products had the signature of one man all over them.

To several gentlemen from Conglomerate Enterprises came to visit Griselda Windfall. They had been in the habit of taking advantage of Griselda's husband, Lemuel, and they didn't intend to get out of the habit just because he had left town.

"It is absolutely necessary that we locate your husband, Lemuel Windfall," they said in unison (there were three gentlemen).

"It isn't necessary to me, it isn't necessary to Lem, and I'm not sure that it's necessary at all," Griselda said. "If Lem had wanted to be located, he could have stayed here."

"He could have what?" the three Conglomerate gentlemen croaked in disbelief in their single voice. "Mrs. Windfall, your husband is making all the new things available free. There are millions of dollars in this if you can help us locate him, or simply tell us where he is, if you know. Then we can work out the double modification, and we will have everything on a paying basis."

"Millions in it for me, and tens of millions in it for you," Griselda said thoughtfully. "And what is in it for my husband, Lemuel, who apparently doesn't want to be found? Please explain to me about the double modification."

"We will take one example out of dozens," the three men spoke in their single voice. "Smithstone Clay has become edible, and we believe that Lemuel Windfall has made it so. In nine billion years Smithstone Clay has never been edible before; and now it is. There were previous hints of it, of course. There were clay eaters in assorted boondocks. But real Smithstone Clay has never been found in abundance before. Now it is. And who can say when or how it happened? Who kept a running census of so worthless a thing as Smithstone Clay? But now it is no longer scarce and no longer worthless. That is good.

"But it comes free to everybody. That is bad.

"It would be simple to put a modification into it at the other end, at your husband Lemuel's end, so that it wouldn't become edible until we put the countering modification into it at this end. This is the double modification. By this we can control the products or traffics or cargoes or potentials or circumstances. And then we will be able to sell it, for a fair price,

to the whole world, instead of having it go free. And people always appreciate a thing more when they have to pay for it."

"Oh, sure," Griselda said. "I will think about this, gentlemen. And I will ask Lemuel what to do about it, if I can find him with his ears standing open.

"And, Mrs. Windfall, there arc dozens of other new and advantaged things besides Smithstone Clay," the three men tried to explain to Griselda in their unity talk.

"I know pretty much what the other new things would be," she said. "I watch the ripples, and I can guess what innovative rocks are being dropped into the pond. Particularly can I guess them when I've heard Lemuel talk about them for fifty years. I will let you know, gentlemen."

Griselda had a little talk with herself after the gentlemen of Conglomerate had taken their leave.

"My Lem has succumbed to the Devil's most transparent temptation," she said. "I wish that he wouldn't do things like that. He should never wander off from me and do things on his own. He hadn't left his first childhood, and now he's fallen into his second. 'Command that these stones be bread,' the Devil must have told him. Why is it that nobody sees the heresy of the 'Feed-the-world-by-easy-device' proposal any longer? The Devil got Lem in a weak place there. He always had a soft spot in his heart for the Devil, and he always had a soft spot for the 'Feed-the-world-by-easy-device' ploy. I've told him that the Devil will be the ruin of him yet."

Griselda went to visit a sibyl in a cave out on the Sand Springs road. It was one of those caves that run back into the bluffs just before you come to Union Street Hill. Once there was a restaurant and nightclub named The Cave in that block. Now the block was known as Sibyls' Row. There were half a dozen sibyl studios and one brake-lining shop in that block, and one empty cave with a FOR RENT sign.

"I would like your help in locating my husband," Griselda told the sibyl. "Here is his address."

"If you have his address, why do you need my help in locating him?" the sibyl asked. "Does he live at the address?"

"Yes, I suppose he does," Griselda said, "but I don't. I'm not sure that the address is real. I hardly know how to say this, but there is something very spooky about the place. I believe I could go there - and I intend to - and that my husband would be there. And yet I might not be able to see him or talk to him. And I might not be able to come back. There are things accumulating there. Things were accumulating long before my husband went there to work and live. And other things have been similarly accumulating in other places or in other entrances to the same place, for long ages. I have this information but I don't know where I have it from."

"I will give the address to my python," the sibyl said. "He will get to the effective level of it." The sibyl went down into a lower room to give the assignment to the python. And after a while she came back.

"Rats, rats!" she said in an odd voice.

"Is that an expletive?" Griselda asked her.

"Not this time. It's just that I'm almost out of rats. You know, there isn't a single rat catcher listed in the phone book this year. Rats and rabbits are what the python eats. You were talking about accumulations Mrs. Windfall. Yes, there have been these most spooky accumulations for ages. For long ages before men appeared, these accumulations are to be found, so the peculiarity of the addresses must go back before mankind. I wonder just who was living at those dubious addresses then. Whatever the species, they had affinity for mining and for well digging: mythology tells us that much about them. They manufactured things by processes that seem impossible. There was always one element missing. I believe that there was bilocation involved. I believe that there still is. Ah, the python has the

address analyzed."

The python's voice came through a sort of ventilator shaft in man-serpent accents: "The address is at one of the primary interchanges, though physically it is on a small creek in Colorado. The full name of this creek is El Rio de las Animas Arrepentidas en Limbo, or the River of the Compensating Souls in the Borderland of Limes. But the early Spanish people did not name the creek so. With rare intuition, they recognized the site for what it was, and their name was the perfect translation of the primordial name, which is very old. The creek is also called Lost Souls Creek and Picketwire Creek. Sophia, ask the lady whether she happens to have a rat with her."

"Oh, no, I don't have," Griselda said. "I never carry them."

"Nobody carries them anymore," the man-serpent complained. "Well, the creek rises at, nay, it falls down from Trinchera Peak in Las Animas County, and it ends in the John Martin Reservoir on the Arkansas River in Bent County. The lower hundred and fifty miles of the creek, from Hoene to the town of Las Animas, does not touch on inhabited region at all.

"The same creek, bearing the name of Las Animas, is also found hundreds of miles distant, in Sierra County, New Mexico. There is some mystery about this bilocation of the creek on Earth, but the fact of the bilocation hasn't been doubted. It is really a case of multilocation, as it is with every primary
interchange place.

"Ah, there's lots of words and names welling up out of my depths, and all of them refer to this location. Some of them call it a dislocation; some of them say that it is one of the limbos or halfway places; or a half-mansion. or a half-house."

"How about a half-hogan?" Griselda asked the educated snake in the room below.

"I don't know," the python said. "But what seems to be the trouble? Why don't you go ahead and visit the place, lady?"

"Yes, I will, I'll do that." Griselda said. "Thank you. python. Thank you. sibyl."

3.

...mineral as well as metal, and that which is now only a name, and was then something more than a name - orichalcum - was dug out of the earth... The red light of orichalcum.

Plato

As Griselda came near the place, she was surprised to find what name the local people called the stream. It was startling; it was a name unbelieved by many; it was ironic.

"Jews, close your ears!" a prairie dog barked.

"Greeks, harden your hearing!" a rattlesnake voiced.

"Covenanters, avert your senses lest you be affronted by it!" a bulibat spoke in a series of little booms.

"What I say is that Lem is lucky to have done even as well as this," Griselda said.

This was the evening of the following day after the conversation with the Conglomerate gentlemen and with the sibyl and the python. It was a few hundred miles distant from the previous scene, and Griselda Windfall, having found her way somehow to an interior place, was dining with a funny little creature in a funny little restaurant. They were set down to a fine compendium of the new edible clays and stones. It was a queer, refractory sort of place, but Griselda had adjusted to it in everything except her eyes and her mind. Her dinner date had been getting smaller, and the cafe-restaurant had been getting stranger and more intimate.

"I knew, of course, that Smithstone Clay had become edible," she said, "but I had no idea that one could now eat Dogtooth Rock or Ganister or Mealing Stone. I sure did not have any idea that they were so excellent."

"Ah, yes, we are about to rehabilitate very many of the rocks and ores and metals. We will adapt them to Earth," Griselda's dinner companion said. He was a bent sort of little gnome with bright and peering eyes. "We can find a dozen uses for every one of them. The folks here were needing some new ideas when I came along. Oh, coal and oil and gas are good enough, and they couldn't be had by regular people without the aid of folks who had fallen into my case. But people appreciate new benisons. Yes, and it is an act of charity and compensation to supply these new things, I believe. Stilbite, Amazonstone, Aztec Money - ah, they are wonderful stones, and we are finding wonderful uses for them."

"Toad's-Eye Tin, Asparagus Stone, Dry-bone Ore," Griselda murmured fondly. "My husband, Lemuel, thought he could do great things with them if ever he could find an appropriate working place and conditions. Listen, Bright-eyes, what's good is that there can be money in these things. Somebody goofed at first and let Smithstone Clay become edible free of charge. Now that they have it in such exotic restaurants as this, though, there will be a profit in it somewhere."

"Do you not understand that all food was originally free food?" that little gnome said with his bent smile. "Do you not know that all shelter was originally free shelter, and that all property was originally free property?"

"Didn't work, did it? And all those free things will not add up to a free trip to Paris for me. There has to be money generated somewhere. How did you become so bent, little Bright-eyes? You remind me very much of someone. How did I get here, anyhow, since the map had gone all haywire?"

"Or picketwire," the gnome said.

"Yes, but I got here. And then both you and the place got funnier and funnier. However did you become so bent?"

"The first and second lumbar vertebrae are reversed. This emphasizes the crook in the back. It bends the head forward and down, to the ideal working and cogitational position. Really, the way that humans have their heads tilted, I don't understand how they can do any thinking or working at all. This reversing of the vertebrae makes a change in the facial expression: one must always look up and peer at another person. There are even cases where persons aren't recognized by their familiars after the change. The reversing of these spinal segments also brings a change in the thought pattern, right down where it matters. Folks have spoken mistakenly of visceral thought, but that basic thing is really spinal thought. Spinal thought is very big here. So is medical practice. The changes are all made without surgery. They are made, in fact, without the... ah... patient being touched in any way. All topographical inversions are easy in a nontopographical ambience like this."

"And you've been topographically inverted, Bright-eyes?" Griselda asked. "You weren't always a gnome?"

"Oh, God help us all, Grissie. Being a gnome is all in the mind and in the shape."

"What is that moaning and groaning?" she asked. It seems to be in the background of everything in this dismal place. And why aren't there any colors here?"

"Oh, one of the requirements for a good workshop is that it be without distracting colors at all. And some folks moan and groan a lot when they're at labor. They're carrying on now like a bunch of ham actors because we've set them to work triggering easy-to-find deposits of orichalcum on Earth. We tell them that it's easier to make than coal or oil, but they whimper about having to learn something new."

"Orichalcum? You're arranging for it to be found on Earth? Not for free, I hope?"

"You want it to be somehow otherwise, Grissie?"

"Certainly, Lem. Oh, I called you Lem - you remind me of him. I want the trick that they call the double modification set into it. I want it set in to my own gain. I'd like a few little fortunes to accrue to me, for a few little years."

"Oh, I suppose so, Grissie. I'll have them make out a Conveyance of Patent that you can take back to Earth with you. Yes, they are moaning and groaning quite a lot. They are the uncreative folks, so they must be Set to simple tasks. Abd simple tasks do become

groaningly tedious."

"What are the simple tasks, Bright-eyes?"

"Oh, mostly the old faithfuls, Consider all the coal and oil deposits that have been fabricated for Earth. Kobalds and goblins and gnomes, so long as they are in this place of tribulation and tribute, are forced to serve the people with these products. Yes, the legends of them working in mines and wells under the roots of mountains are true ones. The making of these things is the hard part. Transferring them from nontopographical ambience like this to Earth is easy. It's a law that all objects tend to locate themselves in the nearest topography. The great accumulations or deposits or gluts on Earth have been passed off as natural or quasi-natural occurrences. They aren't, Grissie, they are manufactured things, and they were manufactured here."

"I'm promised fortunes on the orichalcum intrusions," Griselda said. "Oh, what are some of the other things that you are making in new profusion and for new uses?"

"Oh, Mealing Stone, French Chalk, Cottonball Borax."

"Oh, yes, yes. Lemuel was projecting work on all of those. How about Horseflesh Ore and Iron Rose?"

"We'll be ready with them quite soon, Grissie. And Mispickel and Noselite."

"Two of Lemuel's favorites. Oh, how startling! I've been sitting here with you and not realizing that you were Lemuel. I thought you were some gnome. But at least we buried you for Lemuel, though somehow you didn't seem quite dead. If you had, I wouldn't have come here on this wild-goose ride. No wonder I got lost. The deed said Picketwire Creek, but the people in the area call it Purgatory Creek."

"No, I don't seem quite dead, Grissie. This dying makes quite a change in some persons, but it hardly touched me at all. It upset Jasher Halfhogan seriously, very early in his life; that's why he always seemed a little strange to you. But dozens of things have happened to me that seem more decisive than dying. Ah, here's the Conveyance of Patent. They do fine engraving here, do they not? And this agrees to the double modification and assigns you the benefits. You can take this to Conglomerate Enterprises, or to Wheeler-Heelers, or to Le Conglomerat in Paris, or to any of them; and you'll be paid handsomely."

"To Paris? Oh, if I could only get there, Lem! And with a fortune yet!"

"Oh, you can walk out of here and into any of a thousand different primary interchanges on Earth. Think Paris, and you will come out in Paris."

"Oh, Lem, Lem! Is there anything that you need here?"

"Why don't you send me my old red sweater? There's always been so much moaning and groaning about the heat here that they have overcompensated against it. It will be nice to have my old sweater here when I work late."

"I'll send it, Lem, I'll send it!" Griselda cried. She kissed him, or perhaps she missed him. She thought Paris. She rushed out of there. And she came out in Paris in the middle of...

...the Rue de Purgatoire. And right around the corner was Le Conglomerat, where she traded the Conveyance of Patent for a few of those fortunes. And all around every corner was Paris.

"Oh, the red light of orichalcum," she sang, "and Paris!" For Griselda was a good-looker, now and forever. And with the kind of fortunes that she had, a good-looker like Griselda could have her heart's desire in that place.

## THE SKINNY PEOPLE OF LEPTOPHLEBO STREET

-- and turned into Leptophebo Street (it's always a scruffy sort of delight to come into it). It was a minor discovery and a sudden entrance, like going through a small and florid door into a whole new world, a world of only one street.

The chattering of the monkeys was what struck him first, and then the chattering of the

people in a kindred tone: and then the absolute cleanliness of the place, and the pleasant bouquets of selected and superior smells. Close on that was a whole dazzle of details that would take days to assimilate.

The poverty of the street struck him last of all, and then it seemed a more pleasant poverty with some other name. It was picked-clean poverty, as if every speck of dust had been hand-gathered from between the cobblestones as something as valuable as lepto pepper or gold.

Canute Freeboard, adventurous investor and freebooter-at-large, had come to Leptophlebo Street for what money could be found there; but the street seemed bare of value. He had come looking for a man named Hiram Poorlode. Canute needed money, and that was the year that money was very tight. There were those who said that money might be got in Leptophlebo Street, but they all laughed when they said it.

"Could you tell me where I might find a man named Hiram Poorlode?" Canute asked a friendly-lookhig young fellow there.

"Kmee-fee-eee-eee-eee," the young fellow said, and Canute saw that a mistake had been made. "I'm sorry," he said. "I hadn't noticed that you were a monkey."

The monkey nodded as if to say that it was quite all right, and he motioned for Canute to come along with him. They stopped in front of a man who was sitting cross-legged on the stories of the street. The man had a sign 'Nuts, Wholesale and Retail': he had a pandanus leaf in front of him and on the leaf there were seven filbert-nuts and two alinonds. The monkey pointed the man out to Canute and Canute to the man and he said "Knee-fee-eee-eee-eee." Then he skittered away.

"Yes, I am Hiram Poorlode," the nut-man said. "Thank you, Hoxie." He spoke the latter to the skittering monkey.

"Get your clothes rewoven, sir. Get your clothes rewoven," a young boy chanted at Canute. "My father reweaves clothes free. Turn those baggy clothes into trim fit real fast."

"My clothes aren't baggy," Canute said. "Boy, they sure will be baggy in a little while," the boy said. "Better get it done now."

"Get your teeth cleaned sir!" another young boy chanted at Canute. "My father cleans teeth excellent free."

"Is he your son?" Canute asked the street-sitting nut-merchant Hiram Poorlode.

"Oh no. This one is Marquis Shortribs," Hiram introduced. "His father is Royal Shortribs who is a tycoon in teeth. And I am Hiram Poorlode, nut-merchant, investor, moneylender. Sit down on the cobbles, sir, and talk to me. You are the only customer in my shop at the moment so I can give you my full time."

"I am Canute Freeboard, a stranger in this country and in this town. I expressed strong interest in obtaining investment money. The man to whom I had introduction must have been a humorist and he played a lopsided joke on me. Ah, how is the nut business?"

"It hasn't been a bad morning," Hiram said. "I received twelve filbert-nuts on consignment this morning and I have already sold five of them. With my mark-up, this gives me enough equity in filberts that I call eat one myself and still have enough cash on hand to cover those sold. This is known as eating free and it is the first rule of economic independence. As to the almond nuts, I own them outright. I started the day with five of them and I have sold three for cash. This is the best sales record that I can remember, up to this time of day, for almonds. I also own the pandanus leaf. That being so, I am almost insulated against misfortune. If I sell nothing for the rest of the day it will still not be a complete catastrophe."

"Haircyt, sir? Haircut, sir?" a small boy cried in set-chant. "My father does supreme haircutting and head-grooming free."

"No, I don't believe so, boy," Canute mumbled. "Is he your son, Mr. Poorlode?"

"Oh no. This is Crispin Halfgrain the son of Claude Halfgrain the biggest man in hair and fields in Leptophlebo Street. Some of the finest garments here are woven by his wife Rita from the hair that Claude collects in his studio. You are looking for investment money? I

am the most promiscuous money-lender in Leptophlebo Street. How much do you need?"

Hiram Poorlode, as did all the skiny people of Leptophlebo Street, wore a very large, flat, wide-brimmed hat that was crawling all over with rambling greenery. Canute now saw that what Hiram really wore on top of his head was a growing vegetable and fruit and grain garden. And all those garden-hats were tilted to catch all the sun possible.

"I'm afraid that we're not thinking on the same scale," Canute said dourly. "I need eighty-five thousand dollars for an opportune deal, such a deal as will come only once in my life. I need the sum at no more than seven percent interest and I need it today. Yes, my acquaintance in this city must be a humorist."

"Here are the shoes back again, Mr. Poorlode," a small boy said, and he set a good-looking pair of smooth shoes down beside Hiram. "He will not need them again for two hours, but he believed that Mr. Shortribs may want them before that."

"Thank you, Piet," Hiram said, and the boy skipped off. "That is Piet," Hiram told Canute, "the son of Jan Thingruel who gathers more astatic grain out of cracks than does anyone else on the Street. We have but one pair of shoes here, and whatever person goes to make a prestigious visit will wear the shoes her shoes. They fit all persons in the street, since Claude Halfgrain had the final joints of four of the toes removed last year. They are good shoes and we take excellent care of them. I am shoe custodian this week." Hiram Poorlode lifted up one of the flag-stones of the street and put the shoes down into a shoe-hole that was underneath it.

---

"I have the money by me now," Hiram said then. "Nothing is easier than eighty-five thousand dollars in gold. And, with me, a man's face is his security. Give me half an hour to consider you for I am a cautious man. Spend the time pleasantly: visit and observe our rather odd Leptophlebo Street here. Enjoy yourself, sir, and be assured that your case is under active consideration. I call tell a lot about a man by watching how he reacts to Leptophlebo Street."

"All right," Canute said. "I'd given up hope of raising the money anyhow. Money is tight this season. All but it was a sweet, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! Yes, it's an odd little street here. How much do you sell the filberts for?"

"Three for a mill. On, it's the standard coin to the Street. One tenth of a cent."

One might as well enjoy the drollery. Really, Canute had never seen anything quite like Leptophlebo Street; never such skinny monkeys or such skinny people. The monkeys couldn't talk properly. There's an old saying that whenever monkeys do talk there's some monkey-business going on.

Well, there was plenty of it going on here, but all that the monkeys could say was "Khlee-fee- eee-eee-eee." The monkeys wrote notes on little pieces of paper and gave them to the merchants of the Street. They brought in fruit and they traded it or sold it. From the merchants they bought a few nuts that were out-of-season in the woods, bought them for clay coins or in trade for their in-season fruits or nuts. The people asked the monkeys about their families and about the situation in the woods, and the monkeys wrote the answers on little pieces of paper.

"The monkeys are so smart," Canute said, "that it seems as if they could talk. As long as you are doing business with them anyhow you could teach them speech."

"People of the monkey caste are not allowed to talk," Effie Poorlode said (she was the wife of Hiran the nut-merchant). "Everyone has his niche in the world, and the monkeys don't have talking niches. And it would be no profit to us to teach them speech. We have plenty of time to wait for them to write out their notes, and we do make a good profit on the paper that they write them on."

The people of Leptophlebo Street were the skinniest folks that Canute had ever seen. How the ribs stood out on them! Two ribby young ladies were in a booth down the street. "What? Do you sell the paper to the monkeys?" Canute asked Effie Poorlode.

"Get your teeth cleaned free, sir!" the boy Marquis Shortribs was soliciting a

passer-by. "My father does excellent tooth-cleaning free." But the passer-by continued on.

"If the tooth-cleaning is free, and if there are no customers anyhow, then were is the profit?" Canute asked.

"Oh, there will always be customers," Effie told him. "Suppose that ten thousand persons go by and do not avail themselves on this service. But then the very next person might stop at the Shortribs' booth, and you can see how that would make all the waiting and solicitations worth while. As to your question, no, we don't sell the pieces of paper to the monkeys. The monkeys make the paper in the woods, and they make the ink too. They write their notes on the paper and they give them to us. You can see that the profit will be enormous. If we get only eight or ten of these little pieces of paper a day look how they will count up. We dissolve the ink of the paper, and when we have a thousand pounds of the ink we can sell it to ink-bottlers or pen-makers of the city."

"How long will it take to accumulate a thousand pounds?" Canute asked.

"Oh, it would probably take its a thousand years, but what's time so long as we keep busy? And we find all sorts of uses for the little pieces of paper. I tell you that there is money in paper; there is money in everything."

"How much money is there in everything, Mrs. Poorlode?" Canute questioned.

"Yesterday my husband and I cleared one cent and three mills from all our businesses," Effie answered. "And we also achieved equities in three other mills. This is better than most of our days, but all our days are good. Oh the wealth does accumulate!"

Mrs. Poorlode was like the valiant woman in scripture as she stood proud and skinny, with her garden on top of her head and with her hands busy leaching nut-shells in a bowl.

"This processes the nut-shells for industrial use," she said, "and we have the Nut-Shell Bitter Tea left over to drink. It makes the bones glossy. My husband gives a rebate to every purchaser of one of our nuts if he returns the shell after he has eaten the meat out of it. We are blessed to live on a street that has so many business opportunities."

There was nothing very interesting about the gaunt rib-cage of Effie Poorlode.

"Yes," she said, reading the thoughts of Canute Freeboard, "the townsmen lust after our ribs and after our ossuary generally. There is nothing wrapped up about us. There are some persons in the town with so much flesh grown onto their bones that their fundamental persons and passions are buried away and their real impact is never felt. Luckily that is not so with the people of Leptophlebo Street."

"How is the street kept so clean and swept?" Canute asked.

"Brooms with both astatic and static bristles are the secret," Effie told him. "Organic dust clings to the static bristles, and the non-organic dust is swept clean into gathering vessels by the astatic bristles. Then we pass the brushes over degaussing jets that release the organic particles, and we make soup from them. And the non-organic dust is separated into flammable and inflammable piles."

"They mean the same thing," Canute said.

"Not on Leptophlebo Street they don't," Effie insisted. "So we make briquettes to burn as fuel out of the one sort. And we make bricks and flagstones and face-stones for buildings out of the other sort. So we have our soup and our fuel and our bricks, and we keep the street clean all the time."

A medium sized bird, probably a grackle, came down onto the rim of the garden-containing hat that EfFie carried balanced on her head. And the bird was stuck fast. Canute saw that the edge of the hat was bird-limed to catch anything that landed there.

"I will wait," Effie said. "The pot wants a bird, but the pot must wait also. These grackle-birds attract one another for a while. This is not one of our own grackles that I know; it's one of the newly-arrived grackles from the countryside. They will not be wary of one bird stuck there, nor of two birds stuck. They will not be wary of less than three stuck birds. I will be patient and I will have three grackles for food and for by-products. Will you not stay with us this evening and have a look at our niglit-life on Leptophlebo Street?"

"I don't know what I will do," Canute said. "I haven't comprehended it all yet."

"Lose weight free in seven minutes surgery, sir," a small boy chanted. "My father does good free work. He is one good loser."

"No, not right now, boy," Canute said.

"Have your appendix out, sir? Have Your appendix out?" another small boy was putting the shill on. "My father performs faithful appendectomies free."

"No, not right now," Canute said.

"This boy is Pat Thingruel, the brother of Piet and the son of Jan Thingruel," Effie told Canute. "The father is as stylish a free appendectonlist as you will find anywhere."

"I do not understand how all the people of Leptophlebo Street can work for free," Canute said. "How do they profit by it?"

A second curious grackle-bird came down and got itself squawkishly stuck in the bird-lime of the edging of Effie's garden-hat.

"Oh, there's a lots of profit!" Effie exclaimed. "A veriform appendix, especially when inflamed, is a veritable storehouse of richness. Master microchemists like ourselves can manufacture all sorts of useful things from such rich material. And the teeth that Royal Shortribs cleans, do you realize just how super-organic are the deposits taken from teeth? Do you know how many things can be woven and fabricated from the hair that Claude Halfgram cuts? Garments, rugs, tents, seines, modish gowns for the modish ladies in the town. Almost solid profit. And the head-grooming that he does, do you know that there are some very lively products to be had from that? Our greatest industry, though, is the night soil that we gather from the cooperative of people of the town. And I will tell you something else if you will promise not to tell the monkeys."

"No, I won't breathe a word of your secret to the monkeys," Canute promised.

"We pay the monkeys only half as much per equal weight for their night soil as we pay the people in the town. And the monkeys bring theirs to us; we don't have to go and get it. Ah, there is profit everywhere you look, in the stones, in the air, in the very rain. What a money-harvest we do have! Mills and miles and cents and cents, and at the end of a week we may even have another nickel for our hard work."

"It's a wonder you don't gather belly-button fuzz and process it for profit," Canute laughed.

"Of course we do," Effie cried. "We gather more than a pound a year of it from the, people of the town, and this in spite of the fact that many of the burghers will not cooperate with us and say that the whole thing is silly. But there are a few friendly people in town who wear wool. The woolies are the best for the fuzz. And it can be made into the softest of all sheens. Oh do stay over and have a look at our night-life tonight, Mr. Freeboard! Really, it's wonderful the times that we do have."

A third grackle came and stuck itself in the bird-lime on Effie's head-garden. And then was heard 'Sorrow in Three Voices by Grackles': but only those three would be stuck there. Others would veer away from the three birds in trouble.

But a fourth bird did come, a bird carrying a long piece of broken looking-glass in its beak. It was too wise to get caught in the bird-lime, but it was watched with avid eyes. Sometime it would drop that piece of silvered glass, and some person would rush in and catch it before it hit the ground. There's profit to be had from old mirror glass.

A man with affluent gestures arrived at Hiram Poorlode's booth in a sudden hurry. He had the sharp, lean, craggy face of a bird of prey. He was taut and of a restless thinness in every part. Why, he was none other than the Lean Eagle from Lean Eagle Street!

"Hiram, I'm caught short," said that opulent man who wore diamonds on every finger. "I have to cover. I'm overextended. It will be only for a few days. I need two and a quarter million dollars and I need it now. I have my dray here."

But the Lean Eagle was the highest-flying and the most rapacious money-man ever. Why should he coiiie to Leptophlebo Street to borrow?

"With me, a man's face is his security," Hiram Poorlode said, "and I know your face, Mr. Schlemel kurz Karof. A man of such a name and reputation is security itself."

Hiram removed three of the largest flagstones from the street on which he had been sitting. He passed the heavy bars of gold up to the nine lackeys who served Mr. Schlemel kurz Karof. It took a fair number of gold bars to amount to two and one quarter million dollars.

"There has to be all explanation to this!" Canute Freeboard howled out load. "Oh, but by all the equivocating things that be, there can't be any explanation to it!"

When the lackeys had loaded all the gold bars onto the dray, Mr. Schlemel kurz Karof signed a note and gave it to Hiram Poorlode. Then that opulent man went away with his dray and his lackeys, and Hiram Pooriode replaced the three flagstones in the street.

Canute Freeboard hummed a little tune to himself. There were some notes missing from that time. "How long did it take you and your husband, at a nickel a week, to get to a position where you could make instant loans of two and a quarter million dollars and still have lots more gold glittering in your gold-hole under the street?" Canute asked Effie.

"It sure did take a long time, " she said. "There just aren't any short-cuts." Effie took her from her husband the note that Schemel kurz Karof, the Lean Eagle, had given him. She dissolved the ink off it and put it in the ink accumulation. And she put the de-inked paper with the paper accumulation.

"How will you collect when the writing is dissolved off the note for the ink?" Canute asked Hiram.

"Ah, a man's face is his security to me," Hiram said. "He will pay me back. And if he does not, what is the difference? In time I will accumulate the amount again, and I have lots of time."

"Hey, is the handsome man going to stay around for the night-life this evening?" two pretty young skinny ladies asked. "We sure do have a lot of fun at night-life fiesta."

"These nice young ladies are Regina and Maharana Shortribs," Effie Poorlode introduced them. "I believe that a good-looking you man like you could have a lot of fun just sky-larking with them at night-life, Canute."

"You know what we do for the climax of a night-life go-it-all?" Maharana asked. Oh, the skin and bones of that young girl! They'd send shivers of delight through anyone.

But sometimes one must put second things first.

"Ah, about that loan," Canute spoke to Hiram. "On by the swept cobbles of Leptophlebo Street, there has got to be an explanation to this! About that loan, Mr. Poorlode?"

"Oh, certainly," Hiram said. "I've been observing you and I now have complete confidence in you. I'll lend you the money. Eighty-five thousand dollars, was it not? Do you want it in gold or in certified cash warrants?"

"In gold, in gold. On, what a beautiful, hard-scrabble, skinny street this is!"

Canute rejoiced. "How have you done it? How have you accumulated millions of dollars in gold on a nickel a week?"

"In bad weeks we don't make near that much," Effie Poorlode said.

"Ah, but where does the gold come from?" Canute pursued the matter.

"Oh, there's several legends about the origin of the gold," Hiram told him. "One story is that it's rabbit gold and that it reproduces itself, that it all comes from two nuggets that got together under the flagstones."

"But there is raw nugget gold there. There is bar gold and ingot gold. And there is coined gold of various coinages," Canute protested. Hiram had already removed the stories that covered the gold in the street.

"Yes," Hiram agreed, "several pair of different forms of rabbit gold would be required, wouldn't they? Then there's the story that it's all monkey gold. The monkeys find it and refine it in the woods. Then they give it to us noble burghers of the Street. They are afraid to keep it. It is said that they did keep it when they were men, and that that's what made monkeys out of them. You don't believe that entirely? 0h, I see that Hoxie has been

monkey-facing my act behind my back." And Hoxie had been doing that. But had he been saying 'Do not believe all of it' with his monkey-facing, or had he been saying 'Do not believe any of it'?

"The third legend is that it is all pound-of-flesh gold," Hiram said. "This legend states that we sell pounds of flesh for the yearly bashes of the Extortioners' Guild and the Hatchet-Makers' Guild and especially for that dread secret society Glomerule; and that we receive our gold for the pounds of flesh. Ah, there it is, Canute, all ready for you to take it: eighty-five thousand dollars worth of gold It's quite a bit over a hundred pounds. The young ladies will help you carry it."

"Which of the three legends is true, Hiram?" Canute asked softly.

"Oh, they're all a little bit true, but all together they would only account for only a fraction of our gold."

"What accounts for the rest?"

"How can we tell you that? It's a secret. We know you are not so base a person as to want us to tell you the answer. You will have the pleasure of guessing it as the years go by, but we will not tell it to you. Ah, your gold is ready for you, Canute."

"We know you are not such a fink-dink as would like to be told," Effie said. "It took the last one about a thousand years to guess it, and you want to miss all that fun?"

"Who was the last one to guess it?" Canute asked.

"Me," said Hiram.

"We know you are not such a cheap-creep as would listen even if someone whispered the answer to you," Maharana Shortribs said. "We know you are better than that. My sister and I will help you carry the gold."

"You will not tell me where it comes from," Canute mused. "And you offer it to me so freely that there has to be a catch to it somewhere. What is the catch, Hiram? There's a hook in the bait, isn't there? It's logical that there would be a hook."

"Oh sure, but it's so thin a hook that you'll hardly notice it. And believe me, the hook isn't a logical one."

"Hardly notice it, huh? That may be like saying that a knife is so thin that you'll hardly notice it when it goes in between your fifth and sixth ribs," Canute said doubtfully.

"Yes, exactly like," Effie Poorlode chimed in. "How did you know about the cut between the fifth and sixth ribs, Canute? It isn't one of the major cuts."

"Lose weight free in seven minute process," a little boy chanted at Cnaute. "My father is king of all the weight-takers-off in Leptophlebo Street."

"Not right now," Canute said.

"Get your clothes rewoven free," another little boy chanted. "My father reweaves baggy too-big clothes for slim-trim limb."

"Not right now," Canute said. "Does the hook hurt, Hiram?"

"Only a little bit. Only for a minute. Take the gold, Canute, and go close your deal. Then come back here for certain entertainments and kindnesses that we will have scheduled for you. You'll really like them. And when you have experienced them, and the mark that goes with them, then you will be one of us and you may enjoy Leptophlebo Street for as often as you like and for as long as you like. And you won't even notice the hook when it goes in."

"And afterwards? When I do notice it?"

"I told you that it hurts only a little bit, and for only a little while. We do want you to be one of us. We want you sincerely."

Canute Freeboard looked up and down the crooked length of Leptophlebo Street.

"Choose us, join with us," said that skinny young lady Regina Shortribs. "Have fun with us. And come back often." And Canute looked at the wonderfully bony form of Regina.

He looked at Hiram Poorlode's sign which read "Nuts Wholesale and Retail". He looked at the three sad grackle-birds that were stuck to the top-of-the-head garden of Effie Poorlode, and at that other unstuck grackle that was flying around with a piece of

looking-glass in its beak. He looked at Highfellow, Redbone, Roxie, and Hoxie, the solemn monkeys of the street.

Hoxie wrote a note and gave it to Canute. "Join with us. Stay with us. We like you," the note read. Effie Poorlode took the note from Canute to dissolve the ink off it. A tear ran down Canute's face for he was genuinely moved by the friendship of the monkeys. The little boy Crispin Halfgrain raced in and caught the falling tear in a special little cup before it hit the street.

"My mother can use it," Crispin said. "Each teardrop is a storehouse of balanced chemicals. The special salinity is quite prized."

"Analyze your dreams, analyze your dreams!" a little boy of the street was making a pitch. "My father makes fine dream analyses free. Lie down on the cobbles."

"How can your father make a living by analyzing dreams free?" Canute asked.

"Residuals," the little boy said. "He gets rich on the residuals."

"Choose us, join us," said that skinny young lady Maharana Shortribs. "Have fiesta with us and come back all the time. Hey, do you know what we do for the climax of one of our night-life go-it-alls?" Canute looked at the wonderfully bony throat of Maharana.

"I make my choice," he announced. "I swallow that bait, hook and all. I become a partisan of this street." (Even the lop-eared dogs of the place raised their ears and snouts in joy.) "I take the loan now in cash. " (The people began to cheer.) "I will go and seize the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." (Folks began to laugh and to tune muscial instruments.) "And then I will come back here for the entertainments and kindnesses and the night-life." (The monkeys were clapping their hands.)

There was real welcome in the wind, and somewhere near there was the joyful whetting of knives. Canute and the Shortribs sisters picked up the gold bars and went with them and closed the deal. So Canute nailed down the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but he knew that it was small stuff compared to the mysterious opportunity of Leptophlebo Street itself.

They came back to Leptophlebo Street, and a 'Gala and Welcome' banner was stretched clear across the street. So it was quite impossible to decline any of the activities. And who would want to? The trumpet was blowing a great blast, and the other instruments were joining in

Canute was having his teeth cleaned, his head groomed, his appendix removed, his dreams analyzed, some other pleasant surgery being done to him, and his clothes rewoven all at one time. This was life at its most full, and the dazzle and confusion were to be expected.

"This is the first appendectomy since my father got his knife sharpened," Pat Thigruel sang happily in Canute's ear. "Oh, you are lucky! Listen now as I join the rowdy-dow band for you. I play eighth flute."

"And this is the first free seven minute surgery since my father got his knives sharpened," another little boy was chirruping. "Listen when I join the band. I play fifth drum." Canute couldn't remember what the free seven minute surgery was about but it had to be good. He heard the eight flute and the fifth drum join the hand and it was rapturous music. His dreams were being analyzed right on the glittering edge of his senses and he could only guess what rich residuals they would have. And a written note was placed shyly before his eyes.

"Listen now as I join the rang-dang hand," it read in the handwriting of the monkey Hoxie. "I play third bagpipe." Canute passed the note to Effie Poorlode for processing and salvaging. Everything that was done on Leptophlebo Street contributed to the fortune of that famous place. With joy Canute heard the third bagpipe join the rang-dang hand. He was in glowing confusion as he recovered from his surgeries (there had been several of them) and his cleanings and groomings and reweavings and other things. Oh it all did make him feel light and light-headed and slick-fit and trim-limbed and happy!

"Hurry up and heal up," Regina Shortribs was talking into his ear. "Heal real fast. Drink this cup of Nut-Shell Bitter Tea. It's medicinal, and it also makes the bones glossy. Then we will go and honkey-tonk."

"You know what we do for the climax of our night-life go-it-alls?" Maharana Shortribs asked once more.

"No, but I will like it," Canute gloated happily. He was feeling almost healed now. In another minute he would be healed completely. "What do you do for climax, Maharana?"

"Eat bowls of real organic soup," the skinny girl breathed the delightful information. She made it sound wonderful, and of course it was. But Canute was watching the way that her skiny throat moved when she spoke. It was sheer witchery of ligament and sinew.

As Canute rose to his feet with a little help, the band played on with flutes and drums and bagpipes and all the wonderful and skinny-sounding instruments. It was certainly fine just to be there between the two beautiful and meager Shortribs girls.

"I have swallowed the hook without noticing it," Canute said, "and it didn't hurt a but. I wonder what distinguishing mark has been placed upon me? And my rewoven clothes fit me so trim! How is it possible that anything should be so trim? I feel wonderful and light. I wonder how I look?"

"Bird, bird!" Maharana cried, and she clapped her hands. "Bring the looking glass!"

"Oh gee, now it comes," Effie Pooriode said apprehensively.

"Remember that even the Lean Eagle was known as the Fat Eagle before he trafficked here," said Regina.

"And remember that it only hurts a little bit and for a little while," said Hiram.

"No man can have everything, but on Leptophlebo Street he sure can come close," Canute gloated. "Now let's just see whether I look as fine as I feel."

The grackle-bird brought the piece of looking-glass to him. And Canute took it.

He looked at his image in it.

He cried out in shock!

His face cracked in a spasm of agoiiy. And the looking glass shattered into tinkling slivers that fell, and were caught before reaching the street, by a small boy who would have profitable salvage from them.

But it hadn't been Canute in that mirror. It had been a horrifying skill-and- bone thing. That slick seven minute free surgery had removed more than a hundred pounds of his flesh by a hundred cuts, one of them between the fifth and sixth ribs.

There was a ghastly screaming going on and on.

It hadn't been Canute in the glass. And it couldn't be him now. It was a horrifying devil. It was a starved and demented ghoul. It was a malodorous ghost. It was a misbegotten bony abomination. It was --

It was one of the skinny people of Leptophlebo Street. It was himself, of course: and the screaming voice was his own.

Heavy tears were running down Canute's face

("It only hurts for a little bit and for a little while," Hiram was saying again.)

in outrageous streams

("You'll learn to like yourself this way," Maharana was saying. "We like you this way.")

and falling

(But how could you become one of us if you didn't become one of us?" Effie was chiding.)

to be caught in a special cup by Crispin Halfgrain

("The special salinity is quite prized," he was saying.)

before they hit the Street.

OR LITTLE DUCKS EACH DAY

"Against no word is there such strong prejudice as against the word 'Prejudice'."
The Back Door of History,
Arpad Arutinov

Jim Snapjudge was unhappy without apparent reason. It couldn't be anything preying on his mind. His was a mind that preyed: not one to be preyed upon. He had not been brooding: he did not brood: he thought and moved by swift intuition. No derelictions or wolves of the past were snapping at his heels. His business was all with the future, intelligent prediction. Once the past had been assimilated, he did not turn back to it. And anything following him would have to feed many a cake to the heads of the dog-devil that guarded that time road before overtaking Jim Snapjudge. He was secure.

He felt no guilt for the suicide of Cletus Dogwood. He wasn't responsible for it. He hadn't caused it. He couldn't have stopped it. He had merely judged, correctly, that it would happen. It had been a little disquieting when Cletus insisted that there must be some mistake in the prediction, and Snapjudge had assured him that a mistake was impossible. But as for guilt for anything, why what did Snapjudge owe for? Guilt means owing payment or gelt or yield Word-meanings were important to Snapjudge for his whole profession and life's direction and fortune depended on the meaning of one word.

And should he feel remorse for the late-life criminality that broke out in Angelo Woodstock? It's true that he was the only Prejudicial Analyst who had predicted it accurately, but he had gathered more data than the others had. But remorse, which is to say biting again or backbiting, no, he didn't feel remorse for such things as that. Yet something was presently biting him in an inaccessible spot. Not biting him again, but biting him newly and mysteriously.

Anyhow, he couldn't afford second thoughts about such things. Second thoughts are always duplication, an inefficiency that a Prejudicial Analyst cannot allow himself.

A young man, pleasant and impudent of face, was approaching Snapjudge from the front as he walked through Actuaries' Concourse. The man seemed about to speak to Snapjudge, but instead of that he cocked an eye at him, grinned a crooked grin, and passed on. And perhaps he was gone forever.

No he wasn't. There was a handle on the young man; Snapjudge would encounter him again. That was predictable. For even such a quick passing was sufficient to permit a good Prejudicial Analyst like Jim Snap~udge to give a rapid and basically exact reading.

'Twenty-four years and five or six months old. Born in the autumn, that's sure. Name is approximately Godfrey Halskragen (if the surname had been Englished to Tippet, as had been considered by the father of the man, it would have left a stronger indication; but Halskragen it had remained), from Gallipolis Ohio, so what was he doing down-stream here in Kronstadt? Oh, that could be answered, if it mattered. Not quite sure where in Gallipolis the man had lived, but probably on one of those tree-named streets that slope down towards that river. There was some indication that he had lived in two different houses not too far apart. Mostly of German-Irish blood. A lapsed Lutheran or Catholic. No, no, his German ears were halsstarrig (stubborn), but not that stubborn. A man with such graceful tragi to his ears could hardly he a Lutheran. Wife may be named Irene (Iris rejected after short consideration), and he may never see her again in life. This man (Godfrey tentative) have the opportunity to transfer to this town with his old firm (P & G Rotary Valve Company) at an increase in pay. And he is here to look the town over and decide. He believes, wrongly, that his ever-new resolutions (he is a boozer) will stand up better in a new town. But he will be drawn down into the Rhineland part of town tonight, into the Rangle-Tangles and Bierstuben and Schnapps-Shacks. And he will die there, drowned in the fools' cup as they used to say.

Snapjudge did not verbalize all this judgment to himself, but he did record it all in his mind in an annotation that was faster than words. There is a gyroscopic principle in the Analysis: high speed accompanying accuracy and balance. A slower judgment would

wobble and be less accurate. This was the quick first impression, the only allowable impression for a Prejudicial Analyst. And Snapjudge's impressions, based as they always were on tens of thousands of previous impressions, were uncannily right.

But then Snapjudge did a thing that he did very seldom. He looked back. And the young man who had passed him also looked back at the same instant, and their looks met. Their thoughts crossed like two rapiers made out of swift sunlight.

"Could I not be different from my template?" the thought of the young man laughed back at Snapjudge. "Have I to die tonight just because my pattern says 'die'? May I not escape?" And the young man winked crookedly. Snapjudge catalogued it as an amoebic wink, but he was puzzled at his own attaching such a name to it.

"No, you may not escape," Snapjudge flashed back the stilted thought. "As I have judged you, so you are judged." But he was startled by his own arrogance. Was this the beginning of uncertainty? But why should a Prejudicial Analyst ever be uncertain?

"That young man is prescient," Snapjudge told himself. "How could I have missed that? His orbital index is too low for him to be a prescient. Easy, Jim, easy. Were there true prescients, we Prejudicial Analysts would be obsoleted. We'll not let that happen." Then Snapjudge was taken by a cold chill. It was not over the idea of prescients; it was over something that happened years before.

Two dozen years back, in a biology laboratory period, Jim Snapjudge, his eye to a microscope, had been examining a slide at four hundred power magnification. And something had drifted onto that slide that had no business there. It was a face that barely missed being a human face, that missed even more narrowly being a demon face. And it had winked sardonically and chillingly and crookedly. It was because of that not-quite-human face on the slide that Jim Snapjudge did not become a biologist. He became a Prejudicial Analyst instead.

Why bring that old puzzlement up now? Well, the young man (whose name was approximately Godfrey Halskragen) had winked with exactly that same sardonic and chilling and crooked wink as had the blob under the microscope years before. Yes, it was an amoebic wink. And it meant that there was in this Godfrey Halskragen some thing, too small to see with the plain eye, that would contradict with absolute stubbornness whatever analysis Snapjudge should make. There was plain revolt there.

At that time there was still some prejudice against Prejudicial Analysts. But why should there be? Why this irrational recoil that appeared so often and so foolishly?

We are not commonly in court of law and pledged to hold no previous information on a subject. Then we should not, as a normal thing, be required to have minds wiped clear of all memory or manifestation. We are not meant to be like little ducks who wake up in a new world each day. For a prejudice is simply a pre-judgement, a decision based upon previous as well as immediate evidence. If I found certain things to be true yesterday, why may I not take them into account in making a decision today or tomorrow? If a certain person has taken advantage of me last week, why must I trust him in an identical situation today? And actually, using the guidelines of previous situations and encounters and persons, we can tell almost everything about a person merely by looking at him. Even if he puts his head ma sack, we can te1~ ver, much about him by the sack he selects and the way he fashions it to wear.

This man is Scotch, I say for an instance, and the Scotch lean to a certain sort of character. This man has lewd and vulgar ears, and they are the Sort of ears that criminals often have. This man has a pronounced septum between the nostrils, and such persons are proud without reason, self-centered to the point of having no very clear idea of the outside world; they are dishonest and presuming. Or this other man has greedy thumbs. What should I do, put gloves on my eyes so I do not see them?

Should one he required to say of a person or situation 'I will accept no evidence on this man or thing except today's evidence generated today?' There cannot be any such segregation of evidence. The very shape of a man's head is evidence, and it was shaped in

the course of his whole lifetime and only a little bit today. The way that a man walks is evidence of what he is. His name is evidence that goes back through his whole ancestry. A man with the first name of Howard will be one sort of man. A man with the first name of Harold will be of another sort. There is nothing accidental about this. But one who must make an appraisal today cannot wait for a man to act like a Howard or a Harold. Only a small chunk of the picture will be revealed in one day or in one season. It must be supposed that the man will act in such a way as previous evidence indicates, the supposition being based on the man's own past actions where they may be ascertained, and on the past actions of hundred of other people of the same type.

The use of such suppositions is named Prejudice. Their directed use is named Active Prejudice. And the really effective and illuminating use of a corpus of suppositions is named Prejudice as a Work of Art.

The work of Prejudicial Analysts is always Prejudice as Work of Art.

Each person is a total walking history of himself. The history is total in that it gives not only what the person has done but also what he will do. These histories aren't even very hard to read, not for Prejudicial Analysts.

Another person was now approaching Jim Snapjudge from ahead. She was a dusky young lady who was dressed loudly in the primary colors so that she was like a column of happy and shouting flowers. Outside of her brightly colored clothing, she was rather commonplace in appearance, or at least she was so to common eyes. To the eyes of an expert Prejudicial Analyst she was not too uncommon either, and she was quickly placed. She was placed into relatively simple categories. She was placed firmly, irrevocably, and in considerable details.

'Twenty-one years old last March.' Jim Snapjudge was sending, receiving, and recording in the annotation more rapid than voice, 'and her name may very well be Teresa Tuesdaychild. Hers isn't a continuing surname. It was given to her by her mother, out of whimsy, and all in one piece. In her line there had been, for practical purposes, parthenogenesis for three generations, for they were not marrying ladies in her ancestry. Teresa came up here from the shallow-clay in the South, from the little piny woods and the nanny-goat hills, but all of those ladies go into the towns when the years for it arrive. And each of those ladies has a bosomful of gold pieces.

'This Teresa has a well-paying job in a highly technical field and she fulfills it amazingly. It isn't that she is a person of much technical training. Indeed she lied cheerfully about her qualifications to get this job, and she also presented forged articles and certificates that were provided by a person called John the Forge. But she does have great intuition, strong tactile intelligence, penetrating imagination; and there are few technical problems that can stand up against her. She has so much vitality that she must constantly be sharing it with others. She is one of the bright-star people with the tide running always in her favor. And, so far as she knows, she a quite happy.

'She is a person of several different lives, and she moves easily from one into another. But, though she has a solid hold on all the up-town things, money, happy employment, fulfillment of leisure, variety in her own person, attention of many young gentlemen on the rapid rise (one of them a double-ducky buckaroo of great moxie and moment), though she has contagious gaiety, though she has multiplying group interests, yet she is going down to Rhineland tonight without any of her friends. She will find sordid encounter there and she will meet her ruination, the nature of which remains a little foggy even to a Prejudicial Analyst.'

Well, that was the quick judgment.

This dusky girl who might be named Teresa Tuesdaychild had now gone on past Jim Snapjudge. And, a short moment later, Snapjudge did (for the second time that day) a thing that he did very seldom. He looked back. And Teresa, who had gone by him, also looked back, and their looks met.

"Must it really be my ruination?" the thought of the young lady lightened back at

Snapjudge, and her full vocal intonation was somehow in that thought. "Are you quite sure what sort of encounter I will have down in Rhineland, in the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy-House where Elm Street ends on the River?" And she flashed Snapjudge a dusky and not very friendly grin.

"I have read you, and that is the way you are read," Snapjudge bumbled back in his mind, angrily and uneasily. "What, has another one challenged my Prejudice today? How could I miss two prescients within a quarter of an hour? Can it be only coincidence that there should he a pair of intuitives in one afternoon?

"Well, it's plain that the fates of these two are connected, and it's just as plain that both of these are a little bit stubborn about accepting their fate. I've wondered about this irrational stubbornness where I've met it in others. And a good Prejudicial Analyst isn't supposed to have to wonder about very many things."

Jim Snapjudge stopped at the local station in beautiful downtown Kronstadt Ohio. He was to appear for a minute interview on 1n~evuiews with Agnes at three oh seven o'clock, so he walked into the sending area at exactly three oh seven.

"Oh!" said Agnes, "I thought you would be late."

"Any Prejudicial Analyst could have told you I wouldn't be," Snapjudge said. "My personality profile should indicate to anyone capable of understanding that I am always on time, exactly on time."

"Mr. Snapjudge, you are here to defend your profession of Prejudicial Analyst against public opinion which has always held that there is something malodorous and crippling about prejudice," Agnes began the interview.

"I am not here to defend but to attack," Snapjudge said. "I am here to attack the hypocrisy of those who would prejudge prejudice. To be without prejudice is to be without roots or trunk. But I doubt if you even know the meaning of 'prejudice', Agnes."

"I know the original literal meaning on which you have built such a house of hate, yes," Agnes maintained stoutly. "And I know the true, developed, organic meaning that now obtains. This is the shriveling, defaming, hating, murderous assault on all that is decent; and you are a shriveled, defaming, hating, murderous person."

"Ah, you're foaming at the mouth, Agnes. You should wear a bib. I repeat that I attack the hypocrisy of those who prejudge prejudice, you being one of them. You are categorically against all prejudices (prejudgments) of any sort, and yet on this one thing you prejudge more strongly than any Prejudicial Analyst that I have ever known. Really, why are you against intelligently based prejudgment?"

"Because it is fallible, because it is sometimes inaccurate, because it's presumptive."

"What isn't? Are not all judgments fallible? Working infallibility is he most that can ever be obtained."

"No. The Final Judgment is not fallible. I'd almost wish it were this moment so I could hear it find against you, find against you forever. You really wouldn't call yourself a fair and unbiased man, would you now, Mr. Snapjudge?"

"You are prejudging the Final Judgment, Agnes, you who are so strongly against any prejudging? And, yes, I would absolutely call myself a fair and unbiased man. Even minded, that's me; always a bad word for everyone."

Snapjudge felt that the quip didn't quite go over. The people who are against prejudice are against humor also.

The buzzer sounded, and the minute Interview with Agnes was over with. A minute was what Agnes said it was, and now she was interviewing a spokesman for the Ethical Party.

Walking in the street again, Snapjudge was assailed by second thoughts once more. "What if I'm wrong?" something wailed in him. But a Prejudicial Analyst cannot admit that he is wrong in his basic, so Snapjudge put this doubt resolutely out of his mind.

The expert Prejudicial Analyst has two most useful aids which, however, are still no

tin very good repute. It is unfortunate that they are not, for as repositories of information they are overflowing vessels. These two main props are Phrenology and Folk Belief.

Phrenology (that old House of Our Fathers) is back again and it has heen repaired to a high degree of validity. It is the reading of character and predilections and life determination from the head bumps and head shapes and from other related evidence. There is the analysis of the skull itself and of the plastic-fleshy covering of the skull. And then the shape and disposition of the whole body comes into the game. A recent expansion of the field is kinetic phrenology which embraces the movements as well as the shape and texture of a person. Even the lay and whorl of the hair (Negro hair, Jew hair, Slav hair, Indian hair) indicates what a person must be. Hair on the back of the second phalange sections of the fingers, that indicates cruelty; and a great lot of hair there indicates outright sadism. Hair in the ears, that indicates doltishness and animalism. And the feet, the feet! They would tell almost every thing if they were allowed to. The Prejudicial Analyst is at such a disadvantage when people go shod! And yet a practiced analyst can tell enough. There are some things that can never be hidden by leather or plastic.

Surface marks on the skin! There are little weather-marks or crinkle marks on the faces and throats of all persons, and these grow with age. These are the nexus marks, usually starred, five-pointed for Christians, six-pointed for Jews. Then there are the un-starred, diamond shapes of Negroes, and the lotus marks of the Hindustani people. These marks indicate both the apparent and the hidden blood of examined persons. The marks do not lie, but individual persons sometimes lie. And yet it's a fact that one without a strong spirit of prejudice is scarcely able to interpret these marks at all.

And ears, ears! No Prejudicial Analyst can ever have enough of ears. No good man ever had bad ears. There are criminal ears, there are lazy ears, there are the itching ears that are mentioned in Scripture. And there is a human characteristic that must go with every ear form. There is an invariance here.

And there are many extensions of the simple science of Phrenology. Every extension of the body is an extension of the science of the body. Dogs belonging to persons, for an instance, are extensions of those persons, and they are to be analyzed as ancillaries and extensions. These and other appurtenances, living or unliving (a house belonging to a person may be such an appurtenance) give absolute indication of a person's character and direction.

So many things to be considered, dewlaps, throat-swellings, bull-humps on the backs of necks, the shape of a voice which is the shape of a thorax projected into the air, grizzled eyebrows (especially when they are Manx or Welsh), these all will tell very much to one who is truly devoted to Prejudice.

That which has been will be again, and again, and again. When a correlation has been discovered to exist in one hundred persons it will also exist in the one hundred and first.

And names, names! Names are shapes and textures and movements, they are short-hand representation of living persons. And they are also evocative magic. So it is that names form the transition between Phrenology and Folk Belief which is the other strong limb of the Prejudicial Analyst.

It is hard to comprehend just how very many things names may tell to a Prejudicial Analyst. But how the Analyst himself tells names is the easy part. It is almost to cheat, to take the cross-section from the small end of the log. Even to the student analyst it is almost the case that every person comes with his name printed boldly in plain letters on his forehead.

Take new-born twin calves that look exactly alike. There is no possible way that one can tell them apart until they are named. But name them, and each will immediately look like his name to such a degree that it becomes quite easy to tell them apart. This is not imagination. Ask any farmer or small rancher who has kept a modest herd (not many over a hundred animals) so that each animal may be known by appearance and name. Appearance and name will interact very strongly.

But humans grow much more in the direction of their names than do animals. Consider persons hearing the names of Clarence, Jerome, Horace, Freddy, Eustace, Emily, Rex, Alice, Ralph, Agatha, Isidor, Mona, Dwight. You get the idea? One asks the names of these people only out of politeness. One knows their names, for they are spelled out on the very faces of them.

This most striking trick of the Prejudicial Analysts, naming names of persons never seen before, is really the easiest trick in the whole repertory. Anyone can do it. You can do it yourself with a week's practice.

But there are other tricks that are not easy. The divining of a stranger's total personality and total life, past, present, and future, from such evidence as is immediately apparent is not an easy thing. But it can be done. It requires almost slavish adherence to analogy and precedent. Such divining requires acceptance of the formula 'What type has done, the individual will do.' It requires uncommon sense, and a man-trap memory for millions of details. It requires assurance. It requires confidence. It requires the synthesis of all these things. And it requires, for it to be done with a sparkle, reasoned happiness on the part of the Analyst.

But Jim Snapjudge was unhappy without apparent reason. It couldn't be anything preying on -- What? Are things back where they started?

Yes, they are. Jim Snapjudge, in an uncommon fit of mind-wandering, had walked completely around beautiful downtown Kronstadt and he was back where he had started. But now he knew why he was there. In the building above him was the office and clinic of his friendly enemy and formidable competitor, Jonah Himbrecher, the other leading Prejudicial Analyst in town.

Doctors must sometimes go to other doctors. Even lawyers go to other lawyers in certain circumstances. Priests go to other priests to be confessed: even Popes must do so, except Leo the First for whom an angel provided that service yearly. Gamblers visit other gamblers. And Prejudicial Analysts must sometimes, for the preserving of their equilibrium, consult with others of their kind. Jim Snapjudge went up to see the other Analyst, Jonah Himbrecher.

"Good afternoon, Jim," Jonah said, and subvocally he added "Damned Wasp!"

"Good afternoon, Jonah," Snapjudge gave his greeting, and voicelessly he added "Damned Jew-bug!" This subliminal name-calling was only a little ritual knife-whetting that they used. It certainly didn't imply unfriendliness.

"I suppose that you, as a foresightly person, have made arrangements to turn all your cases and clients over to some other Analyst in the event of your timely (for to an Analyst nothing is untimely) death" Jonah asked matter-of-factly. "I suppose that you can make this transfer by a single act that is as simple as jerking a draw-string. I rather hope that the transfer will be made to myself."

"Sure, it's to you, Jonah," Snapjudge said. "You're the only other Prejudicial Analyst in town. Has my death become timely?"

"Oh yes. Tonight."

"All right."

Jim Snapjudge made a phone call. It was an act as simple as jerking a draw-string, and by that act he turned over all his cases and clients to Jonah Himbrecher.

"Well, that's fate," Snapjudge said after he had completed the call. "There's no arguing with fate. But you might as well sketch out my end for me. Just how will I end, Jonah?"

"Wet," said Jonah Himbrecher.

## 2

"It is he that saith not 'Kismet'; it is he that knows not Fate; It is Richard, it is Raymond, it is Godfrey at the gate!"

Lepanto, Chesterton

"I've observed too many persons on their death day for me to have any doubt in your case," Jonah said. It was almost as if he had something to defend.

"Oh, I haven't any doubt," Snapjudge said humbly. "My fate is fixed as is all fate. But I wonder how it came upon me so suddenly."

"The indications of sudden disaster have always been there, I suppose," Jonah said. "They're written plainly everywhere, on the backs of your hands, and in the wide swing of your eyes. They're in your shapeless gestures, particularly that emphasized tossing of your head. They're in the dilation of your nostrils. But you're a bit of a special person, an Analyst, a Prophet, almost an exception; so the signs and causes were scattered with you and at first they did not have to come together. They've done it though. There is now a correspondence and constellation of all your evil signs, and they cannot be reversed."

"Jonah, how do we really do it? Isn't there something more to it? I mean the sudden and true intuitions. Sometimes they seem to go beyond the evidence."

"Oh, the intuitions are merely the culmination of the evidence that we receive without consciously acknowledging it. This evidence burgeons, or it festers, in our unconscious. Then the intuitions explode out of that evidence that we had consciously overlooked. But the intuitions are valid and in the true line, Jim. Our prediction tactics cannot be in error. There is a mystique that requires their accuracy."

"I don't know, Jonah, I just don't know. There's been a feeling corning over me all afternoon that maybe, someday, somewhere, we should give someone the benefit of the doubt."

"The benefit of what doubt, Jim? We Prejudicial Analysts cannot have doubts. Were we not certain, we would be mighty shaky. If we did not stand on sacred privilege, we would be in danger of being ridiculous."

"It just seems to me, Jonah (and forgive me, for I'm a distraught man speaking on the last day of his life), that we may sometimes be too arrogant in some of this."

"Arrogance is a requirement for us, Jim. Let them know that there are still Prophets in Israel. We are the latter-day prophets, and as such we will always be in danger of being stoned by the people. And, walking always in this danger, it is automatic that we should be arrogant. We have to be right. There is an inerrancy about properly marshalled evidence, about assembled Folk Belief, about phrenological accumulation. What they indicate has to be. We grow out of the past, and the name of that past is Prejudgement or Prejudice. Today's one-inch twig growth at the top of the tree does not give the total profile or representation of that tree. Without rational prejudice, which is the solid sense of things past, we would like foolish gooney birds waking up into a world with only a present dimension."

"Or little ducks each day," said Jim Snapjudge. "But might we not sometimes suspend judgment?"

"No, Jim. Suspended judgment is a little bit like suspended animation," Jonah explained. "Somehow we might like it to be there as a workable alternative if things got too rough. But there's no proof at all that either will ever work. Better to forget about them."

"Does Fate have to be final?"

"Certainly. It wouldn't be Fate if it weren't final."

"And yet there is the possibility that Agnes was partly right," Snapjudge said dreamily. "The strongest case against Prejudicial Analysis isn't that it is unfair or hate-filled (why should such a calculating and impersonal thing and the Analysis bother to be unfair or hateful to fragments of its own data?). the case against it is that it is sometimes mistaken, though by its nature it can never admit that it is mistaken; and that it is always premature. It's as though we were telling a situation or a person 'You can't get out of your cage. Don't try.' And that situation or person should protest 'I want to try anyhow. Isn't it allowed to try?' Arid then we would exclude all chance with a final statement 'No, it is not allowed to try.' From one viewpoint, a case could be made that this is unfair. I don't know whether it would be a strong

case or not. What are you doing to me, man?"

Jonah Himbrecher was doing something with his hands, on or behind the shoulders of Jim Snapjudge. He seemed to be unfastening an invisible something, probably a garment. Then he drew it off and folded it carefully with his ritual hands. The object was still invisible, and yet its shape, including the very fancy fringes of it, could be guessed from the movement of those Jonah hands.

"I am removing your Prophet's Mantle, Snapjudge," Jonah said then in a liturgical voice. "It is best removed some hours before the death, for the prophetic faculty is already lost when the doubting and questioning begin. When one dies and the Mantle has not been symbolically removed, then the trees in the sacred talking groves (there are still some in nearby Scioto County) will wail out 'A Prophet is dead!' And I hate to hear grown trees cry.

"Do you ever go down to Rhineland?"

"Seldom. Sometimes I go down to check on my analyses of persons and their fates. I may go down this evening to check on two such fates."

"Yes. You will go down there this evening. That is where you will die.'

"But what if I do not go down there this evening, Jonah? How will I die if I avoid the scene of my death? What could force me to go down to Rhineland this evening?"

"Snapjudge, you have ceased to be a Prejudicial Analyst, you have ceased to be a Prophet. Otherwise you would not be able to ask such questions. The backs of your hands will force you to go down to Rhineland this evening, and that wide swing of your eyes will force you. Your broken-patterned gestures will force you1 particularly that tossing of your head. The dilation of your nostrils will force you. The way you rock on your feet will force you, and the way you flex your knees. Your chewing of your lower lip will force you: that would do it by itself. You will go down there tonight and you will die there because you are named Jim Snapjudge, and that is the way that Jim Snapjudge will end."

"Yes, yes, I see that there's no way out. Ah, just what is it that we lose, Jonah, when we cease to be Prejudicial Analysts and Prophets in our last hours?"

"Purity of concept is what is lost. That is the guard: and when that guard retires, then other things crowd in by the common gate. Among these things which that noisome complex called popular opinion has associated with Prejudice in times past, and that is still associates a little bit today. But it is only when Prejudice ceases to be true Prejudice, when the judgement in its prejudgment fails in soundness, that unfairness and hate and bias and prematurity can creep in. Now good afternoon to you, Snapjudge, and abide as well as you can in the concept of Prejudice as Work of Art."

"Aye, Prejudice as work of art -- when it works," Jim Snapjudge said, and the fallen prophet went out from that office and clinic.

As evening had already come on, Jim Snapjudge went down to that shoddy, waterfront district named Rhineland. He went to the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy-House which is to be found where Elm Street ends on the River. And there was something gone wrong, or gone different, with the whole Rhineland district.

It was, of course, still shoddy in every detail; but the whole thing didn't add up quite as shoddy as expected. It was bright, rather; it was almost gay; it had a sort of freshness, almost newness about it, and nothing new had come to Rhineland for decades.

"What will you have, Mr. Snapjudge?" asked the proprietor of the Ruination. He was cashier and waiter and bartender and his name was George Rue-something. Jim Snapjudge had lost his prophetic facility and could no longer finish the name of the man. But should it now run in the other direction?

"And how do you know my name?" Snapjudge asked the proprietor.

"Why, don't you know that every bartender is a Prejudicial Analyst as well as a Prophet?" George R. asked. "Oh, by the way1 this needn't be your last meal. That is just a sticky notion that you have. You can break it. You can fight it. Nobody has to die till he's ready."

"I'm ready," Snapjudge said. "There's no going against fate."

"The common people go against it every day, Snapjudge. They fight it. They pull it off its high horse and roll it in the dust. It is only the fine people who are too easily intimidated by the old fraud. Ah well then, why don't you have a meal good enough for the last meal of the rankest murderer? The snap-turtle is good, the crawfish tails are good. We don't have shad roe today but we do have mud-cat roe. The calf brains aren't bad. The hot-cakes and kidneys are really for the people who cross the river from Kentucky, but there's no law against anyone else wanting them. The sand-bar onions are about what you'd expect from wild onions this late in the season. The coffee is good by strong. Don't try to dilute it with more water. It's the water that makes it so strong. And this isn't Kentucky Bourbon, whatever the bottle may say. This is Ohio Rye Whisky and I made it myself. It's good. We've got sour-milk bread and corn-cob bread. And crab-apple cobbler."

"With levity sauce, I suppose. Just fix me something good to eat something strong to drink," Jim Snapjudge said uncertainly. Always before he had known what to order in a place. A Prejudicial Analyst could divine the qualities of any food in the environs just as well as he could read the character and proclivities of any person around. But Snapjudge had lost his powers.

"Gas lights here?" Snapjudge asked, though it was obvious that they did have gas lights. "It seems very bright in here for gas. Do they cost you much?"

"Nothing," George R said. "I use river gas. I drove a couple one inch pipes with sand points on them down a few feet here, and I have all the gas I want. And I washed the big mirror. That's what makes it seem so bright. It fools your fate too. Any change in a big mirror throws them into confusion."

"You'll not turn fate aside with humor," Snapjudge said sourly. "I always have," George R said. "I've got almost everything fixed up now. All but the broken plank out front in the board walk that goes out over the water. I should fix that. Somebody will get a bad fall there. And the board is so noisy that it spooks people."

"The broken plank is noisy?"

"Yes, noisy. It carries on all the time. Always mumbling and grumbling."

The dusky young lady who may have been Teresa Tuesdaychild came in and took a table. She was still dressed brightly, and her primary colors had taken on an exciting glitter under the gas lights. Jim Snapjudge had never been quite sure what her ruination would consist of. And now, having lost his power, he couldn't project beyond what he had known earl icr in the day. He believed that her fate, her ruination, would be caused by a gun misfiring and exploding in her face. This would be the second shot from that gun. The first shot would have killed a man.

"What is she anyhow, white on black or black on white?" Snapjudge asked George R testily. He found Teresa very attractive, but he was somehow indignant against her.

"She is hue upon color, tone upon timbre, shade upon sheen. She is a primary chromatic of high saturation and high brilliance. A jewel, I forget which kind: a flame garnet."

"I don't like her. I haven't any reason. Until this afternoon I did not like or dislike anything or anybody. And I always had a reason for my thoughts. She will come to her ruination in this place tonight."

"No, she will not. Young girls seeking ruination go to the rooming house next door. Not here." George R sat with Jim Snapjudge when he wasn't busv. Now be rose to wait on Teresa.

She asked for the table to be set for three, and she seemed to order for three. Quickly there was the new a bright aroma of food that was better than snap-turtle or mud-cat roe or calf brains or sand-bar onions. There was pungent and juicy rack of rash ribs somewhere, and hot river-boat rolls. There was an olfactory presence of noble coffee of which the water was not the strongest element. And there was the curling whiff of Ohio Rye Whisky. Pleasurable promises all. George R came and sat with Jim Snapjudge again for a moment.

"Why have you the dogs skulking around on the floor yet when you have brightened

up everything else somehow?" Snapjudge asked.

"There are no dogs here," George R assured. "I got rid of all of them two weeks since. Those are merely some of their shadows that are left over for a while. Yes, they skulk and lurk, but they are only shadows."

"Of coming events?"

"No, I don't think so. But you can see anything you don't want to in those shadows. Mostly, I believe, you will see yourself."

There was urbane laughter, there was natural gentry laughter all about: and there was the sound of good music somewhere in another room. That's where even good music should always be, at some distance away, or in another room at the very least. And now Jim Snapjudge had been presented with his last meal, rash ribs that stood and reigned, hot rolls made with buttermilk and honey, pepper that -- Godfrey Halskragen came into the Ruination Bar and Grill and Gandy-House. He joined Teresa Tuesdaychild at her table. Now the two fates were together, and they had only to wait for the assassin, probably the person of the big Buckaroo.

"You will have at least one killing here tonight. I always watch to prevent trouble."

"Yes. That last man who came in, that man who is sitting with the colorful girl named Teresa, he will be shot to death here tonight. I have seer this in a valid vision. His name is probably Godfrey. He will be shot by a jealous man whose jealousy is quite complex. I never believed in mixing the primary colors myself."

"You are not talking about primary colors at all, Snapjudge. You are talking about achromatic colors," George R- said. "But you are mistaken. Somehow you have seen it wrong. Or else the vision itself has changed slightly, but to change the effect completely. The violence will not happen."

"A valid vision cannot be changed even slightly," Snapjudge insisted. "A fate once set is absolutely certain."

"No, Snapjudge, no," George R- contradicted. "Listen to me. In every town there is one small section where fate is not securely established; where things that are absolutely bound to happen will sometimes happen in a slightly different manner; where recompense is demanded and obtained for all unbalanced things. When towns were walled, these sections were always outside the walls. When pales were garrisoned, these sections were always beyond the pales. In Kronstadt Ohio this unruly and slightly mystic section is named Rhineland."

"Look at the way those two talk," Snapjudge was saying, and he was referring to Teresa and Godfrey. "He is trying to seduce her. And the assassin who will arrive soon believes that that man has already seduced her. Those two, soon three, I don't like."

Actually it was Teresa Tuesdaychild who was trying to seduce Godfrey Halskragen. And this is what she was saying, softly and intensely, in her highly chromatic voice:

"What do you owe the P & C Rotary Valve Company, Godfrey? yes, they have paid you well, but you have given them the good value for what they have paid you. If you must move from Gallipolis to Kronstadt to move one step forward, why not move two steps? Change to Simpkins Great Solar Valve Company. It is more than a verbalism when we say 'valves are Simpler with Simpkins'. You say that Irene is afraid that this would be a less friendly town? I'll phone her tonight if you wish. I'm sure I can convince her that people are friendly in Kronstadt. I know I can convince you that the Simpkins people are friendly. When Buck gets here he can show you some figures on your projected earnings. They will be substantially above anything that P & C could pay. I will be quite brazen about thi5. You have a real talent for valve sales, and we intend to recruit you."

"Teresa, I will simply have to think about it a little longer."

"Godfrey, that man over there, I don't like him at all." (She meant Jim Snapjudge.) "He eye-balled me this afternoon. I felt that he was trying to read me. I felt that he was reading me all wrong. That long nose of his and those bugged-out eyes, they're intolerable. He should do something about them."

"What could he do? Does not Scripture tell us that, by taking thoughts we cannot add one cubit to our stature?"

"I'm not talking about adding a cubit to his stature. I'm talking about him shortening that damned nose and unbugging his eyes. Don't tell me that he can't do it! He can. He's running a chilly fever now and I hope he dies from it. But whatever kind of fever he runs, he's too cool to go in for hating. I'm not. I hate a guy who won't hate. I hate him. I think he's a Jew or an Armenian or a Limey or one of those."

"Lady, I hate him too," said a man at the next table. "He looks right through you. He's got some kind of business where he gives ratings on people to companies that hire them. I bet he never gave a good rating in his life. think he comes from up in Middlesex County."

"I hate all those middle sex people," said the lady with the man at the next table. "I don't care if they are consenting adults. How are you going to raise children properly when people like that are always mo~~ng in next door to you. I think that that man's one of them too. He sure looks like it."

A jolt, a momentous jolt! That was only someone coming through the front door? No, it wasn't only someone; it was a menace, an assassin, a personage, a key person in the drama. The very air was freighted with threat.

"It's the killer, the corsair, the Buckaroo," Jim Snapjudge breathed; and his hackles were rising. (Until this afternoon he had forgotten that he had hackles.) "This is Murder, this is Fate, this is my last Analysis vindicated. Here comes death and ruination."

"Oh, it's only Buck," said George Ruination the proprietor. "He's a loud one, yes, and a comic. But there's no real harm in him at all."

"This will be loud," said Jim Snapjudge, "but it will not be comic."

Shadows of gone dogs or coming events were lurking and skulking about the floor, too low to be clarified by the gas lights. A river loon sounded outside. The Buckaroo stood very tall and bulky and dark and formidable, and he imposed silence on the room. There was a threatening bulge in his right-hand coat pocket and the monicker of that bulge was 'murder'. Curiously there was another and only slightly smaller bulge in his left-hand coat pocket; and it was the left-hand bulge that the Buckaroo now drew out and held awkwardly, for he did not seem to be left-handed.

At his table, Godfrey Halskragen regarded the Buckaroo with paling eyes and wary ears: (it is the ears that tell the Prejudicial Analyst so icy, ah, the nervous, waiting lobe, the graceful tragus); and the very shadow of an amoebic wink disfigured that apprehensive face.

Teresa Tuesdaychild watched the Buckaroo with a dusky grin, but a little shiver ran right through that grin. She was either uneasy or excited by the appearance of the Buck. All sorts of vagrant and subtle hues played in and Out of her primary colors.

The music in the other room had changed its motif. Now it was menace music and it built to a climaxing mood. Then the Buckaroo exploded in voice and action.

"Caught the two of you here!" he howled, and a not-quite-right gun was in his left hand. "Die, pig, die."

"Shriek!" cried Teresa.

"Bang!" cried the explosion. And the gun-shot hit Godfrey Halskragen in the face and head.

Gore! Bright red gore, dark red gore, serum-colored gore, brain gore all over Godfrey! A moan, probably a death moan, from the bespattered man with the gushing head! Smokey smell of blood and of burnt flesh!

What? Here was Fate vindicated indeed. But could so much blood some from one pistol shot?

"It's wrong, something has gone wrong!" Jim Snapjudge was complaining in a voice that had gone reedy. "The blood-smell is wrong, and it's too clotted. There cannot be that much splattered out of one little bullet hole. And the gun should have cried 'Bang!' The man shouldn't have cried 'Bang!' Fate will not be mocked. Make it right somebody or there will be

terrible retribution."

"Damn you, Buck!" Godfrey Halskragen howled at the big Buckaroo. "This is my best and only suit. Yeah, and it's my best and only face."

"Bang! Bang!" Buck cried out the explosion noises again, but the big water pistol with its load of Old Hickory Barbecue Sauce and Vinegar and Ketchup had jammed. Buck applied great power and fervor to it. Then it exploded into the primariest color of them all and completely covered the face and head and hair of Teresa Tuesdaychild with a melange of writhing red sauce.

"Ruined,ruined, now I can never marry!" she whooped. Then there was hilarity and happy pandemonium throughout the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy-House! Most of the people who came there knew the Buckaroo and always they awaited an elaborate visual joke of some sort from him. Towels were brought to the victims, and the chortling laughter of all present was a full thing.

But not of all present either. There was one person there who was not touched by the high comedy of the low joke. Jim Snapjudge was in a gibbering, whey-faced shock.

"It is wrong, it is all wrong," he moaned. "The shadows show the way it should be, but the primaries have it all wrong. Look, people, do as the shadows do.

The shadows -- the three shadows: -- one of them was supine on the floor and bleeding a little stream of shadow-blood from a small hole in the head; one of them was sitting on the floor and rocking and moaning out of an exploded face; and the third shadow had drawn itself up into an impossible tallness and was shaking and swelling with fear and shock with the frustrated attempt to flee (but the tall shadow could not flee while its primary remained.)

And the three primaries were cleaning themselves up with an air of great amiability and gaiety. Jim Snapiudge went resolutely over to the faulting trio.

"Since we all of us are a part of Fate, then we all have the duty to guard the province of Fate," he said pedantically. "You, Buckaroo, you still have the proper gun, the real gun, in your right-hand coat pocket. Take it out."

"What, long-nose, what?" Buck asked startled, but he took the proper gun out and held it in his huge right hand.

"Oh, you've brought it, Buck," Godfrey said. "I'll give it a good going-over. I told you I was a gun-smith by hobby. If it acts as if it wasn't to hang fire then it's dangerous. I'll check over the whole firing mechanism."

"You, Buckaroo," Snapjudge said. "You know that you have two bullets in that gun. Shoot Godfrey in the head with the first one and kill him. You know that that is what the fate and prejudice of both of you have ordained that you should do. Then try to shoot Teresa in the head with the second one. It will hang fire. Try it again, and try it the third time. The chamber of the gun will explode then, and the face of Teresa will explode from the same action. And you will be badly injured yourself. I have already seen all this happen in a valid and prejudicial vision. Now do it, and let this terrible and ridiculous mistake be righted.

"What, what, what?" the bewildered Buckaroo jabbered.

"Give me that gun!" Godfrey ordered, and with a rapid movement he took the gun from the Buckaroo. "Damn you, Buck, for a minute there you looked as though you might do it. Oh damn those spooky eyes of yours!" he yelped in relief as he broke the gun and unloaded it.

"Whoop, har, har, whar, whar whar, you thought I'd do it!" Buck chortled and howled with giant joy (was it possible that there were touches of horror and relief in that boisterous joy?), "Man, you should have seen the spooky eyes on you!"

"Little long-nose, little bug-eyes," Teresa was saying to Jim Snapjudge. "You get out of here! Get a long ways out of here! We hate you. We hate everything about you and your insanity. Mr. Ruination come throw this damned whey-faced bum out!"

And other people there said other abusive things to and about Jim Snapjudge. The common people have always understood the character and use of prejudice, and they had

strong prejudice against Snapjudge Prejudice is a tool-weapon, honed for thousands of years, that is designed to cut a guy down and cut a guy up. And it will do this every time if it is employed with determination and steadiness.

So George Ruination had to throw Jim Snapjudge out of the establishment, but he was not too rapid about it. Holding Snapjudge by collar and the seat of the pants, he allowed him a last colloquy.

"You know that the man should have been shot to death, and the face of the girl should have been ruined," Snapjudge said in a begging voice. "That was the judgment and decision of prejudicial fate from the beginning of the world."

"Oh, I know that, Snapjudge," George said, "but I also know that fate can be subverted in a few neighborhood of this world. As to Rhineland here, this is the case: Originally God had jurisdiction over Ohio and the Devil had jurisdiction over Kentucky; and Rhineland was then a part of Kentucky. Then the course of the river changed on one stormy night and Rhineland ended up on the Ohio side. Neither God nor the Devil ever laid claim to Rhineland in its new situation though, and fate has had a very insecure time here with no higher jurisprudence to appeal to. I imagine that a similar account could be given of most of the other unruly sections of other towns. Well, on your way!" And George Ruination, swinging Jim Snapjudge by his collar and the seat of his pants, threw him out the door and into the night in a beautiful arching trajectory.

"Watch out for the broken plank. A man can get a bad fall there!" Ruination called after the flying Snapjudge as he slammed the door.

And Jim Snapjudge did get a bad fall at the broken plank; he fell right through the wooden walkway that went out over the water. He fell into that water that is called Ruination's Duck Pond and Cess-Pool; it is a small, splintered-off back-water of the Ohio River. And Snapjudge drowned there.

That had been his fate and prejudice from the beginning. But his original fate hadn't included that part about him been thrown out by his collar and the seat of his pants.

That broken plank was out of a tree that had been cut in Scioto Countv, Ohio; and the tree had belonged to one of those sacred, talking groves. Now the talking plank began to moan 'A Prophet is dead! A Prophet is dead!'; but nobody in the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy House paid any attention. That plank had been a noisy nuisance for a long time

And on Ruination's Duck Pond, the little ducks, waking up into a new world the next day, found the body of Jim Snapjudge at first morning. They gaggled and splashed around Snapjudge. They asked him questions in their way, and the first friend they had found in the new world that day.

They did not find his nose too long or his eyes too bugged. They did not find his visage too bloated or purpled. And they did not discover him to be either cold or unlikable.

They were unprejudiced little ducks.

## THE HAND WITH ONE HUNDRED FINGERS

We are the folks esteemed and loved
By nobody any more.
We are the cloaked and veiled and gloved
And we're rotten to the core.

-- Rotten Peoples' Rollicks

The Hand with One Hundred Fingers was pretty much in control of things then. It enhanced persons and personalities, or it degraded them, for money, for whim, or for hidden reasons. And what it did to them was done effectively everywhere and forever.

Julius Runnymede had had several afflictions. He had a speech impediment; he was

shy, he was inept, he was a bungler. Then, while he wis still a young man, he inherited a medium-sized fortune. He decided to invest it in a new personality. He went to one of the leading firms of Person-Projectors, and they cured his disabilities almost immediately. His bungling and ineptitude and shyness and speech afflictions were transmuted into assets. He became one of the finest orators in the Fourth Congressional District, and a bright future lay before him. All thanks to the Hand!

The one hundred fingers of the hand were the one hundred Person-Projector firms in the comprehensive union. They controlled all rulers of all countries, and all parliaments and congresses for the reason that they were able to manufacture presidents and premiers and prime ministers and assemblies (and other power-groups behind the formal assemblies) out of common human material. And they were able to destroy as well as manufacture.

Alice Jacoby was an aspiring young actress, but she had bad acting habits. She popped her eyes and she popped her teeth in the intensity of her theatrical emotions. Her voice was adenoidal, and were it not for its adenoidal element it would have been perfectly flat. She wasn't pretty, and she surely wasn't in any way compelling. She had about as much sex as a green watermelon.

But there were at least two people who loved her and who knew that something drastic would have to be done for her. One of these was her father who mortgaged his firm to get money to help her. Another one was her uncle Jake Jacoby who mortgaged his auction and cattle business to get money for her.

Alice paid the money to a firm of Person-Projectors, one of the hundred fingers of the Hand. The people-engineers of this firm enhanced her personality. And immediately Alice was in demand as an actress. She was known. Nearly everyone in the world had at least a subliminal and unconscious recognition of her.

She still popped her eyes and her teeth when she tried to emote, but now these seemed to be enchanting gestures. Her voice was still adenoidal, but now it sceined to be ravishingly adenoidal. She still wasn't pretty, but now she was compelling. And now she was as sexy as a fully ripe watermelon. All hail to the Hand again!

There were three steps. First a person did not have certain advantages. Then the person seemed to have acquired them. And then it was learned that there was no difference between seeming to have special attributes and really having them.

A person's personality was plotted and planned. Then the personal or aura signature was attached to an updated and almost presentable electronic personality. This new electronic personality was let onto world television for only one-fiftieth of a second; but that was time enough to create a consensus and to give a resonance back. The weight of members of participating persons was most important in this. An unchallenged (and unconscious) world consensus of the electronic personality was formed. Oh, there was a bit more to it than that, about a minute and a half more to it than that. If it were too simple then everybody could set up in the Person-Projector business and reap fortunes.

Well, if it worked for Alice Jacoby, why wouldn't it work for everybody? It would, it would. Almost everybody who was able to raise a small or medium-sized fortune had now become a Corrected-Consensus-Projected-Personality. It worked for Wisteria Manford, it worked for Peter Hindman, it worked for Hector Gibbons. It worked for quite a few millions of person, but it would be a distraction to list them all.

The Persons-Projectors brought down as many persons as they elevated (to give a proper balance to things); but the downfallen are hardly noticed at all. And everybody noticed the uplifted.

"The century-long battle over the nature of reality is finished. The 'Nature of Reality' lost. Reality s seen to be no more than a mirage, a heat-inversion false appearance. No one has ever really slaked his thirst in the bogus waters of reality. But almost everyone has imagined that he has. And the imagining is just as good. It was once said that subjectivity

and objectivity were opposite sides of the same coin. Now we know that they are the same reverse side of the same coin, and the face of the coin is blank.

"Reality is what enough people believe that it is. Reality is a projected conditionality. And a person is exactly what the current, projected consensus of that person shows him to be. There is no more to it than that. It was noticed, more than a hundred years ago, that people in group pictures tend to look alike; that is to say, they became persons of a particular consensus. It was noticed that persons in crowds take on the look of that particular crowd; and that persons in demented or rabid crowds lose all individidual characteristics and come to look almost exactly alike.

"Soon after these first realizations, a group of men (they were then believed to be a bunch of fox-faced phonies, but we now know that they were a noble assembly of the media lords themselves) undertook the creation and projection of artificial personalities. It wa sthey believed that 'artificial' and 'natural' were somehow in opposition, which we now know to be untrue. This was a praiseworthy electronic manipulation which paralleled the genetic manipulation which began at about the same time. So, by introducing 'new-date projection' to attach to certain persons, by using old-fashioned folk interaction newly directed, by emplyong feed-back from that interaction, by adding the 'coloration' technique, people could be stabilized into their true and valid forms. This would work for anything. Inanimate objects, and even the sun and the moon, could likewise be converted into new and clarified forms by these techniques; and they will be.

"We have reality now. We never had it before because of diverse viewpoints. The modern psycho-resolution-projection movement has begun to move with electronic speed and spread, and with exponential growth."

-Notes on the History of the Theory of Projected Persons.

Jonathan Fomry Bierce

Crispin and Sharon Babcock had once seemed to be in love. What they were in now, with the arrival of reality, was uncertain; but the old 'in love' business was shown to have had no reality. Probably they were no more than 'associated persons with prejudice' now.

In that earlier time, though, they had both seemed to be quite attractive in all ways, and well fitted to each other. They had even seemed to have a clear physical and mental beauty. Their body measurements and weights would still reveal a fine proportion and beauty; but are you going to believe measurements or are you going to believe your own eyes and other senses? Crispin and Sharon were both clearly substandard now, and that is all there was to it.

It was because of his saying "I don't believe that that is all there is to it" about a number of things that Crispin first got into trouble. By this lie showed himself to be an unconforming young man, unfaithful to the holy and historical disestablishment, and it was right that he should have gotten into trouble. And Sharon was tied so deeply into a complex of inanities that she was beyond correction.

"As long as we have each other, it will not matter what the rest of the world does or think," Sharon said once.

"If we are faithful to ourselves and to each other, then we can survive even the ruination of the world," Crispin had said. And both of them, for a while at least, had believed these things.

There had been a time when Crispin and Sharon had appeared to be successful in their lives. They had satisfaction and station and money and children and a happy home and fine friends. Or so they thought. They even had the illusion of a cup running over with sheer delight. Self-deception must have been rampant in them. And when they finally had to face up to reality there was never a couple who opposed that facing-up so stubbornly or so unreasonably.

Both of them had refused to have personality-correctionprojection. They just didn't

want it, they said. They didn't believe that they needed it, and they preferred things the way that they were. Refusals like theirs would tear the very fabric of the new society.

On the matter of giving up their children they had even deficd the law. And they had refused for a long time to admit that their children were ugly and malodorous and moronic and repulsive.

"They are beautiful children, they are pleasant children, they are intelligent children, and they are good children," Sharon had insisted to an official in defiance of all reason. "We love them and they love us. Let us alone! We will maintain our own ways. We will walk in beauty and happiness as we have walked. You have no right to interfere!"

But the officials had the 'right of reality' to interfere. So the children were projected is offcially deficient. And this projection, by definition, was the reality of the else. And Crispin and Sharon became more and more suspect after the termination of their children. Their attitude just wasn't good.

They retained, however, a sense of humor. But unsanctioned humor in bestial persons can be made to project itself badly. Their magic together had been very much weakened when it became the case that they couldn't stand to be too close to each other.

2.

We are the sick, ungallant band
Whose once bright step must lag.
We are the people who live in the land
Where even the buzzards gag.

-Rotten Peoples' Rollicks.

Judge Roger Baluster had once been a magistrate, and later he been a manufacturer and business man. Still later he had been a tycoon. And that is where he broke it. Tycoons are so easy to type and tear.

And really had he ever had the nobility of character that a magistrate and a business man and a tycoon should have? What he did have was a long history of noncooperation with the person-projector firms.

As a young man Roger had been a crusading judge. He had crusaded against a complex of disintegrating things when they had been new and unestablislied. And now when they were set and established they crusaded against Baluster to his ruination. But through the years he had become a man of much hidden wealth. He was a full-feathered bird and his plucking would take a long time.

In the beginning of it, he had refused to pay a firm that was in the person-projection business the simple monthly fee for 'Personality Updating and Maintenance.' This was petty of him, for he was a rich man.

Roger had had the look of an eagle. He had had pride and judgement and compassion. And humor. He had been (this is hard to believe in the light of his real character as it was later made manifest) adhered and liked and respected by almost everyone.

But he had refused to pay a simple fee. Well then, he would have to pay a complex fee of a made steeper sort. He was handed upward to larger hands. A bigger and more comprehensive firm in the person-projection business decided to take the enhancing of Baluster's personality in hand. And, unaccountably, he refused this offer also. He was placing himself above the law and above the community.

"Well then, Baluster, we will degrade your personality till you are held in universal contempt," the men of the first-class person-projector firm told him. "We will reveal a totally shabby person who is the valid 'you.' Of the false image which you built for yourself nothing will remain. That is the way that things are, and there is only one side to things."

"Aw, I think there is another side to this," Roger Baluster said resolutely. "And I believe that something of what I built will remain. The 'Inner Me' will remain. "

"So then it will remain," said those huckstering men of that firm. "But it will remain as it really is and not as you imagine it. We will give you a certain transparency now. There is nothing like letting the honest light of the day into a dark man like yourself. This transparency will be subiminal, of course, but it will be near universal. Everybody will be able to see into you in those faster-than-a-blink moments. And nobody's 'Inner Person' is attractive. People will see you, in those instantaneous intervals that are too short to be recorded, with complete revulsion. They will see you as a dirty complex of entrails and incased organs. Yours will be the sharp and fou1 smell of blood and viscera and illegally opened persons. Other aspects of you will become other vile things, but the 'inner you' will have become a charnal house in its offensiveness."

"There will be another sort of 'Inner Me,"' Baluster insisted, "and you will not be able to touch that."

"Whatever there is of you, we can touch it and bend it and twist it," they said.

Well, they did touch and bend and twist every discoverable aspect of Judge Roger Baluster. They rotted every element of him, and they set his reputation into reeking corruption.

Once there had been the time when Roger Baluster had had the look of an eagle. Now he had the look of a buzzard or vulture. His pride and judgement had been destroyed utterly. His compassion and his humor had been horribly twisted. His appearance, whenever a glimpse could be got of it, was completely repulsive. As were so many now, Roger was cloaked and masked and swathed most of the time. But a really foul appearance can come through every swathing and speak to every sense.

They had disrupted Baluster's household also. They had taken his wife away, and he couldn't find out what they had done with her. They had destroyed two of his children, and they had turned the other two against him.

But he still had money, very muchi money, cannily hidden. That was what kept him alive. Money can buy a grudging sort of acknowledgement as long as there is any of it left.

Silvester Sureman had gotten crossways with the firm that handled the maintenance of his personality. Before that, things had gone well with him. He had on the day of the misunderstanding, moved into a new suburban home, a sign of affluence. Silvester himself had a misunderstanding-removing business which he caned 'Roadsmoothers Inc.' He was a good relations man. He talked now to the men of the firm that handled the maintenance of his personality. "There is no need for misunderstanding here," he said. "I beg of you to take no action on this now. I beg you to take no action till tomorrow morning. Misunderstandings often disappear overnight." Silvester thought that he had them convinced, but something must have gone wrong. That firm did take action against Silvester that night while he slept. A nightshift man at the firm found a note on Silvester that had been written by a day-man. The day-man had forgotten to put a hold on that note. So the nightshift man routinely had Silvester destroyed in the area of his strength: his sureness in things, and his ability to remove misunderstandings. A split-second echo had gone and come from the world mind that this was a man who was Mr. Quagmire himself, the man who would always be bogged down in indecision and misunderstanding.

On the day of the misunderstanding, Silvester Sureman had phoned the Morning Enterprise to tell them to begin delivering the paper at his new house. "These changes take a little time," the man at the Enterprise said. "It may be the day after tomorrow morning before you receive the paper at your new place." "I am sure that it can be done by tomorrow morning," Sureman said. "With effort and understanding all things can be done quickly."

Then it was the next morning and Sureman went out from his new house early in the morning to get his paper. Yes, it was there. Or was it his? The paper was exactly midway between his house and the house next door. Did the people next door take the morning

paper? The light was on there, so Sureman went and knocked on the door. A huge man with oversized eyes and rather on his face came and opened. (Those oversized eyes, the man either had a thyroid condition or he was a Groll's Troll.)

"Do you take the Morning Endeavor newspaper?" Silvester Sureman asked brightly.

"That is no possible business of yours," the man said bluntly. "No, I do not take such a thing. What this neighborhood does not need is one more nut. Don't be one."

"Thank you, thank you," Sureman said, "I am just trying to prevent misunderstandings before they start." He patted the man on the shoulder and the man winced. How awkward of Sureman! Possibly the fellow was a Groll's Troll, and they are very touchy about being touched.

Sureman picked up the paper and sat at the little sidewalk bench in front of his house to read it. And after a while the huge, shaven man came out of the house next door. He seemed to be looking for something. Then he came over to Silvester Sureman and punched him in the nose and took the paper.

"I told you not to be a nut in this neighborhood," the man said. "Stealing my morning paper is in the order of being a nut."

"But you said that you didn't take the Morning Endeavor," Sureman said reasonably out of his bloody face.

"I don't," the huge man said. "This is the Morning Enterprise. There isn't any such paper as the Morning Endeavor."

The man started back into his house with the paper. Sureman had gotten his tongue twisted on the name, that was all. Oh, oh, that big man was coming back again!

That huge man came up to Silvester Sureman again and punched him in the nose so hard that he broke it.

"It's one thing to be a nut," the huge man said. "It's something else to be a nut with a worm in it. That last punch was because you have a worm in you."

And Silvester Sureman did have a worm in him. It rotted him and it ate him up from the inside, and it brought him down and still further down. Silvester lost his business, of course. He lost everything. He was prone to total misunderstandings and he could do nothing right. We went down and down till he had become one of the vile untouchables.

Conchita Montez had once been legendized as a stunningly beautiful woman of the latin persuasion. It had been believed that she had great charm and elegance and intelligence and presence. Her way with the English language had seemed enchanting, with all those delightful slurrings and mispronunciations. Her eyes and her wit twinkled, and she was one of the persons who brightened her era. That was the legend. But beautiful legends are not always self-sustaining: there is a fragility about even the best of them. And those were the times of fragile personalities.

It isn't known quite where Conchita went wrong. She had given so much enjoyment to everyone! But it was said that she was very particular about whom she gave more special enjoyment to. She apparently didn't know who was running the world in those years. Her rejections of some of the high lords were resented.

"The old way would be to throw acid in your face and so wreck your beauty," one of those lords told her. "We are more subtle and more thorough now. We throw the acid behind your face and it wrecks your whole person. Then your face will crumble of itself."

So those Person-Projectors did a job on Conchita and she became repulsive at once. Became repulsive? She had always been repulsive, of course. Hers was a repulsive nature.

What did we ever see in her? Old posters of her had shonwn her as absolutely beautiful. That was when those old posters were new. Well, why didn't those same posters still show her as beautiful? Because she was repulsive and always had been. And now they showed her as repulsive.

But no poster could show her as repulsive as she really was. A poster could not show

the mush-mouthed offensiveness of her speech or the screaming tediousness of her person.

So she became a hooded and swathed untouchable, ringing her cracked bell when she had to be out-of-doors, avoiding and avoided by all decent people.

3.

My wife is like a doll with a crooked back
And a voice like a broken fiddle.
I love her like a potato sack
With a rope around her middle.

-Rotten Peoples' Rollicks.

Crispin and Sharon Babcock went that evening into what was probably the most beautiful sly hall in the world. If it had not been so before, their entering almost guaranteed that it would be so now. The sly halls were the last refuge where obnoxious people could gather to enjoy (it was as if the word 'en-joy' had been minted fresh just for the sly halls), to enjoy the rousing old pleasures and beauties. The enjoyments and the beauties were very subjective and selective, and they were awfully tenuous. But they were the only enjoyments and beauties that these people could bring about. These places ought be kept enjoyable as long as their people held together on their clear courses.

"The thing will work as long as we are all faithful to each other," Crispin Babcock said. "Oh Lord of the Sick Scorpions, please don't say that again, and again, and again!" Sharon Babcock moaned to herself. (Crispin's statement was one that he made a thousand times a day.)

All the members of the sly halls were outcasts of the untouchable class. They ate and drank in the sly halls. They played mucsic and chukki there. They had shows, they had arts, they had books and all graphics. There were body sports and mind sports. There was song and dance, conversation and cookery and casuistry.

In every sly hall were the one and two room mansions for the couples and for the families (though there were few children; most of the children of the outcasts had been destroyed. There were the single rooms for the sitiglings. There were the blessed rituals that are at the heart of every sly hall; and there was the intense civilization that is the seal of all the sly people.

Some of the folks in the halls were neither masked nor veiled. Some did not even wear the great cloak, the wrongly caned 'invisibility cloak' . They were guised of themselves, they said: they had no need to be disguised. But that was only fancy talk. Most of them were as masked and swathed as it was possible to be.

"Wintergreen was knocked off today," Judge Baluster said. "That's nine of the sly halls knocked off in four days and nights. Somehow the companies are shattered and the people flee out of the halls. So they are arrested for being persistently in public places, and some of them are executed for it. They can't live anywhere except in the halls. Who would rent or sell rooms or houses to the outcasts? But the people get more fun out of the outcasts when they are driven into the open. There was complaint before that they hardly got to enjoy those of us who made such shelters for ourselves. Some new technique is being used to break up the companies and make the outcast people flee the hals." Baluster was keeping his hands busy arranging the ritual places in the sly hall: the 3.05 meter long poles, the pairs of mittens, the desperation-philosophy texts, the tin cans and the wires to run between them, the electric helmets with their euphoric vibes, the piles of good-will mottos.

"What is the new technique, Roger?" Silvester Sureman asked. "Dammit, Roger, can't you do something about your appearance?"

"I'm sitting out of your line of vision, Silvester," Roger Baluster said, "and I'm completely swathed, so that not one particle of me can be seen in any case. What do you mean by my appearance?"

"It's nauseating, you know, and your voice is worse. Well, what is the technique that they're using on its now?"

"I don't know, Silvester, but they're attacking out of a new dimension. I thought that they couldn't hit us with anything else, but they seem to be doing it. We thought we could set up asylums here and there, the sly halls, and make them into worlds of our own. We thought that, in our own circles, we could gradually become less repulsive, be ourselves and to each other, and so regain a measure of self-respect. And we have made progress, very slow progress."

"Oh yes. In a thousand years our progress might be seen clearly, to one with sharp eyes," Silvester Sureman said dismally.

"At least we still have each other, Sharon," Crispin Babcock wheezed, and he pressed Sharon's hand. "Aw, ugh, ugh, ugh," Sharon said with a complete lack of enthusiasm. "Don't, Crispin. It's like being touched by a reptile."

But it was a pleasantly contrived world that they had made for themselves in the sly hall. The great skylights let the sunlight in during the daylight hours; and there was profuse greenery and striking garden arrangements. Otters played in the stream and in the fountain. The bright weavers were everywhere. Salamanders ran like quicksilver and fire over everything. There were cascades of ivy. Eagles perched on the entrance posts, and there was a certain architecture of pride in the big building and in its people.

"We are all celebrities now, you know," Conchita Montez mumbled. "People everywhere in the world know us and know who we are. It isn't much, but it is something. We are valid characters, even if we are only characters for the popular hate-culture."

"The ultimate pornography, hatred," Crispin said piously.

"Yes, that's so," Silvester agreed. "The Projection Lords are not really snperior to ourselves any more than an axe murderer is superior to his victims. But there's no denying that they have the advantage over us, and it may be the ultimate advantage. You do know why they keep a few of us alive?"

"Oh, it's necessary for the balance of their system that the people and themselves have something to hate intensely," Baluster said. "And it's quite true that hating is fine, that it's a deep and furious pleasure. But we ourselves can't hate the Projector Lords, and we can't hate the populace whom they control. They smiply are not programmed to be hated, and the Lords have the control of the programming. But we can hate ourselves and others of the outcasts; we can and we do. It's the last pleasure left to us. That's what is behind our scapegoat trick that we have agreed upon. By it, some of us will be saved when our company is stricken. We don't yet know who our scapegoat will be. Whomever the lightning of our hatred strikes first, that will be the one."

"They want us out in the open where they can have cleaner shots at hating us," Conchita said. "Oh well, I guess I want us out in the open too. It's stifling in here."

"A thre-point-oh-five meter pole, two pairs of mittens, a couple of tin cans, and a length of wire," said Crispin Babcock. "Who would believe that they would be last-chance things? I don't know how we will use them yet (it will be given to us in that hour how to use them), but this is the list that comes to my mind for Sharon and myself. And all these things are here among the ritual objects of our own sly hall."

"It's remarkable how little hardware they have to use in Person-Projecting," Silvester Sureman said. "It's just a combination of coded frequencies to express a displeasure, to contain a person-identification, and to call for an echo, all formed into a wave transmission and set to travel around the world on a common carrier wave. And there is filtering as needed and amplification as needed. And behold! a person is smeared to destruction, forever and to all the world. It's the Dynasty of Hatred that now obtains in the world. "

"And also there is very little software that they have to use in Person-Projecting. A

repertoire of hatreds is maintained; it is added to from the residues of broken persons, and it is dispensed freely and rather imaginatively. A person-smear will be manifest to almost every sense including the unorganed intuitive senses. Except smell. Smell is transmitted only by actual physical particles from the smelled object reaching one."

"But could not smell-reminders be triggered electronically? Could not smell be transmitted in some coded fashion? Nothing comes into our mnlds without a reason, and the sense of strong and murderous smell has just come into my mind. People, is smell the new technique? Is it the attack out of the new dimension? I feel that it is, and I feel that it's upon us now."

Wisteria Manford burst into the sly hall. Wisteria had long since fallen into the outcast condition. She had run out of money for her personality maintenance. It is very dangerous to run out of money. And it takes a lot of money to maintain a borderline personality.

"Garden City has fallen!" Wisteria cried. "Exaltation Heights has fallen! Beggar on Horseback has fallen! Snug Harbor and Bright Shores and Citadel and Gold Beach and Pleasant Gardens and Tomorrow Land have all been shattered. All the sly halls are being emptied by this new attack, and we're next. It's a stink that they use to split up the people, a killing stink. Andy it's coming to us right now."

Indeed, the first heavy wave of stench had come into the sly hall with Wisteria. They shrank away from her. Through the holes in the walls they shrank away from her. The stench shattered the Company, and it changed the sly hall itself completely.

In the light of, in the odor of the new and overpowering stench, the sly hall changed. It does not matter whether the change was subjective or objective. In the new order, there is no difference between the two conditions. The great sky-lights of the hall -- what great sky light? -- were sky holes, roof holes. The roof itself was fallen-in and gappy; that's why there was always sunlight during the daylight hours. The famous greenery of the hall was not so very green. The plants growing there were stink-weed and sick fungus. The otters playing in the stream and foantain were seen to be slashing rats skulking out of the stagnant water. The bright weavers were uncommon spiders of unusual size and malevolence. The salamanders were snakes. The quicksilver-and-fire was a slimy decay lit up by methane-rot. The ivy was poison ivy. The perched eagles were vultures and buzzards. And the only pride to be found in the hall was the stubborn pride of carrion flesh. The people wanted out of that hateful hall at once. How had they ever gathered in such an offensive place?

With the second heavy wave of stench the people did all burst our of the hall. It was necessary that they get away from their rotten refuge, but it was even more necessary that they get away from each other and the foulness of their former company. The supreme necessity was that they should get away from their stinking selves, but how was that to be accomplished? But Crispin Babcock, in spite of the furious urge to be gone, did pick up certain ritual objects that had already been in his mind.

With the third heavy wave of killing stench, the scape-goats were chosen blindly by the scattering company. And those scapes whom the lightning of hatred struck first and most violently were --

4.

We are the stenchy actors cast
In the reeky, smelliferous role.
We are the folks that nobody da'st
To touch with a ten-foot pole.

-- Rotten Peoples' Rollicks.

Those scape-goats whom the lightning of the hatred struck first and hardest were

Crispin and Sharon Babcock. All the people broke away from Crispin and Sharon in revulsion, and they looked at each other in sniggering horror.

"At lest we have each other," Crispin said sickly.

"If you say that once more I'll scream my head off!" Sharon wailed shrilly.

"Small loss if you did. Gah! What a head!" Crispin shouted.

And yet they were still in accord a little bit. People truly in love will always be a little bit in accord. There was something valiant about their response. Both of them realized at the same time what to do with the ritual objects. Each one of them put one mitten on his end of the 3.05 meter pole and the other mitten on his hand to hold it. They rigged the length of wire between the two tin cans and made a kids' telephone. Crispin and Sharon had been children together and had talked on tin-can phones befoer. They still cared for each other slightly, but on how they both did stink! Was there any possible way that the 3.05 meter pole would be long enough? They should have put 3.05 kilometers between each other.

But when they talked to each other on the tin-can telephones much of the ugly, sound-clashing horror had gone out of their voices. Here was a sound filter that nobody knew about except themselves. Their words had a rusty sound, but they were not otherwise offensive. Here was something that all the Person-Projector companies had overlooked. If they had known about it they would have done a job on tin cans also, to make any sound coming through them repellcnt.

The two Babcocks headed into a stiff wind that blew the smell off them pretty well. Why, this would be almost bearable, this life together-apart! Only ten feet aprt, and they could breathe. They were hooded and shrouded, of course, and could never actually see each other again, but remembered appearances came to them that were a little less horrible than they had been used to in more recent unless times. Each pressed his end of the pole with mittened hand, and it was almost like holding hands again.

They even became a little bit joculair in their rusty-voiced banter back and forth.

"Ship to shore, ship to shore!"

"My wife is a rot-headed, smelly bore," Crispin bawled into his tin can, and they both laughed. 'Ship to shore' and 'shore to ship' had been their tin-can telephone code when they were children.

"Shore to ship! Shore to ship!"

"With his wobbly brains and his wobbly lip," Sharon laughed a rusty jeer.

Oh, somehow things would still be tolerable between them, despite the fact that they were the smelliest and lowest outcasts in the land! Even the birds veered away from them in the air. But if they kept a firm grip on the pole they could keep from flying apart. If the strong breeze held forever (they needed that to keep their smell from building to critical intensity), if they didn't begin to think about the situation again, if there was not another assault to drive them finally into sick insanity, if --

There was another assault, the fourth heavy wave of killing stench and hatred. And both fell to the ground. This would be the death of them, and the joy of many millions of people who had picked up the tang and rhythm of the drama and disintegration.

But the last problem of Crispin and Sharon was holding off that ultimate hatred. Could they delay the mortal hatred for each other until merciful death should have taken them?

No, of course they couldn't delay it. It was the mortal hatred that killed them. The Hand with One Hundred Fingers will not be cheated by any last minute tricks.

OH TELL ME, WILL IT FREEZE TONIGHT

Delicious bird, and tree unkind,
And swallowed storms and matters murky,
However find the truth behind?
You find it out by talking turkey.
-- Winding Stair Woomagoos

"We are now in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle of weather phenomena," Hector Voiles said with that breeze-showing voice of his. "This is the area where storms and inversions and highs disappear and are never seen again."

"There is one characteristic of triangles in this area," said Lloyd Rightfoot. "They are unstable. The triangle will collapse right along here, within a mile either way. And the three elements of the triangle will become four."

"Oh, is the fourth man following us?" Andrew Widepicture asked. "I hadn't felt his presence today. I do now. He isn't following us though. He's up ahead."

Really there wasn't anything preternatural about the game warden Will Hightrack joining any group of hunters coming up from the Jack's Fork into the foothills. And groups of hunters are almost always groups of three. This group was made up of Hector Voiles, a weatherman, Lloyd Rightfoot, a naturalist, and Andrew Widepicture, a cosmologist. They all liked to foot-scuff around in the Winding Stair Mountains, and they often carried firearms as an excuse.

"I hadn't paid too much attention to the Bermuda Triangle aspects myself, Hector said. "I was too close to the clouds to see the weather. But I've reported an awful lot of the disappearances without seeing the connection, and other weathermen have made the connections. The weather is always stormier and more sudden on the other side of the fence, you know? And the weathermen have their own other-side-of-the-fence publication, Cloud Nine D, and it handles weather wrinkles from all around, all the odd facts that don't fit in. Some of the stuff is pretty curious. Several of the men want me to do a piece on the Bermuda Triangle aspect of this corner of the Winding Stair Mountains."

The Winding Stair Mountains are pleasantly junky little mountains, very pretty, but small-scale and in no way unique.

"Be a little more clear, Hector," Lloyd Eightfoot said. "What are you trying to imply with your talk of 'Bermuda Triangle' weather phenomenon here?"

"Oh, gathering storms do disappear here. They disappear as if something gobbled them right up, or as if they were sucked into big holes in the air or in the mountain. There can he a pretty active tumbling storm moving right along and spreading and gaining strength. And then (such a thing shouldn't happen, of course) that storm will cease to spread. It will narrow, rather. It will narrow further, and it will grow in intensity. Then it will become quite concentrated and powerful so that it seems certain to break into thunderburst or cyclone. And then, at its most intense and threatening, it will absolutely disappear; and there will not be a trace or a track of it left."

"Where and when do these things happen?" Andrew Widepicture asked. He was sceptical but interested. Cosmologists are interested in almost everything.

"They happen right around here," Hector told them, "always within a radius of one or two miles of here. And it happens about once a year, right about now, mostly in the month of March, hut sometimes in April. Not every year, but almost every year. Really, storms and incipient storms do disappear here without a trace, and their disappearances violate the law of conservation of meteorological energy.

"That I'll not believe," Lloyd Rightfoot said. "When anything is reported as disappearing without a trace, then the report is false. Have you been putting out false reports, Hector? Or is it that you cannot recognize traces? Nothing disappears. But some things transmute so strangely that they seem to have disappeared. Don't your active and tumbling storms transmute into something else when they are gobbled up, Hector?"

"Yes, they do. They transmute into cold, into very sudden and quite severe cold. This cold is always narrowly localized, of course. And, for that matter, so are the storms."

"Like the quick-freeze spell we ran into last year, Hector?" Andrew Widepicture asked. "That was just about this time of year."

"It was about a week later," Hector said, "the latest freeze I remember here. I won't say that it was the latest freeze ever recorded here, because it wasn't recorded. I was talked

out of recording it. It was so improbable that the temperature in this small area should be forty degrees lower than that of nearby areas that it just wasn't a thing that should have been recorded. And the report would have been tainted by the fact that only myself and two ana-cronies (yourselves) encountered it. There would be people who said that we had drunk off too many cans of Old Frosty during our day's hunt."

"How have other weathermen come onto the storm-disappearances?" Rightfoot asked.

"Oh, it's been happening for several generations, all the generations that records go back here. And it's almost always observed by several fellows. And weathermen are natural browsers of old records, besides having long noses and long ears and long instruments."

"Your swallowed storms don't seem to blow me down," Rightfoot said. "What I would like to find out is about a most peculiar tree in this region. It's a consistent legend, and a consistent legend has to have a pragmatic kernal to it. They say that this tree produces -- No, they say that it almost produces a bloody-awful-red fruit. But, happily, something always kills that fruit. The tree, I have heard the bark-brained say, is of no known species. Oh wood lice plague them all! A tree has to be of a known species, or we will name it and make it known. I want to get a look at that tree with the flesh-red fruit that never develops."

"What I would like to find about is a most peculiar cock-crow in this region," Andrew Widepicture said. "It also is a consistent legend, so I cannot throw it away completely. But a cattle-killing crow takes a lot of believing."

"Crows have killed small calves," Rightfoot the naturalist said, "but these are mostly misborn calves that are dying anyhow. Crows have been known to eat the eyes and even the tongues of such calves."

"According to the bird-brained, this most peculiar crow carries full-grown cattle off in its claws and beak," Widepicture said, "and it will eat a grown bull at a single roosting."

"Holy crow!" Hector Voiles cried. "Your legends have gobbled up my legend."

"What are you fellows hunting?" the game warden Will Hightrack demanded as he appeared in their rocky path and collapsed their triangle by becoming the fourth man. "You cannot in good conscience be out gunning at all. There is nothing at all in season right now."

"Storm-Cock is in season, Hightrack," Widepicture said. "Storm-Cock has a very short season, less than a month, and it hasn't been hunted near enough. Storm-Cock and Freeze-Bird! You show us a regulation that we can't hunt them."

"Ah, I may he hunting some long-tongued town-trotters this very day," said game warden Hightrack. "But it's said about the birds that you mention that they never saw the inside of an egg."

"Holy crow is in season," Widepicture said, "but the holy crow season is appointed backwards. It's that crow that does the hunting."

It was a nice sunny day there. Sometimes the breeze showed a slight edge to it, but the hills and the trees and the brush exuded warmth, as did the air between the breezes.

"If town gentlemen could shoot, I wouldn't object to one of them shooting a very big wild tom turkey," game warden High track said. "But I'd object to any of them getting a closer shot than the present eighty yards. I'd object to more than one of them shooting. And I'd object to myself pointing the shot out to any of those gentlemen. But town gentlemen cannot see and they cannot shoot, so that feast will not come to the board."

"I can see. I can shoot," Andrew Widepicture said. He raised his rifle towards a blurred bit of mountain brush in the middle distance. He held his point for a measured five seconds. Then he squeezed off his shoot.

"Good," said Hightrack. "That will make a good meal for the six of us."

"You say 'for the six of us,' Will Hightrack," Widepicture remarked then. "Will the dead turkey arrange for its own transportation? Yes, I see that it will."

A bit later, two men brought the shot turkey. These men were James South-Forty and Thomas Wrong-Rain. They were scrub-cattle ranchers and rock-acre farmers of the region.

They were large, burly, brown men. They were Jack's Fork Choctaw Indian men.

Yeah, it would take about an hour and a half to get that turkey ready. There aren't any experts at cooking a turkey or anything else in the open. Not white men, not Indians, not hunters, not wranglers, none of them are any good at it. There's a lot of large-mouth fakery about such cooking. Half the meat would be ruined, and half of it would be only half bad when finally prepared; but it was a big turkey, and the not-bad half would feed six men.

It was pleasant noon or early afternoon. There was new moss grass there on the slopes, and old buffalo grass. There were rotten boles of hackberry and there were joints of cedar wood that didn't care whether they were burned or not. There was last season 5 brush, and it all made a strong and smoky fire. If smoke would roast a turkey, that big torn would be roasted quickly. But it would be a while yet.

So they talked turkey while the turkey cooked unevenly in pits and in rock ovens and on spits, and half of it would be ruined. "Turkey talk" doesn't mean exactly what is supposed of it. It isn't plain talk. Sometimes that gobble-gabble gets fancy.

"It occurs to me that the three gentlemen don't know very much about what they have been talking about," Thomas Wrong-Rain said. "It occurs to me that even the weatherman gentlemen doesn't know why we have to have another freeze this year."

"No, we will not have another freeze this season," weatherman Hector Voiles said. "The rattlesnakes have been coming out of their holes for a week. The swallows and swifts and cardinals have all arrived. The oak leaves are as big as squirrels' ears, so it is time to plant corn. We had a light freeze on the first (lay of spring, and it will have been the last one. We have had later freezes, two I believe, but all the signs say that we will not have another freeze this season."

"Then all the signs are mush-mouthed frauds," Thomas Wrong-Rain maintained. "I did not say that we would have another freeze: say it that way and maybe we won't. I said that we have to have another freeze. The alternative to that is pretty shaggy. If it comes right down to the raw end and we haven't had that freeze, then we will have to make it freeze!"

"What will you do, Wrong-Rain, have a rain dance or a frost dance to make it freeze?" Will Hightrack the game warden jeered.

"No, no, no!" Wrong-Rain rejected that. "You're talking about Cherokees or some of the other brain-damaged Indians. Rain dances and frost dances are kid stuff. We will just get wrought up and make it freeze. I think it's down to the raw end already. I don't think the last freeze killed it. The tree's getting smarter. I have heard that the tree was already in bloom. If the last frost didn't kill it, then we will have to have another frost. It will be pretty direful if that tree is allowed to fruit."

"Wrong-Rain, I don't believe that even you can pull off a direful tale today," Widepicture joshed, "not with the sun shining in the little Winding Stair Mountains, and a mocking bird mocking. And that edge on the breeze, it isn't much of an edge."

"Yeah, the sun does spoil it," Wrong-Rain admitted. "Never mind, the sun will cloud for the story if the story's true. Well, the tree is less than a hundred feet from here. All of you have seen this tree: I have shown it to all of you. But after persons have seen this tree, sometimes a breeze will blow. Then a fine red powder or bloom-dust will drift down on the people. This makes them forget all about the tree. Normally it's good that the people should forget. This saves them from worry and stomach-rot and irregularity and anxiety. But some of us have to remember about the tree. If it ever comes to full fruit, it will send a shadow like a blight over the whole land. This shadow will kill cattle, and it will kill people."

Andrew Widepicture laughed. Then his laugh crumbled a bit at its leading edge. The sun clouded, and it had clouded phenomenally fast. That meant that Wrong-Rain's story was true, except that he really wasn't telling a story. The mockingbird had left off its melody and was squalling and mewing fearfully like a catbird. And the edge of the breeze had reasserted itself.

"How does the fruit, or the shadow of the fruit, kill people?" Widepicture asked. "By disease? By disaster? By ill luck?"

"I don't know," Wrong-Rain admitted. "It hasn't done it for two hundred years. But that's just because the tree has had its fruit frost-killed every year. I tell you, though, that the tree's getting smarter. It's got the weather tricked this year, unless we use tricks of our own. And our own tricks are about worn out."

"And that's the end of your story?" Rightfoot asked.

"Yes. I wish it were the end of the tree and its fruit, too. That's the end of my story. The sun can come out again."

The sun came out again. And everything was again casual and unimpressive in the Winding Stair Mountains. The Winding Stairs were toy mountains. They were much less impressive even than the Potato Hills in an adjoining region. There was not any way that they could be taken seriously for long. There was no way that they could maintain a sinister aspect for more than brief minutes. These mountains were too lightminded. They were too little. So thought they all of them.

"Hey, you know why the Winding Stair Mountains are so little?" James South-Forty asked them, coming in on their thoughts rather than on any words of theirs, in the way that the Jack's Fork Choctaws have. "They're so little because they're the biggest mountains that the bird could carry here, and here is where he wanted them. Even a big bird has his load limit."

"Are we now in consideration of the second plague of the Winding Stair Mountains?" Andrew Widepicture asked with an asymmetric grin.

"I think so," said James South-Forty. "Sometimes you lose me with that T-Town talk. Yeah, I'm talking about the Storm-Cock, the big bird. I don't know much about that tree that Tom Wrong-Rain talks about. I don't know how a shadow of a tree can kill cattle or people, but I know how Storm-Cock kills them. He eats them alive and he eats them dead. That's how he kills them. He's one big bird."

"How big is he, South-Forty?" Hector Voiles asked. James South-Forty extended his arms. South-Forty was about six feet four inches tall, and from extended fingertip to fingertip he was about the same.

"About that big," he said.

"We might as well go look at the tree while South-Forty talks," Wrong-Rain said listlessly, and then they were already beside that tree. It was no more than a hundred feet from the turkey fire. A little breeze blew as they first stood by the tree, and a little bit of bloom-dust drifted down on them so that they were unable to notice much about the tree. It unhinged their limbs and their minds, it gave them stomach-rot-and-apprehensions, it set them to shaking in every joint and tendon, but they didn't really notice much about it. The fruit was huge and horrible and livid red. It had a rank murder-smell to it, and it would kill you. That fruit had been frosted, and it had rotted. But it wasn't certain that it was quite dead. A small breeze blew again, and who notices details about a tree when there is that sort of bloom-dust in the air?

"South-Forty, you indicated that Storm-Cock was between six feet and six and a half feet big," Hector taunted. "Well, that's big for a bird, but it's not big enough for a bird that can carry off full-grown cattle. How many cattle can he carry off at a time, South-Forty?"

"Three," said James South-Forty. "One in his beak, and one in each claw. And sometimes he carries another one in -- aw naw, I'd better not tell that. It'd be a lie."

"Ah, but look, James," Widepicture reasoned. "The bird wouldn't be big enough to do it. A bird couldn't carry three or four head of grown cattle even if it had a six and a half foot wingspan.

"Wingspan!" South-Forty gasped. "Who said wingspan? I showed you how big Storm-Cock was between the eyes. That's the way you always measure a storm-cock, between the eyes."

They all laughed then. "Seems like I whomped you all between the eyes with that joke," South-Forty gloated. "You walked right into that one."

Another small breeze blew, and a critical amount of bloom-dust drifted down from the

tree onto the six men. It was a sufficient quantity of dust so that none of them would remember seeing a tree with livid red undead fruit with a rank murder-smell. They wouldn't remember that tree at all, except Wrong-Rain.

They went to eat the turkey meat. Some of the pieces were burnt on the outside and raw-red on the inside. Some of them were burnt all the way through. And a few of the chunks were pretty good.

"When are you going to give me some good weather tips again, Wrong-Rain?" Hector Voiles asked as they chewed the stringy meat. "I have consistently been the worst weatherman in town for quite a while. They're going to give me the boot if I don't come up with something sharp."

"You'll be like that weatherman who had to move to California because the weather here didn't agree with him," Lloyd Rightfoot said.

"Maybe I'll phone you tonight," Wrong-Rain said. "I may give you a tip on the weather that no one else would ever guess. Will you use it if I give you a real slanted tip?"

"Yes, I will," Hector promised. "I'll use it whatever you give me.

They ate the rest of the turkey, except for a few pieces which were an extreme case.

"Do you know what's the spookiest phrase that can be spoken?" Wrong-Rain asked them suddenly. "It's 'The Bird in the Tree'. that's the spookiest of all. Think about it." But they couldn't think whether he meant the bird they had just eaten or some other bird. They shot three or four rabbits for the hunting pouch. Then Voiles and Rightfoot and Widepicture scuffed down the little mountain and to their car.

They left the livid and hating tree behind them; but they couldn't give a name to the menace because its bloom-dust had destroyed their memory of it.

They got in the car and drove back to T-Town.

Oh wayward storms, destroyed, demurred!
Oh tree to gobble and defeat them!
All caution lest the murder-bird
Should bite folks clear in two and eat them!
Winding Stair Woomagoos

Thomas Wrong-Rain phoned Hector Voiles at his studio at nine o'clock that night. "A hard freeze tonight in the Winding Stairs, Mr. Voiles," Wrong-Rain said. "We have to have that. The fruit is alive. It would break out before dawn tomorrow. Remember that 'The Bird in the Tree' is the spookiest phrase of them all. It has got to freeze hard tonight. Have you any storms that we could use to fuel the freeze?"

"A warm spell is blowing in, Wrong-Rain. It's strong and twisty, and it's probably dangerous. It could be a real nine-county thunderburst, or it could spin into half a dozen cyclones. It would be a pretty strong storm to swallow, even in the Bermuda Triangle."

"It should be strong enough to make a heavy freeze. Remember the bird that never saw the inside of an egg! That fruit has got to be killed! Announce that it will freeze, and that will put the pressure on for it."

"Wrong-Rain, this storm is a strong-warm. It's seventy-two degrees here now, and it's nine o'clock at night. Fun's fun, but you can t make a freeze out of this one, and it's too big to swallow. How do you make the changes, anyhow? Or are you the one?"

"I'm one of the ones. When the menace appears, and we just got to have a hard freeze for the safety of the region, then I'm one of those who goes for it. I bust my mind for it, as did my father Joe Wrong-Rain before me. Dammit, Voiles, this is The Bird in the Tree! Help us to kill it. We need help. But my friends and I do have the support of a strong person named am, Plus tophushmasapulphattalokarchikkapokartahapatishomobilmingo."

"With five t's? Got it. All right, Wrong-Rain, I'll do it. I'll put my neck in the frosty noose. I'll give them a weather report tonight that'll rupture the station. That's my own neck I feel them chopping off, but it all might be fun."

"Watch that fun stuff, Mr. Voiles," Thomas Wrong-Rain begged.

"No derision, please. Derision will imperil the whole business."

"Well, all right," Voiles agreed dubiously, "but you're asking a lot there. I break up sometimes."

There were already tornado alerts out for Pushmataha, Latuner, Le Flore, and Haskell Counties. So Hector Voiles put out his own alert, to the other weathermen of the country, especially to those of the Cloud Nine D interest. Voiles told them flatly that there would be a storm disappearance in the Little Bermuda Triangle of Oklahoma tonight. He told them that history would be unmade before their very eyes on their very charts if only they paid attention. And he said that the disappeanince of the storm would be marked, not by an oil slick, but by an incredible freeze.

Then he went and got half a snoot-full before he broadcast his nightly weather at ten o'clock. He gave the routine reports. He gave the information that four counties were under tornado alerts. Then he grinned a lowering grin and began a brisk gust in that breeze-a-blowing voice of his.

"Forget the tornado alerts," Hector told his airy audience. "There won't be ally tornados tonight. That skirmish line of storms, it will be funneled and narrowed into a single disturbance, a concentrated storm. And this storm will disappear completely when it is in its most powerful and most concentrated stage. It will disappear in the Little Bermuda Triangle and it will never be seen again. It will disappear in the Winding Stair Mountains at the border of Latimer and Le Flore Counties. It will disappear in storm-wreck and annihilation.

"Listen, people, there is a Bird in a Tree. This is a crucial bird, and it never saw the inside of an egg. This bird must be killed even before it comes to sustaining life. Otherwise, it will fly around the region, with its black shadow under it, and it will destroy land and kill cattle and people.

"There is only one thing that can destroy the Storm-Cock, the Bird in the Tree. A hard freeze can kill it, after the bird has begun to bloom but just before it has attained mobile life. It must happen right now, before morning, or the Tree-Bird will rive open tile tree and go out and destroy the land and its crops and its cattle and its people.

"Now hear my predictions, on which I am staking my reputation and perhaps my life. There will not be thunderstorms or tornados or cyclones. The skirmish line of storms has already narrowed into a single storm front. This storm front will disappear completely within the next fifteen minutes. It will disappear into a hole in a mountain, or into a hole in the air. And the kickback of the disappearing storm will be the cold. This will be hard-freezing cold, extreme cold over the area of the four counties that have been under the alert.

"I predict that the storm will disappear completely within the next fifteen minutes; I predict that the disappearance will he followed by a quick fifty-degree drop in temperature in that same region; I predict the consequent very hard and killing freeze; and I predict that the big bird in the tree will be freeze-killed in the bloom tonight, and that it will not ravage the country and destroy the kine and the people tomorrow. These are the things that I predict, and I will stake my reputation and my life on my predictions. Who else makes such bold predictions?"

It would have been had even if Hector had left it at that. He didn't. He broke up. He began to laugh, to yowl, to chortle. He went into cascades of clattering and rotten laughter. The monitors cut him off, but he continued to laugh like a bloated buffalo.

And that is when the warm moist Gulf air hit the updraft. Turgot Cantowine busted in, and Cantowine was a mighty man at the studio.

"The only thing that can possibly save you, Voiles, is for your predictions to come true!" this Turgot swore angrily. "Man, they'd better come true! Will they?"

"I don't know," Hector Voiles giggled. "They would have come true, I think, if I hadn't broken tip. There's something down there that can't stand derision."

"There's something right here that can't stand it either," Cantowine barked. "You're deriding the wrong people when you start to deride people. The phones are jumping clear

out of their cradles. People are storming the studio doors within seconds of your being cut off. Let's see you make that storm disappear. Man, do you realize what you've done! You've made light of the last still-standing institution. If the weather isn't sacred, what is?"

"I don't know," Hector giggled.

The storm didn't disappear. The thunderbursts plowed the whole northeast corner of the state with lightning outage and flash floods and wind damage. There were six deadly tornados spawned out of the thing, and more than two dozen howling gales. The tornados killed people in the towns of Poteau and Spiro, and in the country around Jack's Fork and the Winding Stairs. That storm sure wasn't one that disappeared and was never heard from again: you'd be hearing about that storm as long as the last survivor or the last victim was still alive.

Hector Voiles followed all the reports. The studio was full of reports of the rising numbers of the dead, but Hector didn't care much about that. He had trouble getting temperature reports from the afflicted area; people seemed too busy to notice the temperature. It was eight in the morning before he was able to get a temperature reading from near the area. The temperature was sixty-nine degrees. There hadn't been a freeze.

Thomas Wrong-Rain phoned Hector Voiles about eight-thirty that morning after.

"Mr. Voiles, the worst that could happen has happened," he announced. "We just weren't able to make it freeze and we busted our brains for it. I think somebody laughed at the wrong time."

"Was there tornado damage in your immediate neighborhood?" Hector asked.

"Oh, some. My house and barns blew away, and my wife got killed; but that's not what I meant by the worst that could happen. Didn't you hear me, Voiles? It didn't freeze."

"No. I know that it didn't."

"So the last chance to kill the murderous fruit, the bird in the tree, has gone by. We just couldn't change the storm into a freeze. So that bird broke out. it split that tree with a thunder twice as loud as the storm itself. It came out of that riven tree then, and it came out of it, and it kept on coming out of it. It was as big as a herd of elephants when it came out. Then it went on a rampage.

"It ate a few cattle, but mostly it went after people. It comes on people in groups of three, and it takes and kills one of them. It's very ritual. I was over at James South-Forty's house after my own house had blown away. John Short-Summer was with us. The bird came, and we knew that it wanted just one of us. It isn't a loud bird, but it makes itself understood. We drew low-card-go to see which one of us it would be, and James South-Forty drew low card; the bird killed him and carried him off. And it's been to lots of other places and killed lots of other people. It kills people who gaped at it when it was trapped in the bloom or in the fruit. It kills people who laughed at it or made light of it. It'll probably come and kill one of you."

"I don't think it could find us," Hectorsaid. (All the breeze was gone out of his voice now.)

"Yeah, he can find you," Thomas Wrong-Rain said.

Hector phoned Lloyd Rightfoot and Andrew Widepicture to join him at his office at the studio. Both had been out among the elements all night, and both said that they would be right over.

"As a naturalist, my most rewarding studies are of nature at her most violent," Rightfoot said as he came in. "Hector, she was violent last night, violent for hour after hour! Somebody cut the nets and let all the thunder-fish out. The floods are the worst thing right now. Oh, was there ever a storm that exploded like that one! I once knew a horse that would stampede like that whenever someone would try to throw a bridle rope over his nose."

"Someone did try to throw a bridle rope over that storm's nose last night," Hector mumbled. "It's so easy to insult an element if you're not careful. They don't like to be laughed at."

"No, nothing in nature likes to be laughed at," Rightfoot said.

"As a cosmologist, my most illuminating moments come when I discover simple natural things going cosmic," Andrew Widepicture spoke as he came in. "There are truly cosmic elements in the peculiar wrongheadedness that has run through the night's events. It just didn't have a neat ending, not any of it. Now, if my calculations are correct, it will require the ending of either the world or myself."

"Of yourself," said Voiles. "A legend-come-to-life always eats flesh, but it will not eat all the flesh. I hope it will be satisfied with yours."

"The legend is a badly-done one, Voiles," Widepicture remarked. "It has too many moving parts. Storm-Cock and Tree-Freezer, that's enough elements there. And Tree-Freezer is complicated by the long-named demiurge who also serves as Tree-Freezer. Is the demiurge only an aspect of Wrong-Rain, or is he an independent element? And Storm-Swallower is much too much. He belongs to another legend entirely, but he was instrumental in this one. And the bird grows bigger and bigger, and less possible. I'm convinced that he's strutted with wooden bones, as he should be, coming out of a tree. He isn't a bird of the ornis sort at all, and he's aerodynamically unsound."

"And I'm not sure that he'll stand the test of daylight," Lloyd Rightfoot hazarded hopefully. "Some of the most incredible prodigies have very short existence spans. And at the end of their span they do not so much die as become unshaped and unrecognized. He may not have time for us before he returns to an unremembering form."

"He'll have time enough for us," Hector said. "He believes that we laughed at him when we saw him still in the bud, or anyway that we didn't pay him enough respect." Hector took a pack of cards out of a drawer and put it on his desk.

"If you spooked the bard-freeze, Voiles, then the bird owes its life to you," Widepicture said. "But don't expect gratitude. Ah, reality is very hard to define. I also doubt that the uncreature will pass the daylight test.

"We'll cut the cards for low-man-dead when he gets here," Hector said. "And the daylight test is no test at all of reality. Many very real things disappear before morning."

"This is more than a mere daylight test," Rightfoot proposed. "This is a time test. This is the eighth decade of the twentieth century of the uncommon era, and tenuous reality cannot enter here. There is a place test. This is the ninth floor of the Television Plaza Building, and reality must be more than merely contingent to exist here. There is a context test. This is beautiful downtown T-Town in broad daylight on a spring day. The blooms along the Main Mall are blooming, and the sap-sucker butterflies are fluttering around them. Automobiles are crumbling each others' fenders in the middle distance, and all the girls walking on the sidewalks are pretty. The very walls here are made out of glass and sunlight, and a too-dark reality becomes no reality at all."

A too-dark bird took out the entire outer glass-and-sunlight wall of the room and crammed the space with head and pinion top.

"So much for this particular reality," said Widepicture. "It brings its own context.

"James South-Forty was correct, Rightfoot said nervously. "The bird is about six and a half feet between the eyes."

"The bird killed South-Forty several hours ago," Hector said. "Well, the rules are (how do I know what they are?) that he takes only one of us. We cut cards low-man-dead for it." Hector cut to a red six-card, while the Storm-Cock watched with hard hatred in his big eyes. "Oh, that's awful low," Hector moaned.

Lloyd Rightfoot cut to a red four-card. The bird seemed to dismiss Hector then, and keep its baleful eyes on Rightfoot and Widepicture.

Widepicture struck a match on the big beak of the bird, but that was for bravado.

"That proves nothing about reality," he said unevenly. "One can strike a match on a picture of a bird, or of a beak." His hand fluttered like a sapsucker butterfly over the cards. He cut to a black three-card, and he was low-man-dead. The bird gazed a long time at the low card to be sure.

The bird sliced a forearm off Widepicture, as for a sample, and munched it.

Widepicture waved farewell to his two friends with the other arm. He was jittery and distraught.

"No, no, I don't accept it," he jabbered. "This isn't reality. This is the most unreal happening I've ever encountered."

The bird sliced Widepicture sheer in two, gobbled up both pieces of him, and then withdrew from the broken room with a clatter of ungainly wings like thunder run backwards.

Sunlit reality flooded back into the room. And outside, on the brilliant sky, there was a jerky black blotch, munching bobble-headedly, flying clumsily as though strutted with wood, a thing aerodynamically impossible, incredibly awkward, and categorically unreal.

## FUNNYFINGERS

"-- and Pluto, Lord of Hell, wept when Orpheus played to him that lovely phrase from Gluck -- but these were iron tears."

On Tears of the Great
-- H. Belloc

"Who am I?" Oread Funny fingers asked her mother one day, "and, for that matter, what am I?"

"Why, you are our daughter," the mother Frances Funnyfingers told her, "or have you been talking to someone?"

"Only to myself and to my uncles in the mountain."

"Oh. Now first, dear, I want you to know that we love you very much. There was nothing casual about it. We chose you, and you are to us-"

"Oh, take it easy, mother. I know that I'm adopted. And I'm sure that you both love me very much; you tell me so often enough. But what am I really?"

"You are a little girl, Oread, a somewhat exasperating and precocious little girl."

"But I don't feel precocious. I feel like a rock-head. How can I be a little bit like papa and not anything like anyone else at all? What was the connection between myself and papa?"

"There wasn't any at first, Oread, not like that. We were looking for a child since we could not have one of our own. I fell in love with you at first sight because you reminded me of Henry. And Henry fell in love with you at first sight because you reminded him of Henry. Henry was always the favorite person of both myself and Henry. That's a joke, dear. But not entirely; my husband is so delightfully boyish and self-centered. Now run out and play."

"No, I think I'll run in and play."

"Oh, but it's so dark and dirty and smoky in there."

"And it's so light and unsmoky everywhere else, mama," Oread said, and she ran inside the mountain to play.

Well, the house and the shop of Henry Funnyfingers backed onto the mountain. It was really only a low but steep foot-hill to the Osage Hills. This was on the northwest fringe of the city. The shop was the typewriter repair shop of Henry the father of Oread. You wouldn't know that trom the sign out front, though. The sign said "Daktylographs Repaired Here, Henry Funnyfingers".

The shop part of the building was half into and under the hill. Behind the shop was a dimly lit parts room that was entirely under the hill. And behind this were other parts rooms, one after the other, rockwalled and dark, rockier and darker as one went on, all deep under the hills. And these continued, on and on, as tunnel and cavern without apparent end.

In these places of total darkness, if only one knew where to reach in which pot, there was to be found every part for every sort of machine in the world; or so Henry Funnyfingers said.

Oread ran through room after room, through passage after passage iii the blackness.

She drew parts from the pots and the furnaces as she ran. She put the parts together, and it barked remindfully. "What have I forgotten?" Oread asked. "Ah, Rusty, I've given you only one ear. I'm sorry." She took the other ear from the Other Ear Pot as she ran past, and she put it on him. Then she had an iron dog complete. It would run and play and bark after her in the tunnels under the mountain.

"Oh Kelmis, Of Acmon, Oh Damnae all three! Come Out of the mountain and play with me."

Oread sang that. Sometimes the three Mountain Uncles were busy (they had to make numbers and letters and pieces for the whole world) and couldn't come to play. But almost always one of them came, and Kelmis came today. Kelmis was the smoky smelly one, but Oread didn't mind that. He was full of stories, he was full of fun, he was full of the hot darkness-fire from which anything can be made. It was great fun there through all the afternoon and evening, as they are called out in the light. But then Kelmis had to go back to work.

Oread and the iron dog Rusty ran backup the passages towards the house. She took the dog apart as they went back and put each piece into its proper pot. Last of all she put its bark in the bark pot, and she came up through the shop and into the inside of the house for supper.

"Oh, Oread, however do you got so smoky and smelly?" mother Frances Funnyfingers asked her. "Why don't you play out in the sunshine like other girls do? Why don't you play with other girls and boys?"

"I made an iron boy to play with once, mama," Oread said. "You wouldn't believe how he carried on or the things he wanted to do. I had the devil's own time taking him apart again. That's the last boy I ever make, I tell you. They're tricky."

"Yes, as I remember it, they are," Frances conceded. "Whatever do you make your stories out of, Oread?"

"Oh, I make them out of iron," Oread told her seriously. "Iron is what everything is made out of first. The pieces are all there in the pots and the furnaces. You just put them together."

"Pieces of stories, Oread?"

"Oh yes."

"Iron stories, girl?"

"Oh, yes, yes, iron stories."

"You are funny-fingers and funny-face and funny-brains," the mother to]d her. "I think I'll have you eat your supper off an iron ~ate with iron spoon and knife."

"Oh, may I? I'll go make them," Oread cried.

"Make me a set while you're at it," Father Henry Funnyfingers said.

"No, Oread. Sit down and eat your supper from what we have, both of you." Frances Funnyfingers loved her husband and her daughter, but sometimes they puzzled her.

We cannot honestly say that Oread grew up; we can hardly say that she grew older. She finally started to school when she was nine years old, and she looked as though she were four or five. Going to school was only for seemliness anyhow. Oread already knew everything.

She got on well. She was a peculiar little girl, but she didn't know it. She gave disconcerting answers in class, but nobody could say that they were wrong answers. What difference does it make which end you start and answer at? She was a strange, smiling little girl, and she was liked by most of her school-mates. Those who didn't like her, feared her; and why should anyone fear so small a creature as Oread Funnyfingers? They feared her because she said "Be good to me or I'll make an iron wolf to eat you up." She would have done it, and they knew she would have done it.

And she always got her homework and got it right. She had, what seemed to her mother, an unscholarly way of doing it, though. She would take her books or her printed assignments. She would walk singing through the shop, through the parts room, through the

other parts rooms behind that, and down into the passages in the toes of the hills.

"Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon, Oh Damnae all three,
Make ready all pots where the answers may be."

Oread would sing so. Then she would pick the iron answers out of the answer pots. She'd put them together by subjects. She would stamp them onto her papers, and they would mark all the answers correct in her hand -writing. So she would have the Catechism, the Composition, the questions on the Reading, the Arithmetic all perfect. Then she'd drop all the iron answers back into the answer pots where they would melt themselves down to iron slag again.

"Don't you think that's cheating?" her mother would ask her. "What if all the other children got their home-work that way?"

"They couldn't unless they were funnyfingers," Oread said. "The hot iron answers would burn their hands clear off unless they were funnyfingers. No, it isn't cheating. It's just knowing your subject."

"I guess so then," mother Frances said. There were so many things she didn't understand about her husband Henry ("He's boyish, like a boy, like an iron boy," she'd say), and about her daughter ("She's like an owl, like a little owl, a little iron owl.") Neither Henry nor Oread liked the daylight very much, but they always faced it as bravely as they could.

One day Oread found her mother in tears, yet there was happy salt in them. "Look," the mother Frances said. She had a valentine, an iron valentine that Henry had given her. There was an iron heart on it and an iron verse:

'When you are dead five hundred years
Who once were full of life,
I'll think of you with salty tears,
And take another wife.'

"Oh, it's nice, mama," Oread said. "But of iron?" Frances asked.

"Oh yes, the very first rimes were made out of iron, you know."

"And what of the five hundred years?"

"I think it's considerate that he would wait five hundred years after you die to take another wife."

"Yes, 1 suppose so, Oread." But Frances wasn't completely at ease with her family.

Henry always made a good living form his typewriter repair shop, or rather he made a good living form his parts stocks in the rooms behind. Other dealers and repairmen, not just of typewriters but of everything, came to him for parts. His prices were reasonable, and there was never a part that he didn't have. A dealer would rattle off the catalog number of something for a tractor or a hay-baler or a dishwasher. "Just a minute," Henry Funnyfingers would say, and he would plunge into his mysterious back rooms. He had a comical little song he would croon to himself as he went:

"Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon, Oh Damnae all three,
Now this is the number, Oh make it for me!"

and in a second, with the last word of the song just out of his mouth, he'd be back with the required part still hot in his hand. He never missed. Parts of combines, parts of electric motors, parts for Fords, he could come up with all of them instantly with only a catalog number or the broken piece itself or even a vague description to go on. And he did repair typewriters quicker and better than anyone in town. He wasn't rich, he was fearful of becoming rich; but he did well, and nobody in the Funnyfinger family wanted for anything.

When they were in the sixth grade, Oread had a boy friend. He was a Syrian boy named Scum Elia. He was dark and he was handsome. He looked the veriest little bit as though he were made of iron; that was the main reason that Oread liked him. And he

seemed to suspect entirely too much about the funnyfingers; she thought that was a reason that she'd better like him.

"When you grow up (Oh, Oread, will you ever grow up?) I'm going to marry you," Selim said boldly.

"Of course I'll grow up. Doesn't everyone?" Oread said. "But you won't be able to marry me."

"Why not, little horned owl?"

"I don't know. I just feel that we won't be grown up at the same time."

"Hurry up then, little iron-eyes, little basilisk-eyes," Selim said. "I will marry you."

They got a long well. Selim was very protective of little Oread. They like each other. What is wrong with people liking each other?

When in the eighth grade, Oread made a discovery about Sister Mary Dactyl, the art teacher for all the grades. Sister Mary D seemed to be very young. "But she can't be that young," Oread told Selim. "Some of the my thological things she draws, they're been gone a long time. She has to be old to have seen them."

"Oh, she draws them from old stories and old descriptions," Selim said, "or she just draws them out of her imagination."

"A couple of them she didn't draw cut out of her imagination," Oread insisted. "She had to have seen them." That, however, wasn't the discovery.

Sister M.D. was drawing something very rapidly one day, and she forgot that someone with very rapid eyes might be watching her hands. Oread saw, and she waited around after class.

"You are a funny fingers," she said to Sister. "All your fingers are triple-jointed like mice. They can move fast as light like mine. I bet you can pick up iron parts out of the hot pots without getting burned."

"Sure I can," said Sister M.D.

"But are you a funnyfingers all the way?" Oread asked. "Papa says that, in the old language, our name Funnyfingers meant both funny-fingers and funny-toes. Are you?"

"Sure I am," said the very young looking Sister Mary Dactyl. She took off her shoes and stockings. Sisters didn't do that very often in the class-room then. Now, of course they go everywhere barefooted and in nothing but a transparent short shift, but that wasn't so when Oread Funnyfingers was still in the eighth grade.

Yes, Sister was a funny-toes also. She had the triple-jointed fast-as-vision toes. She could do more things with her toes than other people could do with their fingers.

"Did you have a little hill or mountain when you were young, I mean when you were a girl?" Oread asked her.

"Oh, yes, yes, I have it still, an interior mountain."

"How old are you, sister who always looks so young and pretty?"

"Very old, Oread, very old."

"How old?"

"Ask me again in eight years, Oread, if you still want to know."

"In eight years? Oh, all right, I will."

High school went by, four years just like a day. Selim had made a big twisted hammered iron thing that said 'Selim Loves Oread'. He suspected something very strongly about the iron. But he wasn't a funny-fingers, so it took him three weeks instead of three seconds to make the thing. Many other things happened in those four years, but they were all happy things so there is no use mentioning them.

When they were in and almost through college (Oread still looked like a nine or ten year old, and this was maddening) they were into some very intricate courses. Selim was a veritable genius, and Oread always knew in which pots the answers might be found, so the two of them qualified for the profound fields. It is good to have a piece of the deep raw knowledge as it births, it is good to see the future lifted out of the future pots.

"We have some to the point where we must invent a whole new system of concepts

and symbols," said the instructor of one powerful course one day. "Little girl, what are you doing in this room," he added to Oread. "This is a college building and a college course.

'~I know it. We've been through this every day for a year," she said.

"We are as much at a cross-roads as was mankind when the concept of a cross-roads was first invented," the instructor continued. "If that concept (excluding choice pictured graphically with simple diverging lines) had not been invented, mankind would have remained at that situation, unchoosing and merely accepting. There are dozens of cases where mankind has remained in a particular situation for thousands of years for failure to invent a particular concept. I suspect that is the situation here; we have not moved in a certain area because we have not entertained the possibility of movement in that area. A whole new concept is needed, but I cannot even conceive what that concept should be."

"Oh, I'll make it for you tonight," Oread said.

"Has that little girl wandered into the class again today?" the instructor asked with new irritation. "Oh yes, I remember now, you always come up with some sort of proof that you're an enrolled member of the class and that you're twenty-one years old. You're not, though. You're just a little girl with little-girl brains."

"Oh, I know it," Oread said sadly, "but I'll still make the thing for you tonight."

"Make what thing, little girl?"

"The new concept, and the symbol set that goes with it."

"And just what does one make a concept out of?" that man asked her with near exasperation.

"I'll make it mostly out of iron, I think," Oread said. "I'll use whatever is in the pots, but I guess it will be mostly iron."

"Oh God help us! " the man cried out.

"Such a nice expression," Oread told him, "and somebody had told me that you were an unbeliever."

"Actually," said the instructor, controlling himself and talking to the rest of the class and not to Oread Funnyfingers. "Actually, these things often appear simple in retrospect. So may this be if ever we are able to make it retro. The A.B.C.s, the Alphabet isn't very hard, is it? Yes, Mr. Levkovitch, I know all about those hard letters after C. A little humor, it is said, is a tedious thing. But the Alphabet was a hard thing when mankind stood at the foothills --"

"En daktulos, at the toes of, that's what the original form of the expression was," Oread told him.

"Be quiet, little girl," the instructor muttered darkly.

"-- when mankind stood at the foothills of the alphabetical concept and looked up at the mountain, it was hard then."

"Yes, the first alphabets were all made out of hammered iron," Oread told the world, "and they were quite hard."

"The same was the case with simple arithmetic," said the instructor, disregarding Oread with a deep sigh. "It is easy as we look back on it in its ordered simplicity. But when it was only a crying need and not yet a real concept, then it was hard, very hard."

"Sure, it was made out of iron too," Oread whispered to Selim. "Why does he get so mad when I tell him about things being made out of iron?"

"It's just a weakness of the man, Oread," Selim whispered. "We'll have to accept it."

"And so we are probably at an end," the instructor was ending his class for the day. "If we cannot come up with a new dimension, with a new symbolism, with a new thought and a new concept (having no idea at all what they should be) then we might as well end this class forever.

We might as well, as a matter of likely fact, end the world forever. And on that somber note I leave you till tomorrow, if there should be a tomorrow."

"Don't worry, Mr. Zhelezovitch," Oread said. "I'll make it for you tonight."

'The name Daktuloi (Fingers) is variously explained from their number being five or ten, or because they dwelt at the foot (en daktulois) of Mount Ida. The original number seems to have been three i.e. Kelmis the smelter, Damnameneus the hammer, and Acmon the anvil. This number was afterwards in creased to five, then to ten... and finally to one hundred.'

Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities

'In the forests of Phrygian Ida there lived cunning magicians called the Dactyls. Originally there were three of them. Celmis, Damnameneus and the powerful Acmon who in the caves of the mountains was the first to practice the art of Hephaestus and who knew how to work blue iron, casting it into the burning furnace. Later their number increased. From Phrygia they went to Crete where they taught the inhabitants the use of iron and how to work metals. To them is also attributed the discovery of arithmetic and the letters of the alphabet.'

Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology

'It is also said of the Dactyls (the Finger-Folk inside the hills) that they live very long lives and retain their youthful appearance for very many years.'

Mear-Daoine
-- Groff Crocker

Just after closing time that evening, Oread Funnyfingers went by City Museum to see Selim. Scum Elia worked as night watchman there to help pay his way through the University. There really wasn't much to do on the job. He sat at a big administrator's desk and studied all night. Studying all night every night is how he got to bea genius. Oread had brought some sandwiches with her.

"Peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches made out of iron," Selim joked.

"No, they're not of iron," Oread said solemnly. "One would need iron teeth to eat an iron sandwich."

"Surelv a fuon yfingers could manage iron teeth."

"Oh, our third set comes in iron, but for me that should be many years yet."

"Oread, I want to marry you."

"Everyone calls you a cradle-robber."

"I know they do. And yet we're almost exactly the same age."

"There's so many people here," Oread said. "Terra Cotta People, Marble People, Sandstone People, Basalt People, Raffia People, Wooden People, Wax People. I will have to find out from my uncles which ones are real. Some of them aren't, you know; some of them never lived at all."

"We have one of your friends or uncles here, Oread, in wax. Over here."

"I know where. You have all three of my uncles here in wax," Oread said. "You might not recognize them from the forms of their names on the plaques, though.

"Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon, Oh Damnae all three,
Come out of your cases and play with me.

"I don't think they'll come out though, Selim, since they're made out of wax instead of iron. Effigies should always be made out of iron."

"What do their names mean, Oread?"

"Oh Smelter, Oh Anvil, Oh Hammer all three
Come out of your cases and play with me.

"No, they won't come out. I'd have to be a bee-brain to evoke anything out of wax."

"Oread, I love you very much."

"No, they won't come out at all. I'll have them come over here themselves some night and make iron effigies of themselves. Then you can get rid of those silly wax ones."

"Little iron-ears, I said that I loved you very much."

"Oh, I heard you. You won't be alarmed when they come out some night to make the effigies? They're kind of funny-looking."

"So are you, Oread. No, I won't be alarmed. Why should a Syrian be alarmed over fabulous people? We're fabulous people ourselves. And if they're your uncles they cannot be dangerous."

"Sure they can. I am. You said yourself that I'd set the flaming ducks after you again. I go home now, Selim, to get my homework made, and also to make that concept-symbol system for Mr. Zhelezovitch the instructor. It's important, isn't it?"

"I'll go with you, Oread. Yes, it's important to Zhelly and to the class and the course. It's true that he might as well end the class forever if he doesn't find it. But it isn't true that we might as well end the world if we don't find it. It's not quite that important."

"Who will watch the museum if you leave? I want very much to make this correctly and understandably for Mr. Zhelezovitch. I am a Funnyfinger, and making things for people is the whole business and being of the funnyfingers."

"Oh, tell Kelmis to watch the place of rime. Will it take long for them and you to make the concept?"

"Oh watch it for Selim, and watch it real nice,
Oh Kelmis, form rotters and robbers and mice.

"Sure, he'll watch it for you. Even a WaxmanKelmis will be faithful in that. Oh no, they never take very long to make anything for anybody any more." (Time had slipped by, though not much of it; Selim had a sporty car that he drove like a flaming rocket; and it wasn't very far to the northwest side of town. They were out at the Funnyfingers' place not, and into the back, back rooms that turned into tunnels.) "They never take very long to make things anymore," Oread was continuing, "not since that time, you know, when God got a little bit testy with them on Sinai when there was a little delay. They first made the tablets out of iron entirely, and they wouldn't do. They had to make them out of slate-stone with the iron letters inset in it, and the iron had to be that alloy known as command iron. Since then they are all pretty prompt with everyone, and they follow instructions exactly. You never know who it really is who places an order.

"Kelmis has the original all-iron set. I'll get him to show them to you some time."

"Where do you get your stories, Oread?"

"I tell my mother that I make them out of iron."

"And where do you really get them?"

"I make them out of iron."

Selim talked easily with the three uncles while they wrought and hammered the white-not parts that Oread was to assemble into a symbol concept.

"How is it that you work inside a little hill in Oklahoma?" he asked them. "Shouldn't you be in the forests or hills of Phrygian Ida? How did you come to leave the Old Country?"

"This is the Old Country, and we haven't left it," powerful Acmon said. "Everything underground anywhere is part of the Old Country. All hills and mountains of the world connect down in their roots, in their toes, and they make a single place. We are in Mount Ida, we are in Crete, we are in Oklahoma. It is all one."

They made the pieces. And Oread, Dipping the parts out of the white-hot iron as if it were water, put them together to make the thing. It was a new concept-symbol system, and it looked as if it would work.

And it looked much more as if it would work the next afternoon. Mr. Zhelezovitch the instructor was almost out of his mind with it. The graduate students and the regular students

(for this was one of those advanced, mixed classes) crowded about it and went wild. The implications of the new thing would tumble in their minds for weeks; the class would be a marathon affair going on and on as the wonderful new things were put to work to uncover still more wonderful things. The stars were out when Oread and Selim left the class, and no one else would leave it at all that night. But these two had something between them, and it might take another new concept to solve it.

"Oread, give me your answer," Selim was saying again. "I want to marrv you."

"Make a wish on a star then. On that one where I'm pointing."

"Triple jointed funnyfingers, who can tell where you're pointing?"

"On that male star there between the several eunuch stars."

"Yes, I seethe one you mean, Oread. I make a wish. Now, when will you answer me?"

"Within a half hour. I go to question two people first."

Oread left there at a run. She went home. She talked to her mother.

"Mama, why is my father so boyish? Is he really just a boy?"

"Yes he is, Oread. Just a boy."

"After some years would he be a man, really, and not just a pleasant young kid?"

"I think so, Oread, yes."

"Then after some years you two could have children of your own? Being a funnyfingers isn't an obstacle?"

"I'll never know that, Oread. When he is grown up I will be long dead."

Oread ran out of there and ran to the convent that was behind the school she used to attend. She entered and went upstairs and down a hallway. She knew where she was going. One funnyfingers can always find another one. Besides, the eight years was up. She opened the door and found Sister Mary Dactyl playing solitaire with iron cards.

"How old?" Oread asked.

"Three hundred and fifty-eight years," said Sister M D without looking up. "Were I not vowed, I would be coming to the family age now."

Oread ran all the way back to where Selim was still waiting in the street under the stars. She was crying, she was bawling.

"The answer is no," she blubbered. Selim, under the stars, was as white-faced as it is possible for a Syrian to be. But he must not give up.

"Oread, I love you more than you can know," he said. "Maybe we can make a different answer out of iron," he proposed in desperate jest.

"This is the iron answer," she bawled, "and the answer is no." She ran away too fast to follow.

Deep under the hills Oread was crying. She was weeping big hot tears. They weren't, however, iron tears that she wept. That part is untrue.

The tears were actually of that aromatic flux of salt and rosin that wrought-iron workers employ in their process.

## CABRITO

The Taberna was only as big as a cracker box, but it had full wall mirrors on each end which made it look three times as large. The seven stools had (not in order of importance) the Norwegian1 the Irishman, a Little Brown Man, a Big Brown Man, two lesser persons, and Anita. Anita on this evening was not being spoken to by any of the other patrons of the bar; it was as though she were not there.

The Norwegian, in the apparent world, was known as Airman Lundquist, and was stationed at the Air Base across the river. He had been a sergeant and Air Man for twenty years; and now, purged of wife and family, was happy in a border town with a twenty-four hour pass every third day. The Norwegian, in the real world, was a wild Viking with a keen sense of humor and adventure, and no other sense of any kind whatsoever.

These seven people drank slow cool drinks and talked easily, for they were all good

friends.

With the mirror images, it was as though twenty-one people were seated there in three only slightly separated groups; and Airman Lundquist was prominent in each group. An odd thing (hardly worth mentioning) is that, though the images of the other six persons followed them in detail, those of Airman Lundquist did not do so exactly. There were (though none at first noticed it) three Airman Lundquist, each telling a different story and drinking a different drink. The story of one was a happening at Bougaineville long ago in those happier days of the great southern war; and the story of another was of a wife in Minnesota who was separated from him, as she was damned if she'd live down here, and he was damned if he'd live up there anymore; and the third one was talking about Elena who had a date with him that night but hadn't shown up. He said he was glad she hadn't showed as he always had more fun on the nights she didn't. And one of the Airmen Lundquists was drinking a Carta Blanka, and one a Gin Fizz, and one a muddy looking Rum drink that was cousin to Cuba Libre. But except for these little things Lundquist and his two images were very similar as mirror images always are.

"We will go get some cabrito," said Lundquist, the real and not the imaged or imagined Airman, "we can get it a half block from here and it's real good. Or we can go about twelve miles out and get some that's always burned. That sure is a rough ride out there and it'll take a couple of hours. Let's go get some cabrito."

He left with his companion, the Irishman, and it seemed as if the two images of the Airman also followed, but invisibly. And all the rest of the evening they were following, for these as you have already guesses were fetches.

"Irishman," said Lundquist, "let's get in the buggy and go get some cabrito."

"Norwegian," said the Irishman, "we could walk the half block."

"We will go farther and do worse."

The driver's name was Trevino and the horse was named Jaime. They went out past the end of the town and then they were like a boat in a sea of cactus with only a narrow moon shining on the narrow road. Jaime trotted at a terrific rate, a hundred, then five hundred, then a thousand paces a minute; and after an hour they left the road and went down a wagon road and came to a great barn-like building in the dark. There were a dozen buggies there and two dozen taxis and cars. They went in and the two fetches of the Norwegian followed them.

There is an idea that only Irishmen have fetches or doubles and then only at the hour of death. This is not so. Only Irishmen can see them, but a great many people have them and the Norwegian had two of the best.

While they waited for their cabrito they drank an old essence of cactus juice that had popped more skulls than it could remember. Rows and rows of cabritos were turned on big spits over the fiery furnace which was almost the only light in the room. And Amata came over to talk to them.

"For a peso Twill tell you a story, and if you like it I'll tell you another one for the same price. And if you like that one too (listen closely) the third one will cost you only half as much."

"Mama, tell them the one about las animas," said Paco.

"That is the second story. I can't be telling the second story first."

"Well, tell the first story first."

"All right. Did you ever wonder where all the cabritos come from? See, there are a hundred turning on the spits at once, and there are a hundred places just like this one; and all the markets in town have cabritos piled high. But you seldom see them in the pastures. You may drive ten miles and if you're lucky you may see one old nanny goat, no more. Then where do all the cabritos come from? Once the authorities became anxious and they came out here. They asked Luis, the old Modrego, 'You butcher cabritos by the dozen and yet you don't raise goats. Where do you get them?' 'But I do raise goats. What is that yonder but a she-goat?' 'But you have only one.' 'When you have a good one that is enough.' 'That isn't possible. If she twinned every time she could have more than four a year, it would be

biologically impossible. And you butcher hundreds.' 'Well, because I'm a poor man who doesn't know it's impossible I've become a rich man who sells a lot of cabrito.' So they went away baffled. But this is the real story that he didn't tell them. They aren't cabritos at all, they're dogs. A dog and a kid look just alike when they're skinned. You see all the dogs running around under the tables? Well, we feed them the bones from the cabritos. Then we butcher them and make cabritos out of them. The bones of these we again feed to the dogs so we have a never ending supply and are never at any expense for food in raising them. Isn't that a good story? Give me a peso."

An old lady came over in a fury. "Did you tell them the dog story? I have forbidden you to tell the dog story. It unsettles some of the customers and they leave without finishing their supper. Believe me, gentlemen, it is a lie. We do not serve dog meat here."

"Is the old lady your mother, Amata?"

"No, she is my grand daughter. I am enchanted so I always stay young and beautiful. But all my daughters aged and died, and then all my grand daughters except that old crone and she's about ready to go too."

"Mama, you know what grandma said she'd do to you if you told that story again."

"Oh, be quiet. She can't even hear us from here. Did you like the dog story? I will tell you another story for another peso."

The Irishman and the Norwegian listened attentively, and the two fetches of the Norwegian were entranced and crowded closer.

"Well, the first story was a lie. But this is a true story. Those aren't really cabritos, they're animas. Did you know that an anima and a cabrito look Just alike when they're skinned?"

"I had thought the anima would be naturally skinless."

"Well, it is. When the soul is pulled out of the body it is just like the body only smaller. The same four limbs and all, but only the size of a cabrito, for the soul is the body in miniature. There is a place near here where there is an old volcano and there it is very shallow. There are seven brothers named Ibarra who are devils, and they thought of a way to make money. They take the animas and break their joints so they will look more like cabritos. Then they haul them up and load them on wagons. They take them around and sell them to places like this."

"What do they do with all they money they make?"

"They spend it on whisky and girls. And they gamble a little. Then the next night they go down again and get seven more wagon-loads of souls. Do you like that story? Give me a peso."

They served the cabritos then, barbecued, sauced, peppered, bursting with juice.

"I hardly know whether to eat it or not," said the Irishman, "I don't believe I ever ate either dog or damned soul before."

"Wait'll she tells the next one," said Paco. "I bet you throw up. Lots of them throw up."

"By all means eat first," said Amata. "It is so much easier to keep it down once you have it down. I would hate to spoil your appetite before you have eaten. But it is an unusual story."

Lundquist, the Norwegian, decided he was eating damned soul, and he gave a small portion to the Irishman who had never tasted it before. And he in turn passed a joint of that wonderful old dog to the airman. And soon they were down to picking the bones.

"The third story as I promised will only cost you half a peso. The first two stories were lies but this is the truth. When you leave here (if you leave) notice that the ruts as you circle around to drive out are not so deep as those where you came in. This is because fewer people and vehicles leave than arrive. You will also notice a pile of old buggy wheels in the back yard and another pile of old tires. This is all that is left of many who came. The last few parties who leave every night do not leave at all. We calculate just about how much we will need for the next night. And to tell you the truth they are calculating now. If by some accident you do leave you will be the last to go. Los hombres we put in one vat, and los cabal los in

another. And there we chop them up just to the size of cabritos. You can make six out of a man and thirty-one out of a horse. And this is what we serve our fortunate patrons on the next night. Wasn't that a good story? Give me a half peso, or more if you want to."

"Is it true?"

"The last story is always true until it is superseded."

They brought them each a piece of bread when the cabrito was completely gone.

"Do not be a barbarian and eat it," the Norwegian explained to the Irishman who did not understand these things, "that would be worse than drinking out of a finger bowl." They wiped their fingers on the bread and threw it to the dogs under the table, who perhaps would be cabritos the next night.

And when they left, the old lady bowed them out. "My daughter likes to tell stories to amuse the people and to make a little money. We hope they haven't annoyed you."

And Amata came to them and told them not to pay any attention to her grand daughter, the old crone.

They got in the buggy and Trevino whipped up Jai me and they left. And they noticed that the ruts where they circled around to drive out were not as deep as where they came in; for always fewer people left than arrived.

They got away safely, the last ones to do so that night. But the two fetches of the Norwegian were not so lucky. They stupidly allowed themselves to be caught just before they could jump on the back of the buggy. And despite their screams they were put in a vat and chopped up to the size of cabritos. And they were barbecued and served to the fortunate patrons the next night.

HORNS ON THEIR HEADS

A power returned to stab and stun
In evil'st children under sun,
Primarily one.
They clamber out of brimstone stew
And claim the very Devil's due,
Especially two.
Most foul of demonology,
They bring effect that should not be,
Damned children three.
All with a sparkling laughing roar
They come like thunder to the door,
In number four.

Mandrake's Children - Hans Meneke

The pig-weeds lifted their heads and almost shouted. Such clumps of grass as still remained shook the dust from themselves and shined as green as they could. Junk gathered itself into neater and less junky piles. The garbage cans aligned themselves and the pretended to sparkle. The afternoon Surrogate fell silent in every building and house within three hundred meters, and the World Turned no more. There was a touch of unlawful order intruded here, powerful, frightening. The Devil's kids had a hand in this. Who else could set up such a pattern of disruption?

But the Devil's kids were gone again like the wind. They struck and they fled. Lawful disorder returned. The weeds drooped once more and had no desire to shout. The grass pulled the dust over itself again and groaned. The junk reverted to junk. The garbage cans fell fully awry, and some of them burst in disgust. The Surrogate World Turned again. But none of it could ever be quite the same. After each visitation of the Devil's kids there

remained minute changes in everything.

Seed of the evil phlegm,
Powers and dreads,
Honey on tongues of them,
Horns on their heads.

They were a bad lot. They were manifestations that could not be. When they struck, even inanimate objects seemed to move and live. They were a dazzling and disturbing shine. Their end would be soon.

For they'd been seen this time and identified. They'd been identifies before, one or two of them, but not all four together. They'd soon be had. They had honey on their tongues; that was disallowed: they should have hard-hash on their tongues.

The worst of the four was Annina of the Horns, a demon in the form of a nine-year-old girl. Her upswept black hair made the two horn-forms at her temples. She came clear-eyed always, with neither black nor white nor green eye-glasses: an obscenity. How could she know who she was when she didn't have the identity glasses on? But none of the four wore them. She wore shoes, and shoes could only mean the cleft foot hidden. She sang, if one might call it that, but she didn't Sing the Thing.

"Stutter and stumble, the rods and the hogs!
Follow me, bushes, and bark like dogs!"

Annina of the Horns sang songs like that. and it was always Devil's song, in that it had effect. For the rods and the hogs (the cars and the cycles) did stutter and stumble and fail of ignition and roar whenever she came by. They stopped and died. And the second part of her verse was even more frightful. The runt bushes and stunted trees did pull up roots and follow Annina, joyfully, and with a sort of green barking as well as greening bark. This was an impossibility. It had to be a manifestation of the outlawed power. Trees and bushes cannot uproot themselves and walk or gambol. They cannot enlarge themselves and shine with new health. They cannot multiply their numbers in as many minutes. Nor can they putdown new roots in the middle of asphalt and concrete and glassified areas and concourses, and shatter them in surface and depth. It was the murderous power at work, and only the murder of the devil-girl would put an end to it.

Daniel the devil-kid was nearly as bad as Annina. He was in about ten-year-old boy form. He was close-cropped and clothed in no way to be trusted. But Daniel had power over the Lions, both the black-maned and the tawny-maned Lions. The Lions were the groups and the street gangs that had long since taken over all enforcement and control. Nobody, not on the Ride, knew how they themselves were controlled: but that devil-kid Daniel could put them under total control.

"Conk in the knockers, and hack at the knees!
Bubble-heads, bubble-heads, freeze, Friz, freeze!"

Daniel would chant such stuff, and every Friz of them would freeze completely, would become immobile, would become voiceless and sightless (incapable in the honkers and knockers), would stand stunned and stupid. And when they had them in such state, the devil-kids would take advantage of the Frizbees. They'd switch the identity eye-glasses from one Friz to another. When the Frizzes came untranced, they'd not know who they were not what sex or thing they appertained to. It didn't really matter, of course, for they were all module or interchangable persons. But the loss (or doubt) or identity (some of them had no loss or doubt, trusting completely whatever identity glasses they were wearing) upset some of them, made them uneasy, and there is nothing worse than an uneasy Frizzie.

Ah, and then the evil kids would lob off the thatches, peel the polls, and crop the crimes of the Frizzes, leave them hairless and hewn. Much worse, much more devilish, they'd sometimes cover the privates or the pseudo-privates of these Lions, these Frizzes, these Enforcers. And what did that do to the bravest and most meaningful slogan of them all:

"Let it all hang out!"? The Lions were completely unlioned without their slogan.

Michael (Quick Mick), the smallest of the demon-kids (he had the appearance of an eight-year-old boy), had his specialty.

"Trap all the trippers, and rattle their town.
Off of it! Off of it! Down, clown, down!"

He'd sing that, and every tripper in the vicinity would come off it, dismally and suddenly. Great hulking horror, but they would come off of it suddenly'. The untripped trippers were always in a sad state whenever Quick Mick had passed by. Mick had only little mousy hairs at his temple, but they stood up a little bit like horns.

And th~ fourth of the demon-kids, Zorro or Azorro, was a mean-green-deme. He could do it all. He could levitate whole buildings for a sign and a wonder. He would lift up and reshuffle the houses and pads of the people so that when they came out of them (Whenever they did bestir themselves to come out), they might find themselves in different streets or even in different towns.

"Raise all the roofs and walls, shuffle the lot!
Where are you getting folks? Where are you got?"

Zorro would sing that in his happy, foxy voice. And no town or region would ever be the same. Nobody was going to unshuffle all those moved houses and pads. Rather were the identity glasses shuffled from person to person, and such a one was told that he had now become such another one so as to be able to live in the new town or street to which he had moved.

And Zorro would do smaller things with equal joy and agility. He'd pulverize the strings of all the swing-whines (the strum-slums, the guitars) making it impossible for the people to Sing the Thing. He'd darken the sets of the surrogates, and tie the tongues of the babble. He'd bring clouds of birds and troops of squirrels and chipmunks from somewhere. He'd erupt the pavements to give his foxes place to den. This Zorro or Azorro had his own temple-horns of sandy red hair, fox hair. He was Vulpes Dei, the Fox of the Devil, and he had the appearance of an eleven-year-old boy.

These were the four offenders, the children of the powers: and the powers were now outlawed, were declared to be nonexistent. The only solution to it was to make it that the devil-children should also be nonexistent.

This would be done. The four manifestations had been seen and identified: they'd been Judas'd. Now they'd be obliterated, charred to their very charcoal, and then even their charcoal vaporized.

The Monitored World had freed itself of all powers and manifestations and devils some years before. Now it had total peace, and it must never more allow itself to be troubled by aberrants. There had been, though the memory of that was almost eradicated now, certain troubles and even certain blood-letting when that old freeing was secured.

But a symbol had been seized and set in that past time. A version of it had been decided upon and that version would remain. This is the way the world operates. Events must follow out of a single selected strand, and all other events be cut off.

When God was finally and officially dead, then certain pronouncements were made about the great corpse of him. These pronouncements became the fact of the matter, and all subsequent facts were based on them.

The corpse had been, in reality, that of a sky-whale (cetus ceruleus, the azure-whale

or the sky-whale) that had crashed to the earth from the sky, or at least had been found smashed on high ground beside a seashore after a high storm. Certain trippers said that they had seen the corpse fall from the sky, and that they had experienced the fact that it was the body of the finally dead God.

Sound decisions were made by sound men about the great corpse. If it weren't for such sound decisions there'd be nothing firm in history at all. An examination of the great corpse showed (as it was expected that it would show, as it had been decided that it would show) that this was not only the corpse of God by the corpse of the Devil as well; it showed that the two had been one and same all the while. This was demonstrated by certain telling marks on the corpse (skeptics said that there was no telling what the telling marks might be).

For there was some opposition to the official view -- for a while. Men who knew whales said that the corpse was simply the corpse of a whale (not even a particularly large whale) that had been flung onto the high beach by a storm; they said that larger whales had been flung higher on that same beach by other storms, and no great thing had been made of them. It hadn't fallen from the sky at all, they said: it wasn't the corpse of either God or the Devil.

But, against this specious view, the official view prevailed and was accepted. Facts become facts when the time is ripe for them, and the time was ripe for this. There was some trouble and some blood-spilling about it, but the Freedom and the Consensus were attained in a short while. It had all been quite a few years before this present. Only the chained philosopher still remembered all the details of it clearly.

For various reasons (linguistic, quasi-historical, vestigial collective-unconscious, etc.), it was decided that the double-named and double-natured dead monster would always be referred to as the Devil or the Demon (in that transitional period when he must be referred to at all). And any manifestations or powers or supposed powers still lingering would be called Devil's Powers or Devil's Children. The eruption of such manifestations had become more and more seldom now. The windy old corpse and all its works had about disappeared.

The Free, Monitored World had quickly become loose and fragmented. There was no great need for unity or for wide-ranging communication. Things were much the same everywhere. Old Dostoevsky had written "If God (the Devil) is nothing, everything is permitted." And, of course, everything was permitted except the manifestations, the twitchings of that old corpse. Old Chesterton had written that when man denied God (the Devil), he would not believe in nothing, but he would believe in anything. And, of course, man did now believe in some things almost coherent; he believed in anything and everything -- except that there were things surpassing belief.

If the genuine in experience had disappeared (and it was realized that it had), yet there were surrogates of every thing to take the places. Indulgences were indulged. Freedom was by fiat. Apprehension was apprehended and strong-armed into dungeon. If travel had all but disappeared, yet tripping had come into its own. If law was found incompatible with freedom, yet there were certain lawless Lions who gathered into strong Prides and imposed their patterns.

And the patterns were privileged. They must not be threatened, not even bv remembered things that came in the forms of small children.

Because of such threatening, several of the larger Lions, with a Judas and the Chained Philosopher present, discussed the latest (and, it was hoped, the last) series of nuisances.

"There are four of these kids of the Devil," one of the big Lions was saying. "You can deliver them to us, Judas? You say that when they have passed (too swift to be taken) on one of their sprees, they sometimes go to a quiet place and become very quiet and unseeing. You say they can be taken then? You'll deliver them us then."

"I'll deliver them to you then," the judas said. He also was in child form, but a little

older of a child than the unholy four.

"Three of them we can burn to charcoal," the big Lion said. "They'll give us no problem. But the Dan won't be burned with the rest. He'd a special problem to us Lions. I believe the intent is that we eat him up. I don't see any problem in that either, but there is rumor of a problem. Tell us what you know about it all, and about these four, Chained Philosopher."

The Chained Philosopher had an iron collar around his neck, and a chain from it to an iron ring set in an iron wall. Once there had been three Chained Philosophers. But two of them had (it was some years ago) lunged against the collars and chains in unphilosophical defiance and broken their own necks. Now only their iron-collared skeletons remained.

But the third of the Chained Philosophers had kept himself alive, and he was even cared for. The big Lions believed he was of possible use. Sometimes one might wish to ask questions of this one man who still remembered outlawed things.

"As you say, three of them you burn to charcoal, or can try to," the philosopher agreed, "and the fourth one is a special problem to Lions: and the Frizes, the Enforcers, are under the Lion Emblem. But, for all that, we are simply talking about small children, no more, no less."

"They're different from other children!" the Big Lion challenged the Chained Philosopher.

"Yes. Most children now are a little less. These are as children should be."

"But what is there about the boy Dan that spooks the Lions, the Frizes, the Enforcers, ourselves?"

"Only the fact that he is a real person, not a surrogate person."

"Why do they all wear their hair like horns growing out of their temples?"

"For fun. It's the least strange and the least hairy of the styles. Why do you yourself affect the pig-wig?"

"The girl Annina, what does her name mean?"

"Only little Anne, or Nancy."

"1 think it means something else. And the boy Quick Mick. His name, as given, is Michael. But I have different information that the name may really be Missel. Is that significant, Chained Philosopher?"

"Not very. It's probably old feeb-Hebe."

"The boy Zorro, what does his name mean?"

"It could mean Fox."

"Well, what would Azorro mean?"

"It could mean un-Fox, but it probably doesn't. Likely it's also feebHebe"

"Both the old spooks, who turned out to be one and the same in their corpse, were feeb-Hebe in their original stories, were they not?"

"Yes, in one of their main origins, Lion."

"How can the old corpse still send out waves so long after it has smashed and crashed?" the Big Lion asked. "They were the same in the corpse. They are dead. True, Philosopher?"

"No, the two are in no way the same. And neither of them is dead."

"If you know more than the rest of us do, why are you chained in an iron collar, Philosopher?" the Lion inquired shaggily. "What answer do you give to the iron fact that holds you?"

"You have me there, Lion. There is something pretty ironic about the fact of the iron."

Another of the Lions was questioning Judas a little. The Judas was a boy about thirteen years old.

"Just what is it that the four Devil's kids do, and how do they do it?" the conniving Lion asked.

"Oh, they do everything, everything," the Judas said. "They just plain get larkish. I could do everything too when I was with them. But l couldn't do the things as well as they

could. That's why I got jealous and left them. I believe that all kids and everybody could do everything once, a long time ago; and these can still do the things."

"A long time ago? You mean before the great carcass fell down from the sky and the old Monster was declared dead for ever?"

"No. I think it was before something else that was a long time before that."

"Now you say that the four kids, after they have been ah 'larkish', will go to desolate places (which you know) and will be very quiet and unseeing for a long while. They 'adore'; I believe that is the word you use. They become like happy statues then, and they can be taken. And you'll bring us to their place so we can take them?"

"Yes."

"And you say you know their times. Do you know when they'll go on a lark again?"

"I think they've begun already," the Judas said. "I think they're on a big one, and I wish I was with them, if I wasn't jealous. Three days from right now I'll have brought you to them. All the play will be over with then and they'll be in transport. Then take them! Burn up three of them! Eat up the other one of them!"

"Did you ever hear of anything like that, Chained Philosopher?" the first Lion, the big Lion, asked the man who was constrained in the iron collar.

"Oh yes, Lion, it used to happen. I was even on the fringes of such a group myself in my youth. I am happy to hear that is still happens."

Then they do go into transport, and they may be taken? And there's no way we can fail to have them in this?"

"Sadly enough, I don't see how you can fail in destroying them. A side-light though: they'll be very heavy when in the ecstasy state. Such was the well-attested case of the children at Carabandal in Spain several centuries ago. It will take eight or ten strong men to lift one child from the earth and break him out of his spell."

"We'll have the strong men, Chained Philosopher. We'll remove this last threat, this final twitch of the monstrous carcasses. The hell kids will have raised their last hell."

The Judas was right, though. The kids had already gone on another lark. The hell kids were raising plenty of hell for a while. They outdid themselves. They raised earth-swells, merry pitching for some of the people, nauseating sickness for others. They raised thunderheads that were carven masterpieces: indeed the homed heads of the four of them could be seen in the clouds by some. This ain't a thing to put Lions and Frizzes at their ease.

The devil kids made particular rain to fall. Particular rain doesn't fall equally on the just and the unjust. It fell overwhelmingly and drenchingly (even fatally in several cases) on such people as the devil kids did not accord with; but it dampened the acceptable people not at all. They dazzled with selective lightning: it lighted up all the worthy folks with a sort of comic glory; it left the less worthy ones invisible in their own darkness, invisible even to themselves.

The kids brought a gathering noise, a running ground-thunder with them; or was it thunder? It was a whooping clattering sound, at least. It was unpatterned, but with a difference: it was the only unpatterned sort of noise that found no wide welcome in that sour ambient. It was laughing, it was thunder-laughing, and it hadn't been heard much for a long time.

Something else the kids dragged along with them: it can only be called the Heroin Itch. Oh, it did liven the people up!-but some to their misery and some to their delight.

The kids did all their old devil tricks, but quicker, brighter than before. They gladdened and moved the grass and the rocks. They brought trees suddenly to new leaf, and not always to their own proper leaf. They set the very earth a-crawl with happy worms. And more people fell under the devil spell of the kids than had ever done so before. All the monitors of the monitored free world were set to clanging by the kids.

"Shout! The hills jump in their hocks and their hams. Whistle! The billibongs gambol like lambs."

There was Quick Mick with his raveled temple-horns who set the hills to hopping and the brooks to skippering. Then Azorro gave a really bristly, foxey tone to it:

"Bleed a red laughter in dying and borning!
Burst! It is day of the judgment this morning!"

The passage of children was very broad swath, and they cut their enemies down like patches of burdock. They had a wild enthusiasm on them; but what is wrong with that word? And Annina of the Horns seemed completely out her head:

"I sing a red tune for the sharks in the sea. Hark! It is really benignant of me!"

But they didn't seem completely benignant, the things that the devil's kids were doing now. In this their last sortie, they did starker things than they'd ever done before: mind-blowing things, brain-blowing things literally. in certain fetid pads, the passage of the children left great globs of blown-brain on floor and wall and ceiling. It was judgment morning for a long time. The passaging kids couldn't be taken and they couldn't be found. They left their passage trails in cloud and earth and water. It was a wilder and more general larkishness than they had ever shown before. It was an enthusiasm double enthused, but what was a little but wrong with that word? Enthuse means the un-God, the in-Theos; not the in-Devil. The kids themselves weren't bedeviled, though they had roused un-dead devils to the angry alert.

It was antic, and it passed. It left nothing but echoes in the hills, and who can back-track the sounds that created echoes?

Nevertheless, the Judas had been correct. The four children went local again, and the Judas knew the location. It was in a flinty, thorny, small-bush place, acrid and angular in its formations, sharp and garish in its colors, having the illusion of an iron and wine taste, and the non-illusion (the powering presence) of a pungent and fetid odor.

The 'odor of sanctity' is not all lilacs and roses, nor is sanctity (the sacred, the sacer) a thing that stays within straited limits. It is too stark and rank for those limits. It pertains to holiness and sacredness; but also to awfulness; and further, to cursedness, to wickedness, execrability; to devotion; and again, to seizure and epilepsy.

Now the 'odor of sanctity', the smell of the thing (stay with us; strong smells and stenches are the vitality itself), is compounded of the deepest and most eroding of sweating, the sweating of blood and blood-serum; of nervous and speaking muck of adrenal rivers; of the excited fever of bodies and the quaking deliriums of minds; of the sharp sanity of igneous; and the bruised rankness of desert bush. Oh, it is a strong and lively stench. It's the smell of adoration, of passion seized in rigid aestivation.

Dan was prostrate on the flinty ground. Annina of the horns was on her broken and bleeding knees. She'd been driven to them, crashed to the earth onto them with a sudden force ten times her own weight. Azorro stood erect, or as erect as a fox can stand, with head thrown back, holding the sun in his gaze and letting it not move. Quick Mick sat nearly on the ground (possibly a slight distance above the ground) as though he were sitting lightly afloat in water, one foot dangling down and touching the stones. In his hands he held a large and apparently round object, half again the size of his head. That the object was invisible was no detriment; quite clearly it was solid and weighted.

A]l four of the children were taken there, by the Lions, by the Frizzes, who seized advantage of them in their ecstasy. It was as the Chained Philosopher had said: the children were unnaturally heavy in relation to the earth. It took eight or ten strong men to lift each child up from the earth and break his spell; to lift Azorro the fox out of his foxish rapture, to break Annina from knees onto her feet again; to separate the dangling toe of Quick Mick from casual flint earth. And there was sparking and blue corona at each separation.

But the men did not touch Dan. They came around him and bent to lift him from his prone position. But they hesitated. How was it that he shivered them all so that they held back from touching him? But Dan unproblemed the problem. He rose of himself, laughing and dusty, and went along with his three companions and their guards. They went to the place of judgment.

"Take off your shoes!" was the first thunderous judgment given when they had come to the place. It was one of the rough Lion-Men who gave this judgment and order. "None has shoes on free world for thirty years, except the devil's kin to disguise their cloven feet. This is the first judgment. Take them off!"

The judgment place was an open space by the furnaces, by the common pads, by the concert crater, a little to the north of the restless ribbon.

"Shall we?" Quick Mick asked. He was asking Annina of the Horns, perhaps, and Dan; or he may have been asking someone a little taller than either. "There is something felt, somewhere, about holy ground, and about either wearing shoes or taking them off."

"It'll make the ground mighty hot," Dan grinned with deadly seriousness. "Judge, have a care for your judgments."

"It'll scorch the ground for them, not for us," cried Annina of the Horns. "Take them off, take them off! We'll see how it goes."

They were four bright and shining, and at the same time very dirty children. You don't go into rapports in the flint-thorn-dust country and stay clean. The four of them took off their shoes. There was a slight anticipatory giggle from Quick Mick. And --

-- And what a howling outrageous trick it was that they played! There was dark and gleaming delight in the very manifestation of their frightening powers. For the ground did become very hot: not for them, but for everybody else.

There is something undignified in the great Lion-Men, the Enforcers, dancing on one foot and then the other: and howling. And disordered dignity has always been the forte of these lawless rulers.

"Fox-fire running, cloned and downed, Singes the Lions and singes the ground." Azorro's laughing chant was very like fox-fire, and the horns on his temples were more like sticks of white fire than like hair now.

"Put them back on!" the biggest Lion of them all roared. And the children, in most insincere obedience, put their shoes back on. Ah, the ground had been burning hot for a long moment though! But had anybody noticed, had anybody ascertained in brief interval when the children had their shoes off, whether their feet were indeed cloven hoofs?

"The second part of the judgment is a question and a demand," the biggest Lion roared, but a bit lamely now. "The question and the demand: Do you abjure the burning bush?' We don't remember the meaning of this, but we're required to ask it."

The four kids rolled eight eyes like rakish unmatched jewels at each other. Why, they had the Lions themselves inventing devices for them to use. This was too good to throw away.

"We adjure the burning bush completely," Quick Mick gleed. "We fling it away from us. We'll not see it with eyes. The true bush comes some other while. Let all the false bush burn now for the backward sign of it!"

And the false bush burned. It burned hotly, quickly, searingly in more than five hundred points of discord. Chin-whiskers and chop-whiskers, bushwhackers and Fu Manchus, burnsides and brodignags, tom-balls and cascades, lank-locks and bush-heads, those bushes were on fire; beards and moustaches, manes and crines, long-hair and frizzhair were all aflame. And the fires were not beaten out until the kids said that they might be extinguished.

"That's enough," Annina of the Horns laughed the order after a bit. So the shattered people, the Jackal-People and the Lion-People, put out their own fires with whimpering and trepidation. Ah, it was pleasantly sharp, though, in the nostrils of the four children, if not of the furious folk: that acrid tang of scorched flesh and seared skin, that fuzzy and bitter smell of burnt hair. The horned children were now horned with rays of white light and were themselves almost radiant.

"The judgment goes on," growled the largest and possibly the most scorched of the Lion-Men. "Now you will do the doings or you will die the deaths. Will you now take pot and hemp and acid and snow to show your solidity with the free people? To show that you're not

seed of the Devil?"

"I'll not take them," Annina sang.

"You others?"

"No. No. Never, scorched Lion, never," the three male kids denied.

"Will you don the pig-wigs?" the Lion asked in rising thunder.

"We will not," cried the children of the ray-light-horn temples.

"Will you Sing the Thing?" the Lion roared, and five hundred guitars strummed and whined in anticipation.

"We'll not sing the Thing," the four said.

"It would be a desecration of the Real Thing," Dan explained.

The judgment place was in an open space by the common pads and the furnaces. The largest furnace had now been fired to seven times hot and was like molten liquid flame.

"We come very near to the end of it then," the judging Lion said sadly, with that sadness that is peculiar to singed lions. "What is the name of your father?"

"Our father's name may not be spoken," Azorro stated. "Your father's name is legion."

"Your father's name is Devil. He had hoofs and horns," the big Lion accused.

"Not so," Quick Mick answered. "That one is your father, not ours. And all those things are the false brag of your father. His head isn't holy enough to bear horns. His stubs aren't earthy enough to have either feet or hoofs on the ends of them. He's a hobble. He's not lord of sky or earth or under-earth, not of any of them. He's lord of lies and flies and order and disorder, but no other things. He's not even lord of fire, for all his vaunt. He's not even able to live in it in joy."

"Are you able to?" the singed Lion asked with a flash of leonine humor.

"We are!" the kids shouted solidly.

"Your father is dead. That is the only fact of the world," the Lion stated.

"Into the furnace with the four of them," all the Jackal-People and "Dead Lion, tell us not who is dead," Azorro laughed.

Lion-People cried.

"With the three of them," the biggest Lion said. "Dan is a special case, a case not well understood. He's to be eaten alive, and we special Lions will eat him. That's the way it's been ordained. Your tricks end now, evil children."

"No. Our tricks begin now," Annina contradicted. "You'd never have believed such tricks. Ah, the furnace! That's a fun I hadn't even thought of."

So they all arranged for the judgment and the end of the thing.

Well, had the children hoofs on their feet? This hasn't been quite settled.

Oh yes. They had shadows of hoofs, at least. They had shadows of pads and of claws also. Yes, and old vestiges of fish tails and even of dragon tails on their extremities. But what they had really and finally, and not as vestige, was fine feet.

And horns on their heads, real horns, white-fire horns, white-light horns, Moses-horns!

Danny was surrounded by two dozen large and savage men who'd eat him alive with their very teeth. They were in a passion for it. No, that is not strictly accurate. Daniel had two dozen trembling and fearful Lion-Men of the streets surrounded. Their teeth chattered, but were they chattering Out of fear or were they chattering to eat Dan alive?

And the other three prepared to step into the seven-times hot molten flame of the furnace.

"Stand you back, the people," Annina called. "We come to our high-tricks now. When we go into the fire you'll see some fun. But stand back or you'll be crisped by it."

"Stand how far back?" the people hooted.

"A hundred meters, a thousand, a mile of meters," Annina called. "And that won't be enough."

"Burn, kids, burn," the people mocked. "The furnace is seven times brick and seven times stone and seven times iron. Burn, seed, burn." But some of the more timid ones did

stand back, far back.

Not far enough, though. The children stepped down into the molten fire and the fun began. And the people reeled back in abysmal fear. A hundred meters back. A thousand.

A mile of meters back.

It wasn't far enough back though.

## BERRYHILL

A house, it is said, is not a home until it has known a birth, a wedding, and a death. So Berryhill was not a home, though the Berrymans had lived in it for sixty years. The Berrymans were people who were not born, never married, and apparently did not die.

In every town of less than a thousand persons in this nation, there is a decayed house on the outskirts that has given rise to eerie stories. Eerie stories find their natural home in small towns, for a ghost population is always largest where the human population is smallest; and the ghosts take over completely when the humans disappear.

The stories of the Berrymans were of long growth. Not only were the Berrymans peculiar old people; there were other oldsters in town who remembered when they had been peculiar young people. The three of them, two brothers and a sister, were tight recluses. They had no friends; they did not mingle at all with the people of the town. When one of them was even seen outside of their house, it was an event to be reported. It was never known for certain whether all of them were still alive. A year, two years might go by when a certain one of them had not been seen at all. But, soon or late, sight would be had of all of them, never together: Nehemias with his black beard, Habacuc with his white, Sophronia in her ancient dress and wearing what was perhaps the last sunbonnet in the world. They were still alive for a while yet.

But nobody in town ever seemed pleased to learn that they still lived. There was no kind thought for them, certainly no compassion for these old folks. They were apart, repelled, unfriended, and unchurched.

But what was really so odd about them, besides their keeping to themselves? Well, for one thing, for three things, there were the three graves, three rocked pits anyhow that were believed to be graves. It was said also that there were three gravestones at the heads of the empty pits, and that these stones were carved with the names of the three Berrymans, and with the dates of their deaths given. By one account, these dates were impossibly far in the future. But, by another story, the dates were coming up very soon, in this very year.

Harvev Hinkle had himself read these inscriptions (or he said that he had), and he told about them. But Harvey was dead now. Matthew Moon had likewise seen them, according to his son; Matthew likewise was dead. There was nobody now living who had ever gone near enough to read the stones, or even to know if there were such stones and pits.

The other oddity of the Berrymans was their manner of survival. No supplies of any kind had gone into that place for many years, perhaps not forever.

They had, it is true, a pumpkin patch. They had what may have been a vegetable garden behind its high screen of weeds. They had, in season, a few straggling rows of corn, crazy and uneven; boys who had stolen some of it said that the ears were mottled and the kernels purple like squaw corn. And the Berryman kept goats; spooky, unhappy goats, unrelated to the lively town goats.

But nobody really believed that it was on such paltry stuff that they lived. There must be a better, and if not a better than a more interesting, explanation.

Indeed the Berrymans dined but once a year. This was the most persistent ~ nd flavorsome of all the stories about them. And they dined, they dined on stranger. Those who had disappeared over the years were numerous. There were the tinker who always came yearly, and now he came no more. There had been Ragged Dan the old tramp. He used to come to town every spring, but when was the last time he had been seen? There was the

wandering darky who had been seen going to town by two different farmers; going on the high road to town. But he was not seen in town; he was never seen again at all. There were the three Gypsies who had wagoned off the road north of town not three hundred yards from Berryhill. And the next day there were only two of the Gypsies. Where was their brother? the towns-people asked the Gypsies. They did not know; somehow he had become lost; they did not know where he went, they said. But the towns-people knew.

And if there had been these well-authenticated disappearances, how many more must have remained unknown? There was Sheila Cotter, said to have runaway with a cattle-buyer. How would she have run away? What cattle-buyer? If the truth were only known, she had been eaten by the Berrymans. It is no wonder that the towns-people had no love for them.

2.

It was a Friday evening and the Lost Creek Bobcats had held one of their irregular meetings. The Bobcats formed one of the most secret clubs in the world, having only two members: Jimmy Ware and Paul Potter, one nine years old, one nine and a half.

It was an oath-bound society, unknown to the world; yet it had caused a wave of destruction in its ten day existence. It was the Bobcats who had hamstrung that sheep belonging to the Millers. It was they who had thrown offal down Tomkin's well, fouling the water. It was they who had broken the great branch of Johnson's apple tree with the blossoms still on it. They had released the pigeons from Hickman's cote; they had broken the dam in Merton's meadow; they had partly burned one of Conner's straw-stacks. It didn't burn well; it was too damp.

Now, however, the club was split down the middle and dissolved in black anger.

"I won't go with you, Jimmy," Paul Potter said. "I'll find a way to stop you. And if you do go, I'll tell on you. You're crazy to even talk about doing it."

"You're afraid, Paul. You're a black-bellied coward."

"I ate the toad stool you said was poison. I was the one caught the barn-owl with my bare hands."

"You're afraid. You're a red-gizzarded, slobbering, wet-your-pants coward."

"I maybe a coward but I won't go with you to do it. They'll kill you if they catch you."

"Besides, you don't know what I'm going to do."

"I know exactly what you're going to do. You've talked about it enough."

"Yes, I guess you do."

"I'll go tell your mother."

"It'll be too late to stop me. Nothing can stop me, and I have Pete in my pocket and Mike in my belt."

"It's the devil in you wants you to go in there. They'll kill you when they catch you."

"Maybe they won't catch me at all. It's getting dark, little boy. You'd better go on home. Run all the way. It gets dark real fast."

So Paul Potter ran home crying, but he knew he would not be in time to get help. And Jimmy Ware waited only a little while, till night came down like a curtain.

Then he walked to Berryhill.

A spooky house is spooky even to a stubborn boy. And in one respect Berryhill always gave an outlandish impression: it seemed to be growing out of the ground. A cottonwood post set in a fence row will sometimes take root and leaf out again; a hackberry will do the same. But here it seemed as though the wood of the house itself had never stopped growing. It was just that it was crawled all over with vines, and chinked up with old moss; but, coming on it at night, it was like a great hollow tree bole, uprooted, overturned, and then overgrown. It had the smell of slugs and lizards and of swamp weeds in the spring night

Well, such things never really harmed. Yet it was rough going even to approach the

old house. It seemed to be surrounded by its own special darkness, miasmal, heavier than the night itself. And, in fact, the house was surrounded by such more rank vegetation than the adjacent region. Moreover, the approaches were uneven, ill-drained, sour, and somewhat dangerous.

There is shock in total sudden contrast, coming on a wrong thing clear-cut and distinct. But there is a more creeping kind of shock in coming gradually upon an indistinct and formless monstrosity until one is nearly in the middle of it. A stark white ghost paralyzes with sudden fright. The indistinct gray specter takes over with a slower paralysis; yet it seizes no less completely. And it such a vague gray ghost that Jimmy slowly came onto now. He had thought at first that it was a bush, till he had passed into its half-yielding substance and felt the living hair on it in the dark.

He twisted back then, with that clattering, devilish cry ringing in his head, and he thought that the gray devil had him. Even in hell there is no sound to compare with it; it is the mad night noise that lifts the hair right off the head and gives the shakes to Satan himself.

Even after he realized what it was, Jimmy was unsettled. A goat, after all, is half devil, and these gaunt gray goats of the Berryhills were disquieting to come onto in the dark. Moreover, they had a high old smell on them as though they were graveyard creatures. A sudden goat-bleat in the dark has the final quality of the judgment horn. But for all that, Jimmy went boldly up on the porch of the old house and scouted over the rotten boards and the warped, uneven, weed-slimed surface. Had he been heavier, there were places where he would have broken through the porch entirely.

Neither of the stagger-shuttered windows gave a view within at all, and there was no trace of light. But the door itself was neither locked nor latched. It gave to the push, but very heavily, as though it were seldom opened.

Within, the old swamp smell was still stronger, and now there appeared just a memory of light. It was as if the house had swallowed a lantern, and it shone through the tissues of its monstrous belly.

Jimmy explored deep into the dark house, and then he stood solid at a turning where there was enough light to make a clear way. The aura of the uncanny was heavy in the place, and Jimmy stood there dogged.

The encounter was made. And then there was no withdrawing.

It was a black-bearded giant, tall as a straw-stack and thin as a pitchfork.
"What is it? What's this?" Black-beard croaked. "Habacuc, come see! I believe it's a boy."

"How would there be a boy?" came the other voice out of a white beard floating by itself out of the darkness. "Likely it's a possum you've caught. they've been in the boards between the ceiling and the floor above. You can tell by the tail if it's a possum."

"It doesn't have a tail. I tell you it's a boy. Come with me to the light, boy. You'll be just in time for supper. It's been a long time since we had a boy here."

Jimmy Ware followed the black-bearded and the white-bearded old men down a dungeon-like stairs, to a lighted cellar room below.

"Sophronia, look, we have a boy!" they called.

"What? I don't know when we've last had a boy here. And just in time for supper too. My, it's been a long time since we've had a boy for supper!" said Sophronia.

Nehemias the black-bearded hung a kerosene lantern on a rafter to light the table. It was a might rough splintered table, and Sophronia set it there with huge pot-metal plates; pewter they were. At each place she set a horn-handled knife and a roast-skewering fork. But there was no food on the table.

"Boy," said Habacuc the white-beard, "you have no idea how glad we are to have you here tonight. Yes, it's been a long time since we've had a boy for supper."

There is a trick that old kerosene lanterns have. There are places in a room that they will not light up at all, and there are corners where the darkness is all the deeper for the light being there. There were the three old folks and Jimmy in the cellar room; and evil stood like a servitor waiting to be released.

"Boy," said Nehemias, "I wonder if you'd lend a hand at this grindstone here The carving knife need sharpening. Let us set to work with a will while Sophronia keeps the water at a boil."

Jimmy turned the grindstone; and Nehemias held the foot-long knife while sparks cascaded and the smell like burnt sulfur or brimstone was about the wheel.

"Nehemias," whined Habacuc in his fluted voice, "have you seen the bone-saw?"

"On the peg right behind you. But I doubt if we'll need it much. I believe the joints will pop easily without it. It won't be a big carcass or heavily-boned. Boy, you may as well get ready. The knife is as sharp as it will ever be, and we will make a special occasion of this. Habacuc, it must be years since we've had a boy for supper. Right at a year since we've had anyone at all. Sophronia, how are you coming with it?"

"Nearly ready to set it on. My this will be a good supper! And I'll have a blood-pudding to go with the flesh meat."

Then evil was no longer a servitor and would no more be controlled. It rose up, the master, and it worked its havoc in the room.

Jimmy Ware disdained to use Pete, the snub-nosed pistol; perhaps it was not operable. He had never fired it. He carried it for effect. He took Mike, the razor-sharp hatchet, from his belt. The dim-eyed old folks had no idea of the danger they had been in. The two old men set to the board and howed their heads in grace; and Jimmy struck, first Nehemias of the black beard, then Habacuc of the white.

The old skulls broke like eggs to the blows of the strong boy. And as Sophronia tottered in with the boiled goat on a great trencher, he hacked her down also. Then every bond burst and the red evil was all through him like sulfur fire.

"Paul said they'd kill me if they caught me. Let them kill me! Let them hang me! It was worth it. Paul was afraid to help me kill the old fossils. Now I have them all to myself. I get to kill all three. What do I care if they catch me afterwards?"

Murder was there in his proper form, and Jimmy Ware was possessed completely. He hacked the life out of the old three, as he had planned for so long. Nehemias groaned in his dying sleep, and Habacuc whimpered like a crushed dog. Sophronia made little bird sounds as she died.

Jimmy hacked as the blood welled with its sharp metallic smell, and it was on his hands with a slickness more like graphite than grease or liquid. The three harmless old relics lay still.

And Jimmy Ware began to laugh and could not stop. He had done what he planned. Now he had everything he wanted.

## THOU WHITED WALL

False coinage will always drive true coinage to the wall, as it were.
Tully Ficticius

"The wall washers are coming rather late tonight," Evangeline Gilligan said. "Oh, I can see that it's going to be one of those days! It's already four thirty in the morning by Eastern time. They're doing a good job though. Ah, but it's nice to be a guided person and have -- so much working for you. Who will hit the wall first today?"

"The smart money's on the Rooky Duke," said Evangeline's husband Mudge Gilligan. "But the smart money was also on Northside Public in Chicago for the wall of the night, and it turns out to be the Great North Wall of the men's room of Monorail Central in Atlanta."

Mudge recognized walls more readily than Evangeline did.

The wall washers came every late night or early morning to clean and white all the big-name walls of the country. They went over those walls with their sophisticated paintwashes and their broad electric brushes. They obliterated every picture and scribble from those walls

and left the stark and challenging surfaces in their clean emptiness. It was always a question which would be the prime wall for a coming day (this information was never leaked) and which of the prophetic artists would score first hit on the designated wall with his message. Many local people watched local walls and guided their lives by the messages that appeared on them. But the wide world watched the prime wall.
But there were always marks breaking through on the walls between the time of the wall washing and the hit of the first prophet. It was the case of the stronger of yesterday's drawings and writings fighting their way out through those paint-washes and splaying themselves black and beetling on the new clean surface. There was a never-say-die spirit to the more meaningful of the old drawings, writhing and fighting their was through. And they changed in their struggles. Comparative pictures showed that the graphia were somewhat different in their emerging state from what they had been when they were submerged by the wall washing.
And then the new day's pictures and scribbles began to appear even before human hands could reach the wall. And this day, as revealed by the vision-set from Atlanta, the Rooky Duke scored first.
"Good!" Mudge Gilligan cried out as he watched. "I'm always afraid of the Rook, but if he's first he can't hurt me, I've got the third tonight, and if that had been the Rook I'd probably have died. There's only one worse than the Rooky Duke for me this session, the way the fates are falling."
Quite often lately, the Rooky Duke had been scoring first, with electric or ectoplasmic hands. The cameras caught a little bit of the fogginess of such ghost hands that splashed their signatures and messages on prime walls before the surge of great-name but purely human artists could reach them.
The Rooky Duke had left his flaming message there, and it meant the deaths of very many people. But Mudge Gilligan was not riding on the Rook for a first.
The Putty Dwarf scored immediately after.
"Two down!" Mudge cried in half relief and half fear. "That's
two of the three who might have killed me. And I have the next coming up, but the odds are strong against all three of my worst death-threats coming up the first three."
Mudge shook though, as if the odds were a little bit closer on the thing.
"Why do you take such risks, dear?" Evangeline asked her husband. "I'd think it would worry you sick."
"It does. But there's a pretty good sum of money in the pot by this time. Only one in the pot can win and it's got to be me soon. There's only five of us left."
"And only one in the pot can lose -- can lose his life, that is," Evangeline said, "and it's got to be you soon. Why did you join up this time?"
"You remember the fortune I got -- Live dangerously, reap the stuff, and die if you lack luck enough. And, Evangeline, nobody can
escape his fortune, and four men have already died in it, and the PC has built up to twelve dollars. It's worth the risk. What other chance have I to avoid being a poor man all my life?"
The Rooky Duke and the Putty Dwarf had already hit. And now
the third prophet, hit --
"Oh, no, no!" Mudge howled in terror as he recognized the third ghostly hand that was writing on the camera'd wall.
"Is he really so bad for you, dear?" Evangeline asked.
"He is the death of me," Mudge moaned, for the third of the prophets to score was the Gloaty Throat.
"At least read the message," Evangeline urged. "It might not be death after all."

But the handwriting on the wall read:
Anoint your head and leave your brood,
and use what came in the breakfast food.

This message didn't mean a lot to the millions of viewers, but it came through strong to Mudge Gilligan.
"All I can do is make an end to it," Mudge whimpered. He knew that his little boy Hiero had got a vein opener in the last box of breakfast food and that the Gloaty Throat was referring to it.
"This is good-by, Evangeline," he said.
"Don't touch me, please," she protested. "Your hands are always so sweaty when you are scared, and you are so acid. You know I don't like you to touch me when your hands are sweaty."
Mudge Gilligan went quickly and anointed his head. Then he got Hiero's vein opener and he opened his veins and died.
"Oh, I can see that this is going to be one of those days," Evangeline said.

With the real mind explosion, most of the more intelligent people had gone beyond high astrology and had begun to tie their fortunes to the handwriting on the walls, to the pictures, to the messages. And the Handwriting on the Wall had already become a great and established institution. As the only prehuman graphic communication, it had always remained somewhat monkey-handed, and its prophetic element had not become soaringly interspecies. It was real understanding, the stuff that was splashed on the walls and became psycho-dyked there. This was gut-art. This was what the great Charles Puncheon had called transcendent drivel. This was seraphic scribbling. And it was creative prediction.
The emphasis on wall writing was not to abrogate high astrology but to fulfill it. All the great prophet-artists of the whited walls are planetary personages, and all the scientific backing of high astrology applies to transcendent wall writing also.
No good name had ever been found to describe the excellence and many-leveled meaning of this testimony on the walls. It had been called kakographia and syngramma and scribble-schnibble. It had been called zographia and ektyposis and ochsenscheiber. It had been called chromatisma and schediasma and oscenite. It had been called scherzi and motfi and asynartesia. The Italians have called it graffita, and the name may have stuck.
But it became more than just a complex of things that dirty little boys wrote on walls. Now it was things that dirty big boys wrote, and these boys were the prophetic artist-heroes who came to the top by power and genius and scheming and creative duplicity and murder.
The twelve zodiacal signs had once been "set" things that were
not subject to change. But the twelve prophets of the whited walls were twelve kings of the mountains who came to the top and flung others down to their destruction. They were the reincarnations of the prophets of the twelve tribes of Israel; they were the embodiments of the twelve planets; they were the twelve apostles; and they were the twelve signs from the sky. These mighty ones accepted every challenge, and many of them lived at the apex for several years. There were no living, former members of this highest circle of the prophetic artists: to fall from the twelve was to fall to death.
At this time, the high twelve were: The Rooky Duke, the Putty
Dwarf, the Tutti Fruit, the Demogorgon, the Braggin Dragon, the Gloaty Throat, the Creature Preacher, Joe Snow, the Spanish Fly, Hu Flung, the Moving Finger, and the Turning Worm.

"Mother, father has opened his veins and bled to death all over everything," small son Hiero Gilligan was hollering. Hiero's early stridence always gave an unpleasant cast to a morning.
"Yes, dear," his mother Evangeline told him, "but be tolerant. it is his personal privilege."
"Personal privilege. nothing!" Hiero exploded. "I never said that papa could use my vein opener. He should have asked me first. I wish people would leave my things alone."
"I'll get you another one if you really want to use it, dear," Evangeline offered.
"No, I wouldn't want to use it now," Hiero pouted. "The shine's all gone off the idea."
The Gilligans had given their little boy Hiero everything, but he had always been hard to

please.

There were those (unguided persons all) who said that the walls and all their fruits were nonsense and that the science behind the prophetic messages was pseudo-science. These unguided folks said that the guided persons were probably insane and that they were wrecking the very apparatus of society with their aggressive ignorance. They said that production had already broken down because of the great numbers of unproductive wall watchers and that already there were not enough of the necessities to go around to everybody.
Well, no, there wasn't enough for everybody, but there was enough for the guided people. They had their power and their numbers. Who was going to dispute them, the fortune-cookie people?

The Spanish Fly had just hit the prime wall, and it was carried to all the other big-name walls. The Fly could not hit in a number of places at one time, as could the Rooky Duke or the Putty Dwarf or the Gloaty Throat. These were camera reproductions of the Fly message on the secondary walls. He wasn't a multi-presence entity. He hadn't either electric or ectoplasmic hands. He had to be at the wall he actually hit. So he was at the Great North Wall of the men's room of Monorail Central in Atlanta. But the Spanish Fly did have successive bodies. He had to have. He used up a body every time he hit.
He had hit now on the prime wall with a sudden and spectacular
splotch of blood and viscera. And the great blotch was himself entire: the blotch was the Spanish Fly. The gory stuff slid down the wall and it spelled out its message as it did so:

I am an insect spilled;
this is my all.
in my red, fulfilled
on whited wall.

There was always a wistful tone to the Spanish Fly's death messages, and there was a wonder how he was able to spell out the message when he came to his last extremity. His enduring classic communication, of course, had been those slow-beat words:

Blood, bone, gore, pith,
reek and rot.
Here I go with
all I've got.

But death splatterings lose a little of their excellence when they are repeated every night or morning.
The Spanish Fly always said that he was really the planet Mercury, but in his present manifestation he had been born in Spain, Idaho. Jealous and edgedtooth persons said that his use of the throwaway bodies was a conjure and a trick.

"Who's going to bury papa?" Hiero Gilligan asked his mother.
"I don't know," she said. "Maybe I will have an intuition on how to get it done."
"Who are you on this morning?"
"I'm playing a double. The Demogorgon and Joe Snow."
"But you aren't smart enough to play a double, mama."
Hu Flung had hit. Hu Flung's messages were always in the medium of thrown ordure. It globbed on the wall, and the words it spelled out were always gross.
The Demogorgon hit. The Demogorgon was probably the least of the reigning twelve. Only a sustained rumor as to who he really was gave him any stature at all. And his

messages didn't mean much to the multitude, but this one meant a little bit to Evangeline:

Oh bury your dead
and run and run!
But where will you head
for luck and Fun?

"Well where will you head to find them, mama?" Hiero asked.
"I don't know. I'll intuit something in a little while. Who are you on today?"
"The Braggin Dragon."

A dozen challengers from the stratum below the High Twelve had hit on the Great North Wall in Atlanta, the prime wall of the day. And ten thousand other challengers had hit on a thousand other walls.
Oh, the world would never run out of talent with so many powerful ones rising like giant waves every morning. Most of these were one-timers, but some of them had sustained power.
Joe Snow hit!
But Joe was always a time bomb. His hits were delayed messages. He hit with snow-shot, white on white, and his messages could not be read immediately. But his communications always caused flurries of intuitions in all who were on him for that day. And later in the day, when the whited walls had become dirty and speckled, his messages could be read as they stood out in stark white from dingy gray.
"I have an intuition from Joe Snow," Evangeline said, and she rose to follow it.
"But your intuitions on Snow are always wrong," the little boy Hiero argued, "and when the messages finally come clear, they are never anything like you guessed."
"Never mind," said Evangeline. "I have to start somewhere, and I will start with this intuition."
Evangeline went by the place of Violet Anemone Rhodina, a widowwoman of the town.
"Your roses look bad, Vi," Evangeline told her. "I believe that there is something a little bit lacking in them. I've been worrying about them."
"And your psychology seems to be a little bit lacking, Ev," Violet said. "What do you want from me and how much will it put me out?"
"Like all the guided people, I am a giver and not a taker," Evangeline said. "Do you know when it was that your roses looked the best they ever have? It was in the months after you buried your husband in your rose garden."
"Yes, of course. He gave my garden three flourishing years. There was never a man with so much to contribute as my husband. The earth is richer for him."
"My own husband died about half an hour ago, Vi. I think he made a mistake, but he went by his own free choice. Now, I was wondering whether --"
"I'm afraid that he's too acid, Ev. He always looked like a very acidic man to me, and too much acid isn't good for roses."
"Oh, no, Vi. I don't believe he was ever acid at all."
"Didn't his hands used to sweat a lot? Wasn't he a compulsive gambler? Both may be signs of a highly acid condition."
"Oh, what will I do with him? What will I do?" Evangeline moaned.
"I'd like to help you, Ev, and I'm willing to be convinced. If you can bring me a certificate that his condition wasn't overly acidic, then of course you can bury him in my rose garden."
"Oh, I will try to get a certificate from someone today," Evangeline said. Then she went by

Gimbal's where she worked. She hadn't been by there very often lately, but she thought that someone there might help her through a bad day.
"Oh, I fired you a week ago, Mrs. Gilligan," Selkirk Gimbal told her. "I'd have told you before, but you haven't been in here since I fired you. Don't look at me so blank. You don't work here any more. You never seem to comprehend what I say, but how else can I tell you that you're fired and that you don't work here any more?"
"That's your problem, Selkirk. We guided persons never have any trouble in expressing ourselves. I'm going to have to take a few days off. I have a husband to dispose of, and I have all sorts of intuitions to sort out. And I'm going down to Atlanta today to examine the prime wall of record. I'll try to get in here a little while next week."
"No hurry, Evangeline. You don't work here any more."
"I'll forgive you for that remark, Selkirk, remembering that
you are an unguided person."
"It may be that we unguided persons get along as well as you
guided ones."
"Of course you don't get along as well as we do, Selkirk. Notice yourselves sometime. You simply don't have our depth. We guided ones are the prestressed people, and we can never be unbalanced. And we have our power."
The guided people of the walls had been given twelve extra sensators-at-large, one for the followers of each prophet-artist. This gave, almost always, a special tilt in affairs towards the guided people. And they had been given many other things.
The unguided persons were those who did not order their lives according to the handwriting on the walls. They hadn't the scientific understanding to bring them to that. They hadn't the planetary disposition for it. In every society there will be the guided elites, and there will be the unguided commonality. And the whited walls, those screens for projecting things from beyond by means of the artist-prophets, were the guides for the guided.

About midday, Evangeline received a report that might have been disquieting to her if she had not been one of the guided ones.
She learned that her small son Hiero, along with three companions, had opened a new option kit that was to have been the gift to one of them for his next name day. This option kit was a very sophisticated one and should not have been given to small children without caution. But they had opened it and they had played with it. And all four of them had optioned out. Of course, self-destruction is a personal privilege for persons of all ages, but the act itself is peculiarly poignant with small children.
All four of the boys were on the Braggin Dragon that day. That
might be significant.
They all looked nice though, as Evangeline was told, and each of them held in his little dead hand one of those motto flags such as come in those kits, with the words It's a world I never made.
"It's too bad that children have to grow up so soon," Evangeline said to herself. And then it seemed that her lament was incorrect since Hiero hadn't really grown up at all.
"Oh, certainly, it's all right," Violet Rhodina said. "I'm letting them bury all four of the little boys in my rose garden. Little boys are seldom hyperacidic."

Evangeline Gilligan took a fly-by to Atlanta. She wanted to see the wall of the day.
In Atlanta at Monorail Central she came upon the Demogorgon himself sorrowfully drinking coffee and eating a roll and a bowl of squid brains at one of the tet cafes.
"I always thought you were a natural," she jibed, "and here you are eating squid brains."
"I am an un-natural," the Demogorgon said, "but I have a right to these. These are devil-fish brains, and I am the devil himself."
The Demogorgon had always insisted, in the face of derision and disbelief, that he was the

one and original devil and as such was unnatural and antinatural. Some of the great prophet-artists were natural in their gifts; but some used artificial enhancement, either special diet or brain surgery, to build up their talents. The surgery always removed several pounds of brain matter that might prove distracting to the talents, and it introduced other matter from the organs and brains of other species and from rogue humans. The special diets consisted of daily eating of these same types of organs and brains. The highest item on the diet lists was squid brains.
The squids, living in it entirely, had a finer understanding of the great oceanic unconscious than had people of any other species. And the squids also had a primordial understanding of writing on walls. Their inky ejections were true communication-writing, and they did have whited walls very deep in the oceans that they wrote upon with their propelled ink. The squids are not a degenerate species that writes sequentially one letter or one word after another. They eject an entire gloopy message at one time upon the walls.
"Who are you on today?" the Demogorgon mouthed around a glob of brains.
"Yourself and Joe Snow," Evangeline told him. "He's the second half of my daily double."
"There's always a delay about Joe," the Demogorgon said. "His
messages are not clear till a contrasting background builds up. And even after they are clear, they still are not very clear. Why doesn't everyone get on me alone? I'm the best of them all. I am pleased to see that you have had troubles today."
"Not bad ones. Or not good ones, as it would be from your view
point. You really are the devil, aren't you? It's just that the man I work for keeps telling me that I'm fired, and it's just that my husband died this morning from a foolish antic and I have no place to bury him. He has an acid condition, I think, and that's bad for some plants. People won't let you bury an acid man in their gardens."
"Aren't there any necrophagists in your town? They are likely
breaking down the doors of your place right now to feed on him. They don't mind acidity."
"They're too particular lately though. They'd eat a few choice
parts of him and then I'd be stuck with the rest. And the dogs are almost as bad. There's so many parts that they like to play with but won't eat up."
"Consider lilac bushes," the really devil said. "Consider blue
berry shrubs. I must go now. I have to oppress widows and orphans and defraud laborers. And there's several small children of both sexes that I must rape. It's an old pleasure that's coming back into favor. And take a careful took at my own latest message on the wall. It's rather excellent. Bad-bye, madam."
"You are outmoded. You know that," Evangeline said. "And you're outrotted in so many ways."
"It's a case of the false coin driving out the true again," the Demogorgon said.

Evangeline went down to view the Great North Wall. She had to wear a man's hat to go down there: that was the rule. They had hats
available at a little booth.
Oh, there is always so much of the local prophetic-art in Atlanta and places like that. But some of it is good. Persons were at work with cameras and scanners and code breakers and calculators on many of the messages, squeezing the last drop of guidance out of them. The message of Joe Slow was still there on the prime wall. The background of it had darkened somewhat, but it was still too much white-on-white to be read. And Joe Snow himself was there.
"How good are lilac bushes for an acid husband?" Evangeline asked him. "How good are blueberry shrubs?"
"Rhubarb is the best," Joe Snow said thickly. Joe was snowed.
"Why didn't I think of rhubarb? When will the background of your message darken enough to make it readable?" Evangeline asked. "I've got to catch a fly-by home in an hour."
"Perhaps the message won't be readable today at all," the thick-tongued Joe Snow

mumbled. "Amateur artists are careless and they are writing over my message. I try to chase them away, but as the afternoon goes on I get sleepy and then there is no one to chase them off. But imprint my message on your mind and hold it there. The snow-colored message itself will not darken, but your mind will become gray and grimy by evening. The contrast will enable you to read it."
"Thank you," Evangeline said. "Things are much easier when one
avails herself of guidance."

Evangeline then had a liaison and affair with a gentleman who
was also on Joe Snow and Demogorgon for the daily double. The liaison and affair took something more than half an hour. Then Evangeline caught a fly-by to go back home.
And when she was back in her home city, she went immediately to Reuben's Rhubarb Patch.
"I have an acid husband," she told Reuben. "And, oh, your rhubarb does look as if it needs acid!"
"That's my poke-weed patch," Reuben said. "This is my rhubarb
on the other side. Oh, bring him along and bury him, I guess. He can't hurt the soil much." So the remains of Mudge Gilligan were quickly buried at Reuben's.

"Oh, how right everything is going today!" Evangeline chortled. "And I thought that things would be bad. I guess that things almost always go right for guided persons. I may as well settle my other problem."
She went by the place where she worked.
"I have decided to forgive you for your bad manners of today,
Selkirk," she told the man she worked for. "You are an unguided person, so I must make allowances. But you know how much trouble you'd get into firing even an unguided person. There's a dozen agencies who'd battle you to the last drop of your blood. And we guided persons are much more powerful."
"You don't work here any more, Evangeline. Get out!"
"I am on a double these days. I am on the Demogorgon, and I am
also on Joe Snow. This will not mean much to an unguided and unscientific person such as yourself, but I assure you that those are the two strongest lobbies of all the wall people. And remember, Selkirk, that this is payday. Shell, man, shell!"
"Out, Evangeline, out!" Selkirk ordered, but he ordered with much less strength than usual. He was nine parts beat already, and with real pressure put on him he'd cave in.
"I'll be back within the hour, Selkirk," Evangeline said. "And I believe that a little bonus added to my pay would be a nice gesture. It's almost imperative that unguided persons make such nice gestures regularly."

Evangeline went down to the local Southside Sewage Plant wall,
a fine expanse. The Turning Worm had just hit for the first time that day, and his had generated some excitement. The Turning Worm was not a prophet of multiple presence, and this was not a prime wall here, but the reproduction was good.
And the reproduction of the Joe Snow message was good, but there was still not enough contrast to make it readable. Evangeline had that snow-message imprinted on her own mind, however, and her mind had now become gray and grimy enough to give contrast. And she read:

Oh make it proud and make
it sly!
Be grassed, be snowed, be
hempty,
and hold your head almighty

high
although your head be
empty.

Evangeline Gilligan walked proudly and with high head. She felt an everlasting compassion for all the unguided and unscienced people of the world, all those who were not prestressed, all who were not people of the walls. The guided persons much working for them!
The wall washers would be around again in a few hours to white the walls for new messages and for another wonderful new day.

## FALL OF PEBBLE-STONES

And heal my heart and bless my bones
With nightly fall of pebble-stones.
Ellenbogen, Rainy Morning Rimes.

Bill Sorel stood at his nineteenth-floor window and shied pebbles and stones out over space to land in the sidewalk and street. It had rained the night before, and there were pebbles oil that little ledge under his window after every rain. It's always fun to throw stones, even small stones, in the morning and see what they will hit.

"Hey, that cop's going to come up and get you again, Bill Sorel," Etta Mae Southern called form her window next door. "Where were you last night? I called every guy I know for a date and couldn't get anybody. You remember the other day the cop came all the way up to your place and told you the people in the street were getting crabby about getting hit on the head with pebbles."

"I have been awarded the big red plum, Etta Mae," Sorel boasted to the early morning air and his neighbor. "I'm not a professor; I'm not a doctor: I'm just a hardworking and dirty-scheming popularizer and feature writer. But I have wrested the big red plum from the big boys in the Q. and A. scientific field."

"Well, don't throw the plum-pit down on someone's head when you're finished," Etta Mae said. "You told that cop, 'They're not very big pebbles,' and he said, 'No, I know they're not.' You told him, 'People just like to complain about things,' and he said, 'Yeah, I know they do. Now you just cut out hitting people on their heads with pebbles so they'll have one less thing to complain about.' You said, 'How did you know it was me?' and he said, 'Who else in this building would be a mad pebble-thrower?' He sure is a nice cop but I bet he won't be so nice if he has to come all the way up here after you again."

"I've been awarded the big red plum," Sorel repeated, and he continued to pick the pebbles out of that little ledge below his window and throw them down over the street. "I have been selected to compile, edit, write or whatever The Child's Big What and Why Book. This will pay me well. All I have to do is answer the scientific questions that children of all ages will ask, and do it in the style that the most doltish kid can understand and the smartest kid will not find patronizing. And really most of the work is done before I start."

"You hit a man with a pebble, Bill. He's looking around to see where it came from. He's on the edge of being real mad if he finds out someone hit him on purpose."

"I didn't," Sorel said. "I discovered that I can't hit any of them on purpose, so I concentrate on hitting them by accident. I just throw them and let them find their own targets. But it wasn't a very big pebble and it didn't hurt him much. Now all I have to do is find out half an answer to one question and a full answer to another, and I'll be able to put the book together. Where do you think the pebbles come from, Etta Mae?"

"My idea is that the rain makes them. Pebbles are made out of silicon mostly. And silicon and nitrogen are almost exactly alike. I used to go with a smart follow and he taught me things like that. When it lightens, the rain makes almost as much silicon water as

nitrogen water, and it deposits it as pebbles. That's one way. Hey, do you know that rotten people never have pebbles around their houses? The other way is that little pieces of sand come together and the lightning-impregnated water fuses them into pebbles. It has to be one of those ways or there wouldn't always be pebbles after it rains. There's a third wiy that pebbles could happen, but it's a little bit doubty."

"Tell me the third way, Etta Mae. I have to consider lots of fringe things for the Big What and Why Book."

"It's that somebody doesn't want you to run out of pebbles because you have so much fun throwing them. So, whoever it is, he keeps making pebbles for you every time it rains. You know Mrs. Justex on the eighteenth floor. She always used to live in a house before she came here, and she had a little ledge outside her kitchen window where her milk would be left every morning. She took the apartment here and saw that there wasn't any ledge. 'Have you got milk?' she asked herself. So she nailed up a little ledge like the one you fixed for yourself there. And every morning there would be a quart of milk for her on the ledge. This went on for a week till she happened to think, 'Who is my route man here? And how does he got up to the eighteenth floor on the outside of this building?' She heard him then -- it was early in the morning -- and she went to see. She opened the window suddenly and knocked him off. He fell down and was killed on the sidewalk. But he faded away, and there wasn't anything left of him when she went down to look. After that, she had to start buying her milk in the store."

"No, Etta Mae, I know Mrs. Justex. That's just one of the stories she tells when she's wet-braining it in the Wastrels' Club."

"It did seem kind of doubty. I don't believe she drinks milk at all. What is the half an answer and the whole answer that you have to find out before you can put the book together?"

"The half one is, 'Why does a baseball curve?' I think I have that all whipped. I'm going to see a man today who is supposed to know the answer. And the whole answer I'm looking for is to the question, 'How do the pebbles get under the eaves?"

"Oh, well, it's got to be one of the three ways I told you."

Bill Sorel stood there at the window and threw every pebble away. That is important. He didn't miss a one. Then he got a little broom and swept that ledge clear of everything. Bill Sorel should have had an easy job of putting that book together. He already knew all the answers except for that half answer and that full answer. He had once handled a lot of the questions in a little daily feature before it was canceled out on him. He could use that material again. And most of the other answers he had already filed in his head for ready use. Besides, there were already many such books that he could draw upon, besides the real reference books, and besides the palaver of his own keenwitted friends. He had had it down to three unanswered questions when he applied for a shot at the Big What and Why. And now he had it down to one and one-half.

When Bill Sorel had come on the scene there had been three questions going around wearing blatantly false answers. These were: "What Makes it Thunder?" "What Makes a Baseball Curve?" "How Do the Pebbles Get Under the Eaves?" It is hard to believe the answers that had been given to these questions by scientists, some of them grown men.

Listen to this one:

"Thunder is produced when lightning heats the surrounding air and causes it to expand and send out waves. The expanding air is heard as thunder."

Well, what can you do when you come on something like that? Possibly it was better than answer that earlier generations gave, that the lighting burned up the air and the thunder was caused by new air rushing in to fill up the place.

Well, Bill Sorel had found out what causes thunder. It was really a wonder that somebody else hadn't stumbled onto the right answer before he had. Read it. Read the amazingly evident answer in The Child's Big What and Why Book.

Listen to this about a baseball. And it's been repeated again and again for more than a century.

"The curving of a baseball is caused by denser air in the bottom of the baseball than on the top. Therefore the bottom spin will be more effective than the top spin, will have more traction on the air, and will cause the ball to curve. The ball will curve to the right if the pitcher throws it with a clockwise spin, and to the left if the spin is counterclockwise. Artillery shells behave according to the same rule."

Oh, great bloated bulls! What? A three-and-a-half inch difference in elevation would cause enough pressure difference between the top and the bottom of a baseball to make the thing curve up to eighteen inches in sixty-six feet? Where is your sense of proportion? Suppose the difference in elevation-pressure should be a hundred thousand times as much, the difference between low ground and the height of thirty thousand feet or so. Would the thrown ball then curve a hundred thousand times as much? Would it curve thirty miles off course in sixty-feet of travel? As Etta Mae would say, "It's kind of doubty."

But now Bill Sorel halfway knew what made a baseball curve. He had heard the explanation at second hand. Today he hoped to hear it it first hand.

And listen to this one about pebbles in the little rain worn ditches under the eaves of buildings:

"It is sometimes asked why there are usually small white pebble-stones under the eaves-drops of buildings when there do not seem to be any other pebbles around anywhere. But the answer is that there are always pebbles around everywhere. They are mixed with the great bulk of the earth and are not noticed. But rain washes the finer and ingliter earth particles away and leaves the pebbles behind. That is the reason that there seem to be so many pebbles under the eaves of buildings, particularly after a rain."

Aw, heel-flies! Bill Sorel didn't know the answer to that one, but he knew that such drivel wasn't the answer.

Yeah, he had a big red plum. He wasn't going to let it get away. He was going to make sure of it. He got in his Red Rang (a type of motor car) and drove off to find the man who could complete his half answer to the second question. And as he drove, he reviewed in his mind that momentous third question.

Some pebbles are limestone, but most of them are quartz. And there are not always pebbles around. In much earth there are no pebbles at all. In most earth, the true pebbles will make up less than one part in fifty thousand. Ah, but you put up a building or house and move into it, and after the very first rain there is a thick accumulation of pebbles in its eaves-drops. Has fifty thousand times their amount of earth been washed away to reveal them?

Bill Sorel had made a nuisance of himself around building projects in checking out the pebble situation. In one place he had taken a cubic yard of dirt, hauled it aside, and gone over it all with a toothbrush and sieve. And he had not found any pebbles at all. The only things too big to go through the sieve were organic things, roots, hickory nut hulls, twigs, pieces of bark and pieces of worms. There were not any natural pebbles at all. He kept track of all artificial pebbles (pieces of mortar, cinder block fragments, bits of limestone gravel and of flint chat). He would always know them from genuine pebbles, and he already know that they would not accumulate under eaves.

He continued his surveillance as the seven houses on this particular tract were raised, were finished, were first rained upon. He examined them. The rain had made little under-the-eaves ditches around all the houses, but there were no pebbles in those ditches. Something was missing from the formula. The premonition of what it might be excited Bill Sorel and almost scared him.

People moved into one of the houses, and Sorel waited impatiently for it to rain. But it didn't rain for a whole week. People moved into a second of the houses, and that night it rained. Sorel was around with a flashlight at dismal, drenching dawn (it was partly for such devoted labor as this that Sorel had won the big red plum), and he discovered that the two

inhabited houses now had pebbles in their eaves-drop runners, and that the five uninhabited houses had none.

He followed it up. As soon as people moved into another house and there was rain thereafter, so soon was there a full complement of pebbles around that house.

You do not believe this? Pick out a housing development in your own region, and make a nuisance of yourself by observing it closely. You will be convinced, unless you are of such mind-set as defies conviction.

Sorel observed other housing developments, apartment projects, commercial constructions. Wherever eaves-runnels were not precluded by roof guttering and spouting, there would be white pebbles appearing in full force as soon as the structure had been put to human use and it had rained thereafter.

Sorel tried it at his own nineteenth-floor apartment. He figured a way to divert rainfall from the roof. He made this diversion, and he made a little ledge outside his window on which the diverted rain might fall.

(A little misunderstanding was created by these activities of Sorel. Firemen and policemen and psychologists and deacons came and soft-talked him and tried to capture him with hooks and ropes and nets. They thought he was contemplating jumping off the building to his own destruction. He wasn't. There just wasn't any way to divert the rain-drop without climbing around on the outside of that building.)

Well, it rained the night after Sorel had made these arrangements. There sure had not been any pebbles there before it rained. There had been nothing there but a little ledge or trough made out of number two pine boards and fastened to the brickwork with screws and lead anchors.

It rained and rained, and Bill Sorel kept night watch on his little ledge by the lightning flashes and the diffused night light of the town. One moment there had not been any pebbles. And the next moment there had been a complete complement of pebbles. Sorel knew that the pebbles were for him. He knew they wouldn't have appeared on the ledge of an apartment that nobody lived in. but how had the pebbles got to that nineteenth-floor ledge? This was the question that still lacked even a Iiint of an answer.

Bill Sorel in his Red Ranger arrived at a little acreage and came on a tall middle-aged man who was eating round onions; and with him was a bright-faced little girl who was eating gingerbread.

"They're good for the circulation," the man said. "I bet I eat more onions than any man in the county. I'm George 'Cow-Path' Daylight. You sent me a postcard that you were coming to see me today."

"Yes," Bill Sorel said. "I'm told that you really know what makes a baseball curve. I've been looking for the answer to that one for a long time."

"I'm Susie 'Corn-Flower' Daylight," the bright-faced little girl said. "Mr. Cow-Path here is my grandfather."

"Yes, I really know what makes a ball curve," Cow-Path said. "It's because I know what makes it curve that I've been striking out batters for thirty years. You ask the batters in Owasso and Coweta and Vedigris about me. You ask them in Oolagah and Tiawah and Bushyhead. They'll tell you who keeps the Catoosa Mud-Cats on top of the heap year after year. I am the best small-town pitcher in northeast Oklahoma, and I'm the best because I know what makes a baseball curve."

"And I am the best third-grade girl pitcher in Catoosa," Susie Corn-Flower Daylight said. "I can even whizz them by most of those big girls in the fourth and fifth grades."

"Cow-Path, they tell me that you maintain that the direction of the spin has nothing to do with the direction of the curve of a ball. And you say that there isn't a gnat's leg's difference in the pressure on the top and the bottom of a ball."

"Not a millionth of a gnat's leg's difference," Cow-Path Daylight said. "A pitcher's mustache with one more hair on one side than on the other would have more effect on the

ball than any such difference in pressure. The reason I understand the physics of the situation is that I spent two years in the sixth grade, which is why I learned that book General Science for The Primary Student so well. There was a paragraph in there about how a gyroscope top spins and loans and holds. I applied it to a aseball and became a great pitcher."

"Well, if the direction of the spin doesn't have any effect on the direction of the curve, what does have effect?" Sorel asked smoothly. He had heard the explanation at second hand, but lie wanted to hear it from the master.

"The direction of the axis of the spin is what causes the curve," Cow-Path said, "but it doesn't matter which direction the ball spins on the axis. Look!"

Cow-Path Daylight took a pencil from Sorel's pocket and, with his strong fingers, he jabbed clear through one of those big round onions that he liked. He had it centered perfectly. He spun the pencil with its spitted onion, and that was the axis of spin. He moved the whole thing head-on down the centerline of the hood of Sorel's Red Ranger, but with the direction of the axis about eleven degrees off to the right of the direction of movement.

"The curve will be in the direction of the angle of the axis of spin," Cow-Path said. "The ball, on the gyroscopic principle, tries to aingn its direction with the direction of the axis of spin. But the direction of the spin itself doesn't matter. See!"

Cow-Path showed, with the gyroscopic onion, how a ball would behave with the axis tilted to the right or the left, or up or down. And he showed that it was all the same thing whether the spin was clockwise or counterclockwise.

"It is for this understanding that I am known as the artist of the backup ball," Cow-Path said. "I can throw a fork-ball that moves like a slider, or a slider that moves like a fork-ball. And I can throw my floater and my drop with the same motion and the same direction of spin: only the tilt of the axis will be changed." Sorel saw that all of this was true with an eternal verity. It was one of those big Copernican moments.Things could never again be as they had been before. Infinitesimally and particularly there had been made a contribution towards a new Heaven and a new Earth.

When he had his feelings a bit under control, Bill Sorel made small talk with the two Daylight people. Then, believing that their well of wisdom could not be exhausted even by such a huge cask as had been drawn from it, he asked them questions.

"Do you know what causes thunder?" he asked them.

"Do you mean thunder or the sound of thunder?" Susie Corn- Flower Daylight asked around her gingerbread. "They're two different things."

"I suppose I mean the sound of thunder," Sorel said. "Thunder itself has no cause."

"Why, how smart you are, for a city man!" Corn-Flower admired.

"I very nearly know what causes the sound of thunder, the sound of lightning really, but I don't know exactly," Cow-Path said. "Lightning is resinous, as we know from the color of it as well as from the odor. I believe that when lightning cracks or fractures the air, it coats both parts of the air with a sort of rosin dust -- not too different from the rosin that pitchers use. Then, when the two parts of the air come together again immediately, they are a little bit offset from each other. So they grind and set themselves together, and the two rosined surfaces rubbing together make a noise."

Bill Sorel was amazed. Cow-Path's explanation was gibberish, of course. But it sounded almost like the real explanation would sound if given in code, and it may have been just that. And Susie Corn-Flower's divination that the thunder and the sound of thunder were two different entities was -- well, it was a thunderous sort of intention. Sorel felt very pleased and gratified with these two persons.

So he tried them with the final question.

"How do pebbles get under the eaves of houses and buildings?" he asked.

"Oh, I suppose they come off the roof," Cow-Path said. "The rain must loosen them, and then they roll off the roof into the eaves-drop ditch."

"No, Grandpa, no," Susie Corn-Flower Daylight said. "Why would they ever be on the roof to fall off? The pebble angel puts the pebbles directly into the eaves-drop ditch. He puts them there as a sign he is guarding that building and that everything is all right. Buildings without people living in them never have pebbles under the eaves."

"No, I know they don't, Corn-Flower," Sorel said. "But did you ever hear that rotten people don't have pebbles around their houses either?"

"I've never known any rotten people," Susie Corn-Flower said. "We've never had any rotten people in our town."

"That's right. There never have been any here," Cow-Path said.

Bill Sorel had The Child's Big What and Why Book finished a week later -- he was a fast worker -- and it was ready to send off. But he had two versions of one page, and he had not yet made his selection between them. This was the page that covered the question, "How do the pebbles get under the eaves?"

Sorel went to the Wastrel's Club to drink white rum and think about it. One version gave the old safe answer, that there are always pebbles around everywhere, and that the rain washed the dirt away from them and leaves the pebbles. This was the safe falsehood.

The other version was somewhat different. It was true, probably: or at least it was a coded statement of a truth. But could Sorel get away with a truth like that in the What and Why Book?

Etta Mae Southern was already in Wastrels' with a handsome, rich, and goodhumored man. She made very small horizontal circles with her finger in the air.

"That's the world's smallest record playing, 'I wish it were you instead,'" she called across the club room.

And Mrs. Justex was alreidy in Wastrels'. She was drinking one of those lacteal gin-sloshes that are called Milky Ways. So Mrs. Justex did drink milk, sometimes, and in a way. That fact changed just about everything. It meant that the widest of improbables was still possible.

On the wall of Wastrels' was a paragraph of wisdom:

"When one has discarded all absolutely impossible explanations of a thing, then what is left, however improbable it seems, must be accepted as the explanation until a better explanation comes along."

Bill Sorel had seen that paragraph on the wall a dozen times, but it had never hit him between the ears before.

A cop came into Wastrels' and said it had started to rain outside. He had a Salty Dog. Cops are the only people left in the world who still drink them.

"You will be in my apartment in fifteen minutes," Bill Sorel said.

"Why will I be?" the cop asked him.

"To try to make me stop hitting people on their heads with pebble-stones," Sorel siid. And Sorel left Wastrels'and went to his apartment. He selected one of the two versions of the disputed pages and put it with the rest of the pages. He sealed and stapled the completed What and Why, and went out and down in the elevator and out into the rain to mail the thing in the stand-up mailbox on the corner. And then he came back to his apartment with happy anticipation.

Then he was standing at his opened window in the early dark. it was raining and blowing and getting him pretty wet. He was scooping up handfuls, double-handfuls of pebbles from the ledge under his window and flinging them out at the lower world. He scooped out twenty, thirty, fifty handfuls of pebbles from that little ledge-trough that wouldn't hold three handfuls at one time. But now that trough stood full of pebble-stones no matter how many he scooped out of it.

Somebody was banging at Sorel's apartment door, and he let him bang. And pretty soon somebody was shaking Sorel's shoulder, and he let him shake.

"Hey, you got to quit throwing pebbles down there," the cop was saying. "You're

hitting people that are trying to get taxis in the rain, and you're tearing their umbrellas. Those are bigger pebbe-stones than you usually throw, aren't they?"

"These are the biggest ever," Sorel said happily. "These are prime pebbles. Say, I used the page about the pebble angel in the book. That's going to hit a lot of people crossways. I mailed the whole thing off with that in it. I'm glad I did."

"They come in just as fast as you throw them out, don't they?" the cop said. "I wonder where they come from? I never noticed that that's the way pebbles come when it rains. Can't you throw more of them faster and get ahead of them?"

Oh, it was with a wonderful clatter that the pebbles arrived!

"Man, this is as fast as I can throw them," Sorel panted. "I bet I've thrown a thousand pounds of them down already. It sure is fun. It looks like I made a breakthrough in pebbles. The pebble angel is showing that he likes the mention."

"Maybe if we both scooped them and threw them as fast as we could, we could almost keep up with them," the cop said. "Yeah, it is fun." The cop threw lefthanded, and the two fitted well together at the window.

He was a good person, that cop. There weren't any rotten people around there. (But have you looked under your eaves after a rain?)

## QUIZ SHIP LOOSE

There were five persons on Quiz Ship. The ship's interior is shown as a functional lounge and wardroom, with food center, game center, navigation center, and problem and project center. There are three doors in the back bulkhead of this functional.lounge: the triangle-sign door of the Crags, the circle-sign door of the Bloods, and the square-sign door of Questor Shannon. At back left is the "Instant Chute."

The five persons are Manbreaker and Bodicea Crag with the power of their earthiness (of whatever earth they are down on); George and Jingo Blood with their "movement-as-power"; and, Questor Shannon, a slight man who expresses an oceanic massiveness and depth. Four of these people seem completely relaxed, but one of them, Questor Shannon, does not.

"Each time we go into an adventure, we go relaxed," Questor was saying. "Some day we're going to get -meared when going in so relaxed. I feel we should go tensed on this one"

"Relax, Questor," the other four said, as they said so often. "This is an easy one," Bodicea Crag (Queen Bodicea) gave the relaxed opinion. "Paleder World has no reputation for danger. Two other parties have been here, and they have left it unscathed."

"The logs of both parties show them to have been a bit scathed," Questor still argued. "Persons of both those parties have sworn that Paleder is a murderous world behind its smiling and open face. And their own words have been contradictory. The most open of all the worlds: one of them said. Well, why does it remain a closed world then? What has been the obstacle? Why have we come here to solve, in relaxed fashion, an enigma that some have called murderous? Coming to any other world that has been called murderous, even in minority report, we would come with much greater caution."

"Murderous it does not seem to be," Manbreaker Crag spoke with assurance. "No one of either previous party was killed. Well, yes, it is a puzzle. I like puzzles. The John Chancel Party -- Chancel was always essentially a one-man party, but he did have three companions with him here -- recorded that Paleder World was an absolute puzzle, that they did not know what they had seen after they had seen it, that they did not remember what they had been told after it had been explained to them. Chancel was good at puzzles, but he did not solve the puzzle here. He said that this world had the most advanced technology of any world known, so advanced that the world seemed to deprecate it a bit and keep it in the background"

"I know what Chancel wrote in his ship's log," Questor said tensely. "'It has a rich hoard,' he wrote. 'Like every hoard, it is guarded by a sleeping dragon. Unlike most cases, this is a corporate dragon. And unlike other corporate dragons, this one has a sting in its tail. It can murder you with that sting.' So there is something to this puzzle to be tense about."

"Chancel ffIled his log books with riddles and with enimatic statements," Jingo Blood (the Empress Jingo) said. "But he didn't solve this riddle. I will."

"How will you solve what John Chancel couldn't. Jingo?" Questor asked. "How will you figure out what Vitus Ambler misfigured? What special attributes do you have for this?"

"I'm smarter than they were," Jingo Blood said. "Relax, Questor."

"But we shoot in just nine seconds"

"So, relax for nine seconds, then," Jingo told him.

The nine-second interval ran its course. The five persons shot into the "Instant Chute" at back left. The Quiz Ship went into a "blank-out hover."

The "Instant Chute" was itself a piece of very advanced technology. Much of the technology of Gaea -- also known as Eretz or Earth -- was quite advanced. The chute brought the five Quiz Ship persons down through ten thousand meters of space instantly, and it set them onto Paleder World. The requirements set into the chute in this case were simple: "That the persons be brought down within Paleder City, on solid footing, in an outdoor place near or at the nexus of the most intense intellectual activity of the city." Well any sufficiently sophisticated "Chute" could do that.

They landed without a jolt. But did they come down safely?

"This is wrong, abysmally , wrong!" Questor croaked fearfully as he came to ground in totally unacceptable surroundings. "There is not supposed to be any such jungle or miasma as this in Paleder City. We have overview pictures. It is not supposed to be like this. Something is very wrong." He beat what seemed to be a fanged bird away from his face. And these were not acceptable surroundings. No one could dream of worse.

"There sure are not supposed to be any fer-de- lance snakes like that one:" Manbreaker Crag barked, "'not in the middle of the leading city of one of the most civilized planets ever reported." He flipped his swagger stick into a bolo or machete. "We have landed solidly, but barely so.. This is quicksand all around us, and all the poisonous-looking flora are floating plants on that quicksand. Ah. look at the jag-rocks protruding from the quagmire! And there is a jag-toothed monster perched on every one of those rocks or snags. A person would lose a hand or an arm if he reached for anything to keep from sinking in this bog. What went wrong with our landing anyhow? Is this even Paleder World at all? The Chute has goofed. But there cannot be any such outrageous malfunction as this!"

"It isn't my idea of beautiful downtown Paleder City either," George Blood growled. "There hasn't been such a miasmal landscape anywhere since the Devonian period on Caea. And we were exactly over central Paleder City. Neither the Chancel nor the Ambler expeditions mentioned anything like this, and there are no such extensive, endless, I might say, areas of desolation in our photographs, the rougher sections of this world, certainly not in Paleder City. This is a very sticky malfunction. Let's back out of it. Let's go back and do it again."

"Let's go back and not do it again," Bodicea Crag said. "Let's not do it again till we find out what went with our Chute. This is deplorable."

The firm land "island" that they were on was hardly big enough for the five of them to stand on even with extreme crowding; and the snouts and serrate mouths that broke the surface of the quicksand were murderous. The whole thing was a churning soup-bowl of death-dealing monsters.

"The best place to attack a problem is where it is," Jingo stated firmly. "It may be that we have been handed, quite by accident, entree into the underlying mystery and puzzle of Paleder. Hey, this is a puzzle that can really get its teeth into you! That was new boot too! Let's attack the puzzle where it sprawls about us here. I do not believe that the Chute

malfunctioned at all, but some phrase of our instructions to it may have led it to give us this unusual opportunity. Let's use it, let's use it! How real is this, Questor? There will never be a better time to test the latest of the latest, the new portable instrument. What does the gadget say?"

Questor Shannon had the small reference innstrument out and in the palm of his hand. It read "fact and depth and intensity of illusion" But immediately, a sleek head on a long neck came out of the quicksand, gobbled the reference instrument, took three of Questor's fingers and a part of the palm of his hand with it, and withdrew into the quagmire again. It had a neat and precise operation for something so large, for that head could have taken Questor himself entire in one gulp. And Shannon sniffled and whimpered and shook with the pain of it.

"Ah, reality, along with the reality discerner, has been swallowed by a swamp dragon," Jingo Blood said. "So now, reality is to be found in the dragons and not in ourselves. We can use your lost fingers for a reality meter now though, Questor. If you find that your fingers are back on your hand, after a bit, that will mean that the present scene is a little less than real. But, if the fingers stay gone, that means .that points are scored against all of us."

Jingo Blood seemed to be enjoying the situation a bit more than the other four were, but she was surely not leaping with joy about it. They couldn't move from there without being done to death by the huge and slashing creatures. And they couldn't stay there very long, as their "island" was beginning to crumble under them.

"At the present moment, there is no sun in the sky over Paleder World," George Blood remarked in what was supposed to be an even-toned conversational voice. "And yet it was at Paleder City noon that we shot the Chute and came down. The sky should now be full of the Sun Proxima (the Grian Sun) which is also the sun of Kentauron-Mikron, Camiroi, and Astrobe. Why, by the way, have the people of those three worlds not sufficiently explored Paleder, or Dahae as some of them ca11 it? Why have not the inhabitants of the planets of Sun Alpha and Sun Beta explored it? A mystery. There is no sun in the sky over us, and yet there is sufficient shocking gray and orange, lurid and garish light. No sun, and no real cloud-cover either. Dull daytime stars are above us; but instead of clouds there are globs of gloop drifting in the very low air. And one of them is coming upon us now at an unnatural speed."

The glob came upon them and swallowed them in its fetid breath. It was sharp with teeth in it, and these were quickly identified as belonging to aerial snakes. The glob brought with. it a saturating mental and emotional depressions stark consternation, an unbearable fearfulness and unpleasantness. It brought dread. It brought hallucination and contradiction, fear of falling, and fear of ultimate fire. It brought ravening ghosts and ghost-animals. It brought flying foxes that fastened onto throats with hollow and life-draining teeth. it brought violent small creatures who sometimes seemed to be human children and sometimes tearing monsters.

But a voice came from one of the small and possibly human monsters. It was a boy's voice speaking in Demotic or Low Galactic:

"Hang in there, Gaea guys! Some of us are on your side. Don't let this whip you. It's only a little psychic storm."

What at sort of stuff was that?

And then came the abomination of total despair. This corroding despair entered into the organs and entrails of all the Quiz Ship people. It entered the streets and alleys of their brains and the avenues of their notochords. It entered all the bags and vessels of their bodies. It suffused their glands and seeped into the marrow interiors of their hollow bones. This was complete despair.

"If this is not the ultimate damnation, then I'd gladly choose the ultimate damnation in place of it," Bodicea Crag gave a sharp-voiced value judgment. "Whatever we are in, it cannot ge any worse than this."

It got worse suddenly. The "island" they were crowded onto, the island in the midst of the endless quicksand-quagmire, erupted and cast them all into the noisome and poisonous morass.

They were struck and gobbled and slashed. They were torn apart by tides and concussions. They were drowning in hot, searing, vividly inhabited and attacking mud; and they had limbs lopped off by swamp dragons. They screamed, and their screams were choked off in mouths full of mud.

"I'm not a cowardly man," the huge and pompous Manbreaker Crag sounded then, managing to get his mouth, but nothing else, above the surface of the erupting and devouring mud, "but we have to make our peril known to somebody, somewhere. Loudness is called for, and my own loudest voice is rather unpleasant and piercing."

It was indeed. But everything else that remained in that world was likewise unpleasant and piercing. All of the persons of this expedition had, under test conditions, endured as much as fourteen megapangs of pain. They could not have qualified for the expedition elsewise. But here, in the ravening bog, there was multitudinous pain dozens of times more intense, and there was no way they could endure it.

But how does one not endure things that are at the same time beyond endurance and beyond escape? The five screamed, screamed with their mouths and their eyes full of blood and mud and offa1. They were being eviscerated by dragons, and they were being boiled alive like lobsters. Things were literally eating the brains in their heads and the organs in their bodies. Things had already devoured their minds and their souls.

The five of them screamed, underwater and under mud, mindlessly and soullessly, on and on.

"Oh, stop that exasperating shrilling," adult voices were saying to them in High Galactic. "And stand up! And stop fouling yourselves in the mud! Are all the people where you come from as frivolous and silly as you are?"

The five persons from Quiz Ship stood up. There was something about the silliness of their situation that was almost more horrible than the pain they had thought they were suffering.

They were standing somewhat less than ankle-deep in little puddles of tacky mud. They stepped out of it and tried to cleanse themselves of flecks and spotches of mire. There really wans't too much of it on them. They were smeared somewhat, but they weren't mortally dirty.

"We were in a horrible quagmire-jungle," Questor Shannon was saying. He felt they owed some sort explanation to someone. "We were overwhelmed with despondency, and we were being killed by swamp-dragons and fire snakes and frenzied foxes. We were in the abomination of total despair."

But it was plain that these people didn't believe him at all.

"You were where you are now," one of those Paleder adults said. "We are sorry if we fail you expectations, but we do not have any swamp-dragons or frenzied foxes on our world. You landed in this little spot where you are now. This was less than a minute ago. Then you began to scream and carry on."

"What? What is -- what was this place?" Jingo Blood was asking. "What a double-dealing monstrosity of a place it was? And where has it gone?"

"It was, and is, as even you should be able to see, a very small amusement park for very small children:, one of those adults said. "As you can see, it is no more than twenty meters across, and nowhere is the growth, the 'jungle' as you call it, more than one meter high."

That was true. The fearful flora did not now come to the waists of any of the Quiz Ship people; but, just a moment ago, it had seemed to reach all the way to the sunless sky, sunless no more.

For the Grian Sun was strong in the noontime sky now. What, it had been less than a minute since the Quiz Ship people had landed? All that confusion had taken place in less

than a minute?

"The snakes, the dragons, the sea-serpents, the air-serpents, the flying devil foxes --" Bodicea Crag was pleading as though for justification.

"Oh, you mean the little rubber creatures," one of the Paleder adults said. "The small children like to make them and to play with them. And they make jangles of noises when they play here, but not so discordant noises as you yourselves make. Do you like to play with the little rubber animals also? Perhaps you will be allowed to make some of them. The small children have dragon-making contests, but these are the fafled constructions that you find here. The chfldren. Ugh, the children! They are tedious when they are uncontrolled. Where are the adults of your own party?"

"We are the adults. We are all the party there is," Manbreaker Crag affirmed, with a touch of sad arrogance.

"You-are-the-adults?" the Paleder people asked in apparent disbelief. "The way you were carrying on, we thought that you were simply incredibly loutish children. Now we see that you are, yes, that you are incredibly loutish adults. We will have to take you into custody and to inquire into your awkward arrival here. Yes, and into your grotesque behavior, We are not sure that you are genuine humans or Proto-humans at all. You may be what are called 'fiasco humans'. It is likely that you are from Gaea or one of the other very backward worlds."

"It's only one-upmanship," Jingo Blood tried to rationalize it to her companions as the five of them were led away (by moral force, not physical), apparently to some sort of confinement. "The people of Paleder, seem to be very good at one-upmanship. But I do not quite understand --"

"We haven't made a very impressive beginning here," Manbreaker Crag said dismally, and they silently all agreed with him. But how had they seemed to be drowning and dymg? How had they been doing it in little patches of mud that were no more than five centimeters deep? How had it seemed that they were being broken apart and eaten alive by ravening animals that now turned out to be no bigger than their thumbs, and that moreover were made out of rubber?

"How are your fingers, Questor?" Jingo Blood asked him.

"They hurt terribly," he said, and he showed them.

"Ah, but you still have them," Jingo chortled. "That means that the little scene we just experienced was not real and that it didn't happen"

"Those fingers, they are bad," George Blood said. "They're highly infected already. I suspect that they will have to come off. And if you do lose them, that might mean that the little scene we just experienced was real to some extent, and it did happen, a little bit anyhow."

"Loss of nerve, and loss of our sense of propotion, that's what has been responsible for our fiasco," Manbreaker Crag was rationalizing to his fellow Quiz Ship people. "We let them get the jump on us, and make fools of us."

"Being made a fool of shouldn't matter a lot to an explorer," Jingo Blood told them. "The job of an explorer is to solve problems and to get information. The explorer must be willing to serve as bait if there is no other way to coax the information to strike. Special information is like lightning, and it must be tempted. So, we have been bait. Yeah, live bait."

"It hadn't seemed like a loss of proportion to me," George Blood said. "Maybe it is a finding of a lost sense of propotion on this problem. We lost our sense of proportion as to Paleder World one hundred years ago, when John Chancel first set down here. And no one from our world has been able to see this world in proper proportion from that day till this. Why have we been confused? This isn't an alien planet. This is a world of human or proto-human persons. It is a civilized world where they speak Galactic.

"But there are so many enormities to be solved here! There are so many towering questions to be answered, and none of our people has even had the wit to ask them yet. Why is Palederpermitted to hide its light? That is the question."

"How have the people of Paleder become such master illusionists? That is the main question," Manbreaker Crag stated pompously.

"No, that is not the question at all," Jingo contradicted. "I don't believe that the head of the creature even know that there are illusions going on. Those things are part of the snap of its tail. But what is the. creature itself like if its tail has such a snap to it? That is more like the question. The things to notice aren't the little diversions such as the tiny park that seemed to us to be enormous. What are we being diverted from? That is the question. There must have been many people diverted away from raiding the wonderful technology of Paleder. The people of Paleder seem to set up the illusion that their technology is not worth bothering with. How have they managed that illusion? That is much more important than the little tail-flick illusion of the quagmire and its dragons."

They were in a pleasant enough room, large and probably comfortable. They hadn't explored it thorughly yet, but they had learned one objectionable thing about it: they couldn't get out of it. They couldn't open the doors. They couldn't even find the doors.

"If we are not to mind being fools, then let's take the fools' way of getting some action here!" Manbreaker shouted. "Let's make a noise about it."

"You make a noise about it, Manbreaker," Bodicea said. "You have a peculiar talent for that."

Manbreaker Crag made howling, roaring, gibbering noises of fearful volume. Possibly he did it for no longer than a quarter of a minute, but it seemed like hours to his four companions. What did it seem like to the Paleder people?

"Simpletons from Gaea, stop that childish racket!" Paleder voices sounded the command to the them from outside the room.

"We want out of here!" Manbreaker roared. "Out, out, out!"

"Come out then" said the voices with perhaps a touch of taunting. "The doors aren't locked."

"We don't even now what are doors and what aren't," George Blood howled.

"Intelligent persons would know doors," the voices outside remarked. "The doors can be found by persons with eyes in their heads. They are not locked. They are only intelligence coded. Persons of adequate intelligence can open them easily. Persons with inadequate intelligence better remain where they are for a while. We will possibly have to locate your keepers and have them come and get you."

"Oh, there s no problem about getting out," Jingo Blood told her companions after a moment. "You can get us out of here, Manbreaker. You can get us of here by another very peculiar talent that you have. But let us first take the blinders off our eyes, now that they are loosened. Let us consider why the Paleder affair has not been properly pursued.

"Why have we people of Gaea not pursued it? Paleder is a gleaming 'goldmine in the sky' with its technology that is beyond any other. But this is only our third acknowledged attempt at it, the other two being one hundred years ago for one of them, and fifty years ago for the other. No, our own is not an acknowledged attempt either, so there have been only two of them. But there may have been several sneaky Pete attempts like our own. And why have the people of the nearer worlds, Camiroi, Astrobe, Kentauron-Mikron, not pursued it? Probably they have, but somehow they were shaken from it or diverted from it.

"Does Paleder really have the most advanced and most sophisticated technology of all the worlds? Likely it has. Then why hasn't that technology been appropriated? Or why haven't here been attempts, with or without force, to appropriate it? Is it the case of 'Yes, it is the most sophisticated technology to be found anywhere; only --' Well, only what? What is it that turns people away from the acquisition, from the follow-up? Is there something phony about this 'most advanced technology anywhere'? Is there something undesirable about it? That is what we have to find out. Now let us get out of here and find it out Lead us out of here, Manbreaker."

"How?" the ponderous Manbreaker asked.

"By one of the small number of talents that you have. No, not by roaring, by your other

main talent."

"Oh, that one!" Manbreaker barked. He was a large and powerful man.

"You can tell the doors, Manbreaker," Bodicea said. "They will be the easiest parts to break open."

Manbreaker Crag broke out of that room, presumably through a door where it should have been the easiest. And the other Quiz Ship people followed him out.

"How novel," said a Paleder person with the only touch of amusement ever noticed in any of those high-brained ones. "We ourselves would never have thought of that solution. And yet it conforms to the requirements, as being an alternate intelligent solution, a solving of the egress problem by using a more spacious interpretation of the framework of the problem. We might be tempted to incorporate such a procedure into our own thinking, were we not beyond the stage of incorporating any new material."

"Certainly we allow visitors to Paleder World," a Paleder person was saying in answer to a question. "Being the most open of all worlds, by our own claim and covenant, we could hardly bar visitors. No, we do not encourage them to come. Why should we? Visitors are always something of a nuisance. Yes, there have been many parties here from various worlds. No, you are not the third party to arrive here from Gaea. You are more like the thirtieth. Oh, we suppose it's true that the parties who come here on 'unacknowledged' attempts, those who do not file 'Paleder' as their flight destination, do not often return from Paleder, or do not return in good case. Often they have bad luck in leaving. Those who come without filing flight patterns usually have a bit of theft in their hearts, and they must expect retribution. We find that you yourselves have not filed 'Paleder' as your destination. That was thoughtless of you."

The people from Quiz Ship were on Paleder for part of three days. They held conversations with several dozens of the Paleder people in that time. Or else they held several dozen different conversations with a smaller number of these people. Why were the people of Palder, those people of most surpassing accomplishments, of such undistinguished presence and appearance? Thirty seconds after speaking to one, you would remember only most vaguely what he looked like.

And certainly the science and technology of Paleder was unutterably advanced. Why then did it seem so trivial? Why were the Quiz Ship people so unamazed by it?

Take the weather. One could turn the "manual over-ride" on the weather box at any Paleder City street corner, and the indicated weather would happen at once. One could turn it to "rain," and it would rain instantly. One could tiim it to "rain harder" and it would rain harder. But the visitors from Gaea were made to feel that there was something gauche about using the "manual overrides" on everything. The programmed, automatic way of everything was the best. The "manual overides" were there only in case of error in the automatic. But there were no errors.

"After all, we do have perfect weather," a Paleder person said. "Perfect weather is weather that is not noticed at all. Perfection is anything that passes absolutely without notice."

"I must disagree with that," Questor Shannon argued. "Perfect weather is that of which one might say 'Ah, this is a beautiful day!'. I can find no fault at all with your controlled and flawless weather of Paleder; but I am not impelled to cry out 'This is a beautiful day!'. I wonder why I'm not?"

There was the "hand-of-death" feeling on all things on Paleder. How to explain it? It was as if the people of Paleder had simply decided to stop living, their problems all being solved. And this decision to stop living was reflected in all their handiwork. Dead man stuff, yes. Puzzling.

"Both the impulse and the expression seem a little bit sticky to me," the Paleder person said in answer to Questor's "This is a beautiful day" thesis. "I am glad that our

flawless weather does not provoke such jejune outbursts."

Everything on Paleder was flawless. But was that the same thing as being perfect? Maybe. Was it the same thing as being excellent? Maybe. But there were surely some things that it was not. Perhaps it was not inspiring.

There was no impulse to revel in the flawlessness of things here on Paleder. Why then, on Gaea or most other worlds, was there often the impulse to revel and to hold high celebration for things that were hardly half this good?

The persons of Paleder traveled hardly at all. And this seemed unappreciative of them, since they could travel as much as they wanted, as far as they liked, as comfortably and as instantly as they wanted; and they could do it at no cost at all.

"Your 'Travel Tricks' are something on the line of our 'Instant Chutes', farther up on the same line," Bodicea Crag was saying to a Paleder adult. "And yours are, yes, flawless. Our device uses a staggering amount of power to transport just five of us only ten thousand meters in an instant. But a million times as many of you could go a million times that far with the consumption of hardly any energy. I notice though that you do not use (I get the impression that you have the feature but no longer employ it) the 'particular-excellence' factor in selecting destinations. For instance, we instructed our 'Instant Chute' to set us down at the 'nexus of the most intense intellectual activity' of this city. As it happened, the chute goofed and set us down we know not where. It failed or misunderstood, but, usually it succeeds with pleasant results. Now, you could have yourselves transported to 'the most pleasurable site and circumstance of this world, at this moment' You could always have the best of the best. Why don't you?"

"We do, but not by selection. To do that, we would have to accept the view that one thing is ever more pleasurable than another, that one thing is ever better than another. We don't accept that."

"You don't?" Jingo Blood asked in amazement. "But things have to be better or worse than others. Such differences are what makes the world go around.

"Not this world," the Paleder person said.

"You amaze me," Jingo pursued it. "Don't you believe that one thing may, be more interesting another, that one person may be wittier than another, that one hill may be higher than anonother, that one song may be more musical than another?"

"No, no," the Paleder person said. "We believed and acted on these things on our way up. But when we got, to the top, we saw it all more clearly, so we did away with the top. All these apparent differences are mere illusions, to be cast aside."

"Well, dammit, don't you, master illusionists that you are, believe that one illusion may be more illusory than another?" George Blood demanded in full voice.

"No, no," the person said. "We don't accept illusion even about illusions. On Paleder World, one hill may not be higher than another. We no longer have any hills or mountains. They caused elements of randomness in our world, so we did away with them."

"Did you really level your hills and mountains?" Questor asked in amazement.

"No, of course we didn't. That is to look at it backwards. We raised our plains. Everything on Paleder is at highest point. 'Highest and most equal' is our motto," the Paleder person said.

Food on Paleder was, well, flawless. And it was always locally sufficient. But would you ever cry out, in the midst of devouring some of it, "Hey, this is good!"? Well, why wouldn't you?

Most of the consummate technology of Paleder was invisible. And, according to the Paleder persons, this general invisibility of unnoticeability was the sure sign of perfection. It is only imperfect things that draw attention to themselves.

"How does that tail belong to this animal?" Jingo Blood wailed in sudden frustration early on their last day there. "What is the atrocious imbalance here all about anyhow?"

"My modified love, what are you talking about?" George Blood asked her.

"These citizens of Paleder, these possessors of the highest sophistry and equipment, they are a bunch of sleep-walkers! There is just no other word for them. What sort of animal is Paleder anyhow?"

"As you imply, jingo, it is the animal whose tail is its most interesting part," George Blood said.

By the "tail" of Paleder, the Quiz Ship people seemed to mean the weird children of that world. Oh, the strange children of Paleder, lurking and flickering and burning, and seldom to be seen straight off!

"These people have their world set up so that no one is permitted to be too cold or too hot" Jingo puzzled, "or too wet or too dry; so that no one is allowed to be hungry or in bad health; where no one -- this curdles me -- is allowed to be unhappy. No one is permitted to be worried or uneasy, or ill-clad or unintelligent. Isn't that exciting? No, it isn't. But why isn't it?"

"Well, these people here will answer us anything we ask," Bodicea said. "Let's ask them more questions then. Yeah, and come to more dead ends."

"With us, of course, there is no division between our psychology and our technology," was the nswer that one of the Paleder persons gave to an awkwardly-asked question. "You cannot have our technology without also having our psychology. You cannot have our attainments without being like us. Ours is not a technology for,conscious persons"

"It is not a technology for whom?" Manbreaker crackled. But the High Galactic word which the person used, "syneidos," "conscious," was unmistakable.

"The 'dragons' with us as with you, though you may not understand it of your own cultus, the 'dragons' are no more than aspects or alternate morpha of our own children. oh, yes, they are often the murderous aspects of our children. They are often solidly, though unnaturally, fleshed dragons. And they can be mean! The dragon and the child are always one. But the child, given a little timi time, will usually outgrow its dragon. Or, less frequently, the dragon will outgrow its child and will then become the viable form"

That is what another Paleder person said in answer to another awkwardly-phrased question from one of the Quiz Ship people. But the kid- dragons on Paleder were more often visible than Gaea.

"You say that we should control our children better? You say that our children should all be in bed by this hour of night? People of Gaea, we do control them, they are all in bed right now. I will wager that every child in Paleder City has been in his bed for two hours already tonight," said another Paleder person in answer to another set questions. "Ah, but you ask who then are those small and savage persons or creatures congregating murderously in the small parks and stalking so devilishly through the darkened streets? Oh, those are our same children, sleeping in their beds in one of their aspects, and ravening in the tangled night in another. Small children often have more than one aspect to them"

"I thought Questor said lamely, "that the 'dragons' were really only small rubber devices made by the children"

"There are many ways of looking at it. The little rubber dragons or monsters are entry points for most of them. They pass through them. They are the talismans or triggers. They are their conceptions of how they will look. And then they become those conceptions for a while."

"The reason we get such wraithy answers is that we ask all the wrong questions," Jingo Blood complained to her companions. "Well, on the one end we can only fight dragons with dragons. And on the other end we canonry seek the right questions to ask."

So they set up "Project Fight-Dragon-With-Dragon." They implemented it with what talent of that sort they could discover in themselves. And they found that talent to be quite abundant, once it started to flow.

And they asked more, and still more awkward, questions. But it was Bodicea Crag

(Queen Bodicea) who finally asked the key question.

"Are you people conscious?" she asked a group of Paleder people, and she was amazed at herself for asking it.

"No, of course not," one of those person said. "We are entirely too civilized for that. Consciousness is a short and awkward interval that many persons and many races pass through. Other persons and races, less fortunate than these, remain in the state of consciousness and do not pass through it. Another group, ourselves, are now able to avoid consciousness entirely in our adult forms. Centuries ago, we passed through it,as a race, We still pass through it as small children. But there is no reason for us to repeat that passage in our adult forms."

"If you are not conscious, then you are -- unconscious," Jingo Blood said as if pronouncing a great truth.

"That is the silliest attempt at logic that I have ever heard" a Paleder person said. "But how can we explain her silliness to a completely silly person? We are not conscious. We are not unconsious. We are post-conscious. And ours is a post-conscious world."

"If you are post-conscious, then you are not conscious that you are here talking to us" George Blood said. "You don't know that you are here. You don't know that we are here."

"No, we're not conscious of these things. We don't know that we're talking to you. But there's a 'pattern' on our world that responds to you correctly, through us, or in other ways. That saves us trouble."

"If you don't know that we're here, then we can insult you with impunity," Manbreaker Crag said with a big grin on his big face.

"You can try it," one of the Paleder persons said. "But our 'pattern' may react to your insults, either through ourselves or otherwise. When our 'patern' reacts, you can get hurt badly."

"Then all your vaunted technolog will serve only post-conscious persons," Questor Shannon said.

"Yes, our flawless technology will serve only flawless persons -- ourselves."

"Then you are no more than zombies!" Manbreaker chortled.

"No, we went through the zombie phase, in our race, a little while after we went through the conscious phase. But now we are post-zombie as as post-conscious. Really, now that we have arrived at our destination, we don't much care to remember the roads by which we arrived."

"Will you prevent, or try to prevent, our leaving Paleder World?" George Blood asked.

"No, we will not," one of those post-conscious persons answered. "But something may try to vent your leaving, perhaps the 'pattern,' perhaps the dragon-children."

The Quiz Ship persons withdrew from the post-conscious aggregation. It was late at night of the last (but they did not know that it would be the last) night of their visit to Paleder World.

"There's a psychological imbalance in all this," Jingo Blood said. "Becoming post-conscious is going to have a devastating kick-back through the whole psychic web. It has to be counter-balanced somewhere. What is it that must proceed from such an imbalance?"

"Nothing will proceed from it," George Blood said. "The kick will be a backward one. Nothing will follow. But, oh, what will go before! The seemly adults will throw it all back onto the childhood. The dragon-children are not post-conscious. They are conscious, and murderously pre-conscious. All the psychic lumber cast off by their fastidious parents comes clattering down upon them. It has to land on someone. What power, what twisted power those kids must have!"

So the Quiz Ship people concentrated all their energies on "Project Fight-Dragon-With-Dragon'

"Our 'Instant Chute' did not fail or misunderstand when we came down here," Jingo

said now. "The little quagmire park that seemed so large to us, it really was the nexus of the most intellectual activity in town. Wherever the morphic children are concentrating in their psychic monsterness, that will be the nexus of what intellectual activity there is here. Everywhere else, things are post-intense and post intellectual and post-active."

"Yes," George Blood agreed.

"They got rid of such a lot of clutter when they became post-people," Jingo went on, "and it all comes down upon their children."

"We have the picture now," Manbreaker blasted with his strong voice. "All their brains are in their tail now, and the tail has a murderous flick to it. Let's take the Chute and get to Quiz Ship as soon as possible. And let us get away from this world, The Chancel party got away. The Ambler party got away. A lot of the others must have failed. Let's make a break for it."

"We can try," Bodicea said. "Maybe we can get the ship loose."

"The midnight town was lively. And post-people do not usually indulge in night life very mucn. What was reveling through the town tonight were great numbers of monsters and dragons, and those small creatures who seemed to be human children and also to be tearing monsters. Fanged kids, poisonous kids, mean kids. Aye, and the damnable aspects of them!

Roving ghosts and ghost-animals. Flying foxes attaching with hollow, blood-sucking teeth. Swamp dragons. A sleek head on a very long neck came out of the slimy darkness and took three of Questor's fingers and part of the palm of his hand. This was the same flesh and bone that he had lost on their arrival. And Questor Shannon sniffled and whimpered and shook with the pain of it.

"The untinkable calm of the post-persons must be paid for in some more jittery coin," a pleasant dragon said. "It is paid for, or recompense is made for it, by this delirious chaos here in the undermind of this world. It is the children who compose the undermind now, and their creatures, and their creatures' creatures. It is the howling irrationality."

"Dragon," George Blood spoke dangeorusly, "you speak with my wife's voice. Have you devoured my wife?"

"Oh, it's myself, George," the dragon said in the voice of Jingo Blood. "The dragon and I are one. It's part of the 'Project Fight-Dragon-With-Dragon,' but it's a difficult projection when it's done consciously rather than unconsciously. I suspected, while I was still an undergraduate in psychology, that children of our own world were sometimes able to incarnate their dragons, but those one-in-ten-thousand cases of it were always explained away as something else. I can't do it very well yet. I notice that Bodicea is doing it a little better, but nor really well. And you other three are total busts.

"Oh, by the Great Clamminess, here comes that Glowering Glob again!"

It was much as it had been during that first minute after their arrival. The glob of clammy gloop, drafting in the low air, came upon them and swallowed them whole with its fetid breath. There were aerial snakes in that glob, and they struck out of it with paralyzing pain. There was the saturation of mental and emotional depression, the stark consternation and unbearalbe fearfulness and contradiciton. There was the dread. There was the fear of falling forever.

"No, no, no, no, I cannot go through this again," Manbreaker Crag yowled.

"Is is the end of it all, the dirty end of it," George Blood roared.

There were fer-de-lance snakes. There were swamp-dragons and jag-toothed monsters.

"I do hate a dragged-out death," Jingo keened as her dragonness slipped away from her. "Come quickly, end of it! oh, come quickly!"

"Be of stout hearts, Gaea guys, a little giffling dragon cried in a clear and boyish voice. "Some of us are with you. We're on your side."

They had heard that voice before.

But the Gaea people were being struck and gobbled and slashed. They were

drowning in hot, searing, vividly inhabited and attacking mud.

"I'm Glic," the clear, boyish voice sounded again. "I'm pleased to meet all of you."

"Oh Lord," Manbreaker moaned. "Is it the amenities that we meet again in this our final passion?"

"Voice of Glic, how did the people of the Chancel Expedition escape from this world?" Questor Shannon was imploring. "How did the people of the Ambler Expedition escape?"

"How would I know?" Glic's voice sang. "I'm just a little kid. Move it along though, folks! Don't block the concourse! We're going too. Some of us are going to get on Quiz Ship whether you make or not. We want loose from here."

But the Gaea people were being torn apart by tides and concussions. They were drowning in boiling mud, in boiling air. Then there was a horrible constriction. The were being forced through the suffocating gullet of the most dread dragon of them all. Yes, swallowed up.

"It's nothing but a psychic storm, people," said the boyish voice of Glic. "Don't they have them on Gaea too? Keep saying to yourselves 'This is fun, is is fun.' We might make it through and get loose."

Then they were through the gullet and into the very maw of the devouring dragon. And the maw heaved and launched. It was moving through space!

No, it was a dragon's maw only in a manner of speaking. The Chute had been a very tight gullet to go through, but it had been the Chute that swallowed them up. Now they were inside Quiz Ship and it was in acceleration away from Paleder World.

"We're loose, we're loose, And Paleder's the Goose," eight little dragons were chanting.

Little dragons or not, they were loose and in flight. Four of the Quiz Ship people were there. And there were nine dragons who had begun to shed their dragonness. Some of them were becoming approximately human children. One of the fastest-shedding of them was Glic, who was recognized by his voice.

"You sure are lucky we wanted to go with you, or you'd never have made it," Glic chirped. He was a red-headed little boy with a bit of dragon spirit still abiding in him.

"One of us is missing," Manbreaker Crag grumbled. "There are only four of us now and there supposed to be five. Does anybody know which of us is missing?"

Questor Shannon was at the controls of Quiz Ship now, though the only direction he was able to give it was "Away from here! Get us loose!"

Then they were loose, and Questor was singing a glum ditty, but his voice was a little more cheeful than usual:

"After the world is over,
After the minds are gone."

"It was a bust, of course," Jingo Blood was saying. "Their famed technology was wonderful, I suppose. But it was not wonderful for us. And it was not for export. "

"Oh, you are wrong, lady!" eight children with tatters of dragonness still clinging to them cried out.

"You are still sick from the psychic storm, people," Glic cried. "But look at the bright side -- us. I am here, and with me are seven companions more witty than myself. We know a lot of that technology, but we don't lock ourselves inside it. That's why we wanted loose from Paleder, so wouldn't become post-people too. They had become post-space-flight, and where would that leave an adventurous person like me? We know the gadgets and technologies, though. Eight brainfuls of technologies you're getting with us."

"One of us is missing," Manbreaker insisted. "Bodicea, which one of us is missing? Oh, it's Bodicea who isn't here."

"I'm here," she said.

"Bodicea, get out of that dragon suit!" Manbreaker roared.

"It isn't a dragon suit. It's me," she said. "I wasn't quite ready to grow up anyhow." Nevertheless, the dragoning was falling off her in big pieces, and soon it would be gone.

"We're just little kids," said a little girl who still had her hair full of dragon scales, "but we're insufferably smart on that technology already. We can't give you enough of it to turn you into post-people with everything completed, but we can sure give you enough to pop your eyes. I bet we can set all the Gaea guys to gaping with what we know."

It wasn't really too difficult to understand the Demotic or Low Galactic that the children spoke.

"We couldn't see any future in that post-people stuff we were supposed to grow into," another of them said, "but we look forward to life with backward people like you."

"I knew we'd stumble on the answer," the Empress Jingo guffawed. "'Creative Chaos' that was the answer."

"Thank you," Glic said. "You're lucky we met you."

## BEQUEST OF WINGS

"Do you have to play that damned wind-harp in here every evening?" Potter Firmholder complained to his skinny daughter.

"I don't, no. I'm not here every evening, dear Potter," the daughter Angela said. "You yourself say that I'm never here. Oh, Potter, I need seven hundred and twenty dollars for a pinion-pick for this harp. It does save the pinion bones, you know."

"Oh, Skinny Angel, you could get a gold pick for that," said Peggy Firmholder, her mother.

"Well, of course it will be gold," Angela said. "Should I have a pot-metal pick when all the other kids have gold ones?"

"You must think money grows in the clouds," Potter grumbled. "You young people have got to come down to Earth."

"Potter Firmholder, give the child the money!" Peggy said. "Everything has gone up."

"It's the things that have gone up unnaturally that disrupt me," Potter still complained. "Here, Angel, here's the money. I'm sorry I was cranky. What, off again? You'd better eat something before you go."

"I'll catch something on the wing," Angela said. She swept out with the wind-harp and the money, and it was plain that she was on her way to Cloudy Joe's Drug Store. Cloudy Joe had gold picks for wind-harps. He had 'wing-glo' wash. He had struts and canvas and tar, and white condor feathers, and pinion wires, and airplane glue; even food and drink and tapes and magazines, and cloud moss, and wax-bug candies, everything that one might want.

"I don't like her longing around Cloudy Joe's Drug Store so much," Potter Firmholder told his wife. "There's something a little bit wrong with that place."

"When you were that age, you hung around Ace Whizz-Bang's Tavern," Peggy said. "And, Potter, there was more than a little bit wrong with that place. Cloudy Joe's is a cult spot."

"So is Ace Whizz-Bang's," said Potter. Used to hang around Ace Whizz-Bang's? Potter still did. It was better than Cloudy Joe's Drug Store with all those high-flying young people crowding into it.

"I don't even know how Cloudy Joe's stays there," Potter said. "It's against all common-sense rules."

"Oh, Potter, I've explained it to you a dozen times, and so has Angela," Peggy said. "It's held up there by the new mathematics, by a Fortean Vector Value. Between the Euclidean and the Einsteinian universes there are thin intrusions known as the Fortean Universe. And Fortean Universe Vectors are strong enough to hold almost anything up, if

they don't have to hold it up too far. Yeah, that's the patter for it, but I don't know what holds such places up either. They weren't up there before people discovered those vector values. Would they fall down again if people forgot the vectors? Poor Angela's getting more and more fearful as the time runs out on all of it. They're allowed six weeks of it after full sprout, and the time's nearly up. Young people have a very hard time of it nowadays; the 'lightest and brightest' of them do anyhow."

"Bat-wings, bat-wings!" jeered Ace Whizz-Bang as some of the Bat-Wing gang swooped by his front door. "Do you knew, 'Mealyous, bat wings used to be cited against the old Natural Selection theory?" (They called Potter Firmholder 'Mealyous at Ace Whizz-Bang's and at other places.) "For a great evolutionary change to come about, it was argued, there had to be some advantage offered at every step on the wiy to that change, or how would the change be carried through? But where was the every-step advantage when a mousey rodent was growing wings and turning into a bat? Where was the advantage during those several million years when the changing thing wasn't wing enough to fly with and was too elongated and spread in the fingers to be used as a hand or a foot or a claw? It couldn't be walked on. It couldn't be manipulated. It couldn't be flown with. Why have it for a million years then? But now the main arguments against Natural Selection are that it didn't happen, and that there just isn't time to wait for it in a busy world."

"And the main arguments against Sudden Mutation are that it does happen, and that there just isn't time to get used to it even in a fast-moving world," 'Mealyous Firmholder said. "It's hard on the young people, the high-flyers of them, and it's hard on their parents too. It was once said that the great menance hanging over mankind was the mushroom cloud. I suppose that wasn't true, since nobody really paid any attention to it. But now the greatest menace hanging over these lightest and brightest of the young people is the bolt-cutter. And they just can't avoid paying attention to it."

"Aye, they live on the sky-brink for a while, and then they fall off it," Ace Whizz-Bang said. "I was too old for it. It hadn't appeared yet in my youth (Oh, I guess there were a few dozen or so cases in California), so my youth had to be complicated by lesser things. Even today you will seldom see a 'stubby' who's more than twenty-eight or thirty years old. And the older uncropped ones are still younger than that. They get ungainly and crash-prone and they die within five years of their escaping the bolt-cutter. Now even the flyers say that they're not supposed to escape it. They say that their failures are bringing the full thing nearer every day."

"It's easy enough to set them down as trivial and flighty," Firmholder said. "Of course they are. They are young and ignorant, and extravagant in their views. But they seem to have a genuinely beau- tiful and thrilling mystique."

"Fragile though," Whiz-Bang said. "It's pathetic really. And it'll be traumatic to them in later life likely, though none of the afflicted ones have had a later life yet. There's only two things we can do about it. We can live with the sorrowful situation, or we can destroy the 'lightest and brightest' of the children as soon as they can be spotted."

"They're hard to spot before they're about fifteen years old and start to sprout," Firmholder said. "And a person rather hates to kill his fifteen year old son or daughter, whatever the logic of the situation."

"Nah, that wouldn't bother me much" Ace Whizz-Bang said. "A bunch of pupa-stage punks is what they are. One good thing about it all, though, you can really make bar glasses shine with that 'wing-glo' wash they've brought out."

Well, Angola Firinholder grew pale and wait during the crisis weeks.

"Aren't you rather overdoing the 'touch of death' role, Angie," her father tried to josh her once, to lift her out of her sadness. But Angola burst into tears and flew off.

"You shouldn't have said that, Potter," Peggy told him. "It's so terrible a thing for children of that age."

"Oh, I know it, I know it, Peg. I was just trying to jolly her a little bit, When we were young people, we were motorcycle nuts, and we loved the speed and noise. Now they go much faster, but they're not half as noisy about it."

"It must be horrible to be clipped," Peggy said, "and to be a 'stubby' and a 'hubby' for the rest of one's short life. They have to continue in such clumsiness of hands with only a little improvement. And they lose their beauty of voice and are adept at so few things. And it's only the lightest and the brightest who are afflicted so far. All their lives they will seem awkward, even to those more awkward and slow-witted ones who never were light and bright."

"I still wish that she wouldn't hang around Cloudy Joe's Drug Store so much."

"Leave it alone, Potter, and leave her alone. Cloudy Joe's is a cult place, and their cult is all they have to sustain them during the metamorphical horror."

"Well, I wish she'd agree to have it done in a hospital where it's clean."

"No, Potter, no. That would be uncult."

Those lightest and brightest of the young poeple did have remakably beautiful voices during the weeks of their affliction. And the wind-harps that they played upon had a full and gusty sound. The cult songs that they sang had trivial words and times, but their renditions were superb. It was like honey from Heaven when those sounds drifted down. They were airy songs, sky songs, soaring songs, pinnacle songs. There was a complexity to their music that wasn't to be found in even the worst of the Rocks and Grocks.

The 'brightest' liked to perch on high pinnacles, on towers, on spires, on eagle cliffs. They held their bright and sparkling congresses in these places and in places even higher, such as Cloudy Joe's Drug Store on its Fortean sky-lodge.

A 'flight' of young people was mutually supporting in the terrible spiritual and physical crisis that the members were passing through. Whatever shame was in their condition was at least shared shame for members of a flight. Most of the suicides of the 'brightest' young people were of lone eagles, not of 'flight' members.

Together, the shame of eating insects and cicadas, and even small birds caught on the wing, was a mitigated shame. The appetite for these things was as relentless as it was sudden. Eat them they must, and it was better that they eat them together.

The physical clumsiness of the brightest could not be overcome singly, but in group it could be partly overcome. No afflicted person could bring his own fingers together, could bring his two hands together. But two persons might bring their now elongated thumbs together for manipulation or handling, or might bring the knobs of their pinion bones together. Tools were devised (the pinion-pick for playing the wind-harp was only one of them) to slip over the ends of pinion bones in order to push or hook or grasp.

Working together, the young people could assemble bat-wings out of struts and canvas plastered with tar, or bird-wings out of plasti-hedelion fibre and feathers. It didn't take very much manufactured equipment, slipped over newly deformed hands and arms and shoulders, to achieve conquest of the unaccustomed environment. There was cult culture in this, cult music, achingly close cult friendships and companionsliips, courtships that were almost magic, and exaltation in the higher air.

There came an incredible chestiness to the young men of the afflicted cults, and an incredible breastiness to the young women. The wing-beat muscles had developed superbly. And so had the winged voices. Their song was absolutely extraordinary, as was the orchestration of their wind-harps. Sheet music for most of this superb body of melody can be had at Cloudy Joe's Drug Store, and at other such places around the world. There is one of them in every sky.

Angela Firmholder was at one of those 'high-places' in the twilight meeting with other young and soaring personalities who mide up her 'flight'. Carolyn Bushbaby, Rod Murdock, Peter King-feather, Alice Tombigbee, Clyde Boggles, Hester Hilltop! They were fellow adventurers in the furthest biological adventure since the primordial clay stretched itself and

breathed. They were companions of Air and Earth. They were friends and lovers. Ah, soaring and swooping in the early darkness! It was poignant that it could last only six weeks.

"It is a damnable, contagious, crippling arthritis, and it is no other thing," Doctor Hexbird had written in Today's Future. "It strikes only adolescents of a highly sensitive and a highly talented nature. The 'Lightest and Brightest' designation is as much truth as poetry, but it is a tragic truth. It is the flower of the younger generation that is stricken with this dreaded and painful, and sometimes fatal sickness.

"The fingers and hands become so elongated and splayed that they can no longer be used for human hands. They cannot grasp, they cannot manipulate. It would almost be better if the hands were chopped off completely. What must be chopped off, however, are two outlaw growths on each side, two very long bone spurs call the greater and lesser pinion bones. These new spur-bones change the whole deportment of the victim; this is the reason that they must be removed after they have become hard bone. They can be cut with bone-saws, but in unapproved and cultic operations they are cut with bolt-cutters. Then these bones must be pulled out of the flesh for their entire length. This bloody laying-open of breast and shoulders and neck and arms and back to get the long bones out is a traumatic horror. The thirty per cent mortality in these cultic operations is outrageous.

"After the two giant bone-spurs are removed, the pain of the unusual arthritis will often disappear. There is no way that the length of hand and finger bones can be reduced, but the hands can regain a slight bit of their agility. They can never be fully human hands after such a deformity, but they can be used a little bit.

"When the two pinion-spurs have come to their full length, and just before they must be removed, it is possible for the victims, by the use of a few slight strut-like and wing-like attachments, to fly."

"We might expect even a sudden mutation, if so far-reaching as this (a flightless species acquiring flight) to take from three million to twelve million years. Now that we are actually observing it, we find that the period is much shorter than that. The whole cycle is about sixty days in the individual; possibly it will be sixty years in the species (this to include second-stage and third-stage development also). It has come too swiftly for the individual or group personality to adjust to it fully as yet. There are cases of unhappiness and death. And the physical retreat from its implications (the retreat should disappear in the second or third stage of the mutation) is incomplete and unpleasant and very often fatal.

"Why do the 'lightest and brightest' of these mutated flyers accept the cropping of their wings and their frequent deaths? They accept it because it is necessary for the mutation. The complete flyers will not descend physically from these 'brightest'. These will not have any descent. And yet the mutation could not be completed without their trail-blazing and destruction. There is a biological imperative here, but its mechanism is still not clear.

"Ah, it is a great privilege to live in the time of an actual, major, rapid mtitatioil." So wrote Dr. Rudolph Redstern in Tomorrow's Flight.

"With cloud-grown mosses for my bed,
And wax-bug candles at my head."

That was part of the instructions that Angela Firmholder wrote for her parents, in case of her death. And she added an explanation in prose:

"The cloud-moss may be had in thirty kilo bales (one bale of it will make up into a nice death-bed) at Cloudy Joe's Drug Store, for fifty dollars a kilo. it is the real moss that grows on the shady side of clouds, and it is the softest moss there is.

"The wax candles are to made from the waxen insects that we catch and eat in flight. Some of the more enterprising people catch them against their own deaths, and to sell. I have been a lazy flyer and I did not provide for myself, so you must buy them. I want three of

these wax candles, from fat-bugs, from wax-bugs, and from rush-bugs. They are for sale at Cloudy joe's Drug Store for six hundred dollars a candle. I know that you will not begrudge me these for my last rites.

"I expect to die from the clipping. I don't much want to live on as a 'stuby' or a 'nubby', but I will if that is ordained for me. The clipping is the case and the law now. Soon there will be other cases and other laws. The big thing is almost here, and the destruction of a few of us early flyers prepares the way for it. In half a century all the people will fly, without device and without shame, and without pain or tortuous effort.

"Rod Murdock, who is my first sky-companion, will clip my pinion bones with the ritual bolt cutters. Then all the members of my flight will lay me over and remove these newest of bones, the pinions. And then a new member will take my place in the'flight'. Then I will be brought here, for the death of a flyer, or for the life of a 'nubby'. But I will not be ashamed in any case.

"People will not need hands when they are grown to full flight and to full flight custom. We will not need anything manufactured, not even wind-harps. When the days of fullness arrive, our distal feathers will sound like wind-harps."

"What I think," said Ace Whizz-Bang, "is that before the end of this century there will be two kinds of people. The 'lightest and the brightest' will have become bird-people complete. I say, let them go. Let them become birds. To me, there was always something a little bit too-much about those lightest and brightest anyhow.

"And the other kind of people will be ourselves, the old people. We will be somewhat improved by getting rid of the flighty element in ourselves, and we will be ready to tackle another million years of it. Say, 'Mealy, there's six of those flying kids coming down over your house right now, and it looks like they're carrying your daughter between them. Was this the day she was supposed to be cropped?"

"This was the day, Whizz-Bang. Oh, my poor skinny Angela!" Firmholder cried, and he hurried the half block to his home.

"Potter Famealyous Firmholder," said loving wife Peggy. "They're bringing her in now. Is she not beautiful?"

"Beautiful," breathed Potter. "Oh, the poor creature!"

The young 'flight' people brought Angela down and laid her on the cloud-moss bed. She was white with fright and pain, and red with blood. But she smiled.

Somebody brought a display of pinnacle roses from Cloudy Joe's Drug Store. Somebody lit the wax-bug candles.

"Oh, my poor skinny angel," Peggy Firmholder mourned her daughter.

There was a musical tone of distal feathers ruffling in the wind of a long swoop downwards. They sounded ever so much like wind-harps.

"Oh, how cult!" cried Peggy.

??