

## CONTENTS

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[SOMETHING GREEN](#)

[CRISIS, 1999](#)

[PI IN THE SKY](#)

[KNOCK](#)

[ALL GOOD BEMS](#)

[DAYMARE](#)

[NOTHING SIRIUS](#)

[STAR MOUSE](#)

[COME AND GO MAD](#)

## MEET

McGARRY, who lost thirty years and would settle for a woman—even a green one.

BELA JOAD, who learned how to beat the lie-detector—once and for all.

ROGER PHLUTTER, when he spots the first run-away star that made Pimlico look like a flea race.

WALTER PHELAN, who found out it wasn't so bad being the last man on earth when the knock came at the door ...

ELMO SCOTT, a writer with bems on the brain.

LIEUT. ROD CAQUER, who learns that a simple case of murder is not always a simple case of ...

CAPT. WHERRY, who would laugh at a broken crutch.

MITKEY, the mouse with a German accent.

GEORGE VINE, is he mad, or is it—you ?

## SPACE ON MY HANDS

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**DEDICATION  
TO SAM MERWIN, JR**

## **SPACE ON MY HANDS**

### Introduction

AS I SIT DOWN at the Smith-Corona to write an introduction to this collection of stories, the first thing that comes to my mind is the question: "Why write an introduction at all?" None of these tales is conventional enough to feel in the least slighted if someone reads it without having been formally introduced to it. Yes, definitely I have failed in what I tried to do in writing these stories if even one of them turns out to be stuffy enough to want to know your name and murmur politely that it is pleased to meet you before it wants to be read.

So why, then, am I writing this? Why does any writer—unless he has a serious message that he's afraid you might miss and he wishes to point it out to you—write an introduction to a book? I'll let the cat out of the bag; it's because the publisher of the book, avid for a bit of extra wordage free, has put him on the spot by telling him an introduction is necessary. So the writer wastes an evening that could be much better spent in any of the more pleasant ways in which an evening can be spent, such as—but why go into that? I could be doing one of those pleasant things right now.

You see, since I've been hornswoggled into writing this introduction anyway, I'm going to be honest. I'm going to admit that I hate writing—introductions, stories, novels, letters or postcards. None of these stories was written because I enjoyed writing it—much as I may have enjoyed having written it, once it was out of the typewriter and in the mail.

But this I must also confess: Science-fiction stories are the least painful of all stories for me to write, and when I have put THE END on the final page of one, I feel greater satisfaction than with any other kind of story. Possibly a factor in this is that I've written relatively few science-fiction stories compared to mystery and detective stories, but I don't think that's too much of a factor. The important reason is that science-fiction, by giving greater scope to the imagination and by imposing fewer rules and limitations, comes closer than any other type of fiction to being honest writing.

The science-fiction writer has the privilege denied to writers in all other fields, except sheer fantasy, to tailor his background, his universe, to the story he wants to write; he can, thereby, achieve an integration and an integrity denied the writer who has only one universe to work in and who must twist and trim the products of his imagination to fit the inflexible mold of fact. A horrid word, fact, when it denies you the future and the stars.

Big words, I notice now, for such small tales. But I'm glad that I wrote them because, until I did, I didn't realize how true they are. I apologize, Shasta; I'm glad now that you made me write them; I take back my snide remarks

I shall, in repentance, write an introduction after all:

Reader, meet stories; meet the mouse who missed the moon; meet the Bems who came to the aid of the party; meet the man who fell in love with the thought projection of a cockroach; meet the detective in

the inconspicuous bright red suit; meet the ostrich in the polka-dot necktie and meet the spaceship in the sandwich and the chicken who couldn't talk.

And may you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed cashing the checks for them!

FREDRIC BROWN

Taos, N. M.

4 January 1951

something green

THE big sun was crimson in a violet sky. At the edge of the brown plain, dotted with brown bushes, lay the red jungle.

McGarry strode toward it. It was tough work and dangerous work, searching in those red jungles, but it had to be done. And he'd searched a thousand of them; this was just one more.

He said, "Here we go, Dorothy. All set?"

The little five-limbed creature that rested on his shoulder didn't answer, but then it never did. It couldn't talk, but it was something to talk to. It was company. In size and weight it felt amazingly like a hand resting on his shoulder.

He'd had Dorothy for . . . How long? At a guess, four years. He'd been here about five, as nearly as he could reckon it, and it had been about a year before he'd found her. Anyway, he assumed Dorothy was of the gentler sex, if for no other reason than the gentle way she rested on his shoulder, like a woman's hand.

"Dorothy," he said, "reckon we'd better get ready for trouble. Might be lions or tigers in there."

He unbuckled his sol-gun holster and let his hand rest on the butt of the weapon, ready to draw it quickly. For the thousandth time, at least, he thanked his lucky stars that the weapon he'd managed to salvage from the wreckage of his spacer had been a sol-gun, the one and only weapon that worked practically forever without refills or ammunition. A sol-gun merely needed exposure to the rays of a sun—any bright and close sun—for an hour or two a day; it soaked up energy. And, when you pulled the trigger, it dished it out. With any weapon but a sol-gun, he'd never have lasted five years here on Kruger III.

Yes, even before he quite reached the edge of the red jungle, he saw a lion. Nothing like any lion ever seen on Earth, of course. This one was bright magenta, just enough different in color from the purplish bushes it crouched behind so that he could see it. It had eight legs, all jointless and as supple and strong as an elephant's trunk, and a scaly head with a bill like a toucan's.

McGarry called it a lion. He had as much right to call it that as anything else, because it had never been named. Or if it had, the namer had never returned to Earth to report on the flora and fauna of Kruger III. Only one spacer had ever landed here before McGarry's, as far as the records showed, and it had never taken off again. He was looking for it now; he'd been looking for it systematically for the five years he'd been here.

If he found it, it might—just barely might—contain, intact, some of the electronic tubes which had been smashed in the crash landing of his own spacer. And if it did, he could get back to Earth.

He stopped ten paces short of the edge of the red jungle and aimed the sol-gun at the bushes behind which the lion crouched. He pulled the trigger, and there was a bright green flash, brief but beautiful—oh, so beautiful—and then the bushes weren't there any more, nor was the eight-legged lion.

McGarry chuckled softly. "Did you see that, Dorothy? That was *green*, the one color you don't have on this bloody red planet of yours. The most beautiful color in the universe, Dorothy. *Green!* And I know where there's a world that's mostly green, and we're going to get there, you and I. Sure we are. It's the world I came from, and it's the most beautiful place there is, Dorothy. You'll love it."

He turned and looked back over the brown plain with brown bushes, the violet sky above, the crimson sun. The eternally crimson sun Kruger, the sun that never set on the day side of this planet, which always faced it as one side of Earth's moon always faces Earth.

No day and night—unless one passed the shadow line into the night side, which was too freezingly cold to sustain life. No seasons. A uniform, never-changing temperature, no wind, no storms.

He thought for the thousandth—or the millionth—time that it wouldn't be a bad planet to live on, if only it were green like Earth, if only there was something green upon it besides the occasional flash of his sol-gun. Breathable atmosphere, moderate temperature—ranging from about forty Fahrenheit near the shadow line to about ninety at the point directly under the red sun, where its rays were straight instead of slanting. Plenty of food, and he'd learned long ago which plants and animals were, for him, edible, and which made him ill. Nothing he'd tried was poisonous.

Yes, a wonderful world. He'd even got used, by now, to the solitude of being the only intelligent creature on it. Dorothy was helpful, there. Something to talk to, even if she didn't talk back.

Except—Oh, God—he wanted to see a green world again.

Earth, the only planet in the universe where green was the predominant color, where plant life was based on chlorophyll.

Other planets, even in the solar system, Earth's neighbors, had no more to offer than greenish streaks in rare rocks, an occasional tiny life-form of a shade that might be brownish green if you wanted to call it that. Why, you could live years on any planet but Earth, anywhere in the system, and never see green.

McGarry sighed. He'd been thinking to himself, but now he thought out loud, to Dorothy, continuing his thoughts without a break. It didn't matter to Dorothy. "Yes, Dorothy," he said, "it's the only planet worth living on—Earth! Green fields, grassy lawns, green trees. Dorothy, I'll never leave it again, once I get back there, I'll build me a shack out in the woods, in the middle of trees, but not trees so thick that grass doesn't grow under them. *Green* grass. I'll paint the shack green, Dorothy. We've even got green pigments back on Earth."

He sighed and looked at the red jungle ahead of him.

"What's that you asked, Dorothy?" She hadn't asked anything but it was a game to pretend that she talked back. A game that helped him to keep sane. "Will I get married when I get back? Is that what you asked?"

He gave it consideration. "Well, it's like this, Dorothy. Maybe and maybe not. You were named after a woman back on Earth, you know. A woman I was going to marry. But five years is a long time, Dorothy. I've been reported missing and presumed dead. I doubt if she's waited this long. If she has, well, yes, I'll marry her, Dorothy."

"Did you ask, what if she hasn't? Well, I don't know. Let's not worry about that till we get back, huh? Of course, if I could find a woman who was *green*, or even one with green hair, I'd love her to pieces. But on Earth, almost everything is *green* except the women."

He chuckled at that and, sol-gun ready, went on into the jungle, the red jungle that had nothing green except the occasional flash of his sol-gun.

Funny about that. Back on Earth a sol-gun flashed blue. Here under a red sun it flashed green when he fired it. But the explanation was simple enough. A sol-gun drew energy from a nearby star and the flash it made when fired was the complementary color of its source of energy. Drawing energy from Sol, a yellow sun, it flashed blue. From Kruger, a red sun, green.

Maybe that, he thought, had been the one thing, aside from Dorothy's company, that had kept him sane. A flash of green several times a day. Something green to remind him what the color was. To keep his eye attuned to it, if he ever saw it again.

It turned out to be a small patch of jungle, as patches went on Kruger III. One of what seemed countless millions of such patches. And maybe it really was millions; Kruger III was larger than Jupiter. Actually it might take more than a lifetime to cover it all. He knew that, but he didn't let himself think about it. It might be bad if he once let himself doubt that he would ever find the wreckage of the only ship that had ever preceded him here. Or if he let himself doubt that, once he found the ship, he would find the parts he needed to make his own spacer operative again.

This patch of jungle was a mile square but it was so dense that he had to sleep once and eat several times before he had finished it. He killed two more lions and one tiger. And when he had finished, he walked around the circumference of it, blazing each of the largest of the trees along the outer rim so he

wouldn't repeat by searching this particular jungle again. The trees were soft; his pocket knife took off the red bark down to the pink core as easily as it would have taken the skin off a potato.

Then out across the dull brown plain again.

"Not that one, Dorothy. Maybe the next. The one over there, just on the horizon. Maybe it's there."

Violet sky, red sun, brown plain, brown bushes

"The green hills of Earth, Dorothy. Oh how you'll love them—"

The brown endless plain.

The never-changing violet sky.

Was there a sound up there? There couldn't be. There never had been. But he looked up, and saw it.

*A tiny black speck high in the violet. Moving. A spacer. It had to be a spacer. There were no birds on Kruger III. And birds didn't trail jets of fire behind them—*

He knew what to do; he'd thought of it a million times, how he could signal a spacer if one ever came in sight. He yanked his sol-gun from the holster, aimed it straight in the violet air, and pulled the trigger. It didn't make a big flash, from the distance of the spacer, but it made a *green* flash. If the pilot were only looking, or if he would only look before he got out of sight, he couldn't miss a green flash on a world with no other green.

He pulled the trigger again.

And the pilot of the spacer *saw*. He cut and fired his jets three times—the standard answer to a signal of distress—and began to circle.

McGarry stood there trembling. So long a wait, and so sudden an end to it. He put his hand on his left shoulder and touched the little five-legged pet that felt, to his fingers as well as to his naked shoulder, so like a woman's hand.

"Dorothy," he said. "It's—" He ran out of words.

The spacer was circling in for a landing now. McGarry looked down at himself, suddenly ashamed at the way he would look to his rescuer. His body was naked except for the belt that held his holster and from which dangled his knife and a few other tools. He was dirty and he probably smelled. And under the dirt his body looked thin and wasted, almost old; but that was due, of course, to diet deficiencies; a few months of proper food—Earth food—would take care of that.

*Earth! The green hills of Earth!*

He ran now, stumbling sometimes in his eagerness, toward the point where he saw the spacer landing. It was low now, and he could see that it was a one-man job, as his had been. But that was all right; a one-man spacer can carry two in an emergency, at least as far as the nearest habitated planet where he could get other transportation back to Earth. To the green hills, the green fields, the green valleys

He prayed a little and swore a little as he ran. There were tears running down his cheeks.

He was there, waiting, as the door opened and a tall slender young man in the uniform of the Space Patrol stepped out

"*You'll take me back?*"

"Of course," said the young man. "Been here long?"

"Five years!" McGarry knew he was crying now, but he couldn't stop.

"Good Lord!" said the young man. "I'm Lieutenant Archer, Space Patrol. Of course I'll take you back, man. We'll leave as soon as my jets cool enough for a take-off. I'll take you as far as Carthage, on Aldebaran II, anyway; you can get a ship out of there for anywhere. Need anything right away? Food? Water?"

McGarry shook his head dumbly. His knees felt weak. Food, water—what did such things matter now?

The green hills of Earth! He was going back to them. *That* was what mattered, and all that mattered. So long a wait, so sudden an ending. He saw the violet sky suddenly swimming then it went black as his knees buckled under him.

He was lying flat and the young man was holding a flask to his lips and he took a long draught of the fiery stuff it held. He sat up and felt better. He looked to make sure that the spacer was still there and he

felt wonderful.

The young man said, "Buck up, old timer; we'll be off in half an hour. You'll be in Carthage in six hours. Want to talk, till you get your bearing again? Want to tell me all about it, everything that's happened?"

They sat in the shadow of a brown bush, and McGarry told him about it. Everything about it. The landing, his ship smashed past repair. The five-year search for the other ship he'd read had crashed on the same planet and which might have intact the parts he needed to repair his own ship. The long search. About Dorothy, perched on his shoulder, and how she'd been something to talk to.

But, somehow, the face of Lieutenant Archer was changing as McGarry talked. It grew even more solemn, even more compassionate.

"Old-timer," Archer said gently, "what year was it when you came here?"

McGarry saw it coming. How can you keep track of time on a planet whose sun and seasons are unchanging? A planet of eternal day, eternal summer.

He said flatly, "I came here in forty-two. How much have I misjudged, Lieutenant? How old am I—instead of thirty, as I've thought?"

"It's twenty-two seventy-two, McGarry. You came here thirty years ago. You're fifty-five. But don't let that worry you too much. Medical science has advanced. You've still got a long time to live."

McGarry said it softly. "Fifty-five. Thirty years."

Lieutenant Archer looked at him pityingly. He said, "Old-timer, do you want it all in a lump, all the rest of the bad news? There are several items of it. I'm no psychologist, but I think maybe it's best for you to take it now, all at once, while you can throw in the scale against it the fact that you're going back. Can you take it, McGarry?"

There couldn't be anything worse than he'd learned already—the fact that thirty years of his life had been wasted here. Sure, he could take the rest of it—as long as he was getting back to Earth, green Earth.

He stared up at the violet sky, the red sun, the brown plain. He said quietly, "I can take it, Lieutenant. Dish it out."

"You've done wonderfully for thirty years, McGarry. You can thank God for the fact that you believed Marley's spacer crashed on Kruger III. It wasn't Kruger III; it was Kruger IV. You'd never have found it here, but the search, as you say, kept you—reasonably sane." He paused a moment. His voice was gentle when he spoke again. "There isn't anything on your shoulder, McGarry. This Dorothy has been a figment of your imagination. But don't worry about it; that particular delusion has probably kept you from cracking up completely."

Slowly McGarry put his hand to his left shoulder. It touched—his shoulder. Nothing else.

Archer said, "My God, man, it's marvelous that you're *otherwise* okay. Thirty years alone; it's almost a miracle. And if your one delusion persists, now that I've told you it is a delusion, a psychiatrist back at Carthage or on Mars can fix you up in a jiffy."

McGarry said dully, "It doesn't persist. It isn't there now. I—I'm not even sure, Lieutenant, that I ever did believe in Dorothy. I think I made her up on purpose, to talk to, so I'd remain sane except for that. She was—she was like a woman's hand, Lieutenant. Or did I tell you that?"

"You told me. Want the rest of it now, McGarry?"

McGarry stared at him. "The rest of it? What rest can there be? I'm fifty-five instead of thirty. I've spent thirty years—since I was twenty-five—hunting for a spacer I'd never have found because it was on another planet. I've been crazy—in one way, but only one—most of that time. But none of that matters, now that I can go back to Earth."

Lieutenant Archer was shaking his head slowly. "Not back to Earth, old-timer. To Mars, if you wish, the beautiful brown and yellow hills of Mars. Or, if you don't mind heat, to purple Venus. But not to Earth, old-timer. Nobody lives there now."

"Earth—is—gone? I don't—"

"Not gone, McGarry. It's there. But it's black and barren, a charred ball. The war with the Arcturians, twenty years ago. They struck first, and got Earth. We got them, we won, we exterminated

them, but Earth was gone before we started. I'm sorry, old-timer, but you'll have to settle for somewhere else."

McGarry said, "No Earth." There was no expression in his voice. No expression at all.

Archer said, "That's it, old-timer. But Mars isn't so bad. You'll get used to it. It's the center of the solar system now, and there are four billion Earthmen on it. You'll miss the green of Earth, sure, but it's not so bad."

McGarry said, "No Earth." There was no expression in his voice. No expression at all.

Archer nodded. "Glad you can take it that way, old-timer. It must be rather a jolt. Well, I guess we can get going. The tubes ought to have cooled by now. I'll check and make sure."

He stood up and started toward the little spacer.

McGarry's sol-gun came out of its holster. McGarry shot him, and Lieutenant Archer wasn't there any more. McGarry stood up and walked over to the little spacer. He aimed the sol-gun at it and pulled the trigger. Part of the spacer was gone. Half a dozen shots and it was completely gone. Little atoms that had been the spacer and little atoms that had been Lieutenant Archer of the Space Patrol may have danced in the air, but they were invisible.

McGarry put the gun back into its holster and started walking toward the red splotch of jungle on the far horizon.

He put his hand up to his shoulder and touched Dorothy and she was there, as she'd been there for four of the five years he'd been on Kruger III. She felt, to his fingers and to his shoulder, like a woman's hand.

He said, "Don't worry, Dorothy. We'll find it. Maybe this is the jungle it landed in. And when we find it—"

He was near the edge of the jungle now, the red jungle, and a tiger came running out to meet him and eat him. A mauve tiger with six legs and a head like a barrel. McGarry aimed his sol-gun and pulled the trigger, and there was a bright green flash, brief but beautiful—oh, so beautiful—and then the tiger wasn't there any more.

McGarry chuckled softly. "Did you see that, Dorothy? That was green, the color there isn't any of on any planet but the one we're going to. The most beautiful color in the universe, Dorothy. Green! And I know where there's a world that's mostly green, the only one that is, and we're going there. It's the most beautiful place in the universe, Dorothy, and it's the world I came from. You'll love it."

She said, "I know I will, Mac." Her low, throaty voice was familiar to him. It was not odd that she had answered him; she had always answered him. Her voice was as familiar as his own. He reached up and touched her, resting on his naked shoulder. She felt like a woman's hand.

He turned and looked back over the brown plain studded with brown bushes, the violet sky above, the crimson sun. He laughed at it. Not a mad laugh, a gentle one. It didn't matter because soon he'd find the spacer he was looking for and in it the parts that would repair his own spacer so he could go back to Earth.

To the green hills, the green valleys, the green fields.

Once more he patted the hand upon his shoulder and then turned back. Gun at ready, he entered the red jungle.

crisis, 1999

THE little man with the sparse gray hair and the inconspicuous bright red suit stopped on the corner of State and Randolph to buy a micronews, a Chicago *Sun-Tribune* of March 21st, 1999. Nobody noticed him as he walked into the corner superdrug and took a vacant booth. He dropped a quarter into the coffee-slot and while the conveyor brought him his coffee, he glanced at the headlines on the tiny three-by-four-inch page. His eyes were unusually keen; he could read those headlines easily without artificial aid. But nothing on the first page or the second interested him; they concerned international matters, the third Venus rocket, and the latest depressing report of the ninth moon expedition. But on page three there were two stories concerning crime, and he took a tiny micrographer from his pocket and

adjusted it to read the stories while he drank his coffee.

Bela Joad was the little man's name. His right name, that is; he'd gone by so many names in so many places that only a phenomenal memory could have kept track of them all, but he had a phenomenal memory. None of those names had ever appeared in print, nor had his face or voice ever been seen or heard on the ubiquitous video. Fewer than a score of people, all of them top officials in various police bureaus, knew that Bela Joad was the greatest detective in the world.

He was not an employee of any police department, drew no salary nor expense money, and collected no rewards. It may have been that he had private means and indulged in the detection of criminals as a hobby. It may equally have been that he preyed upon the underworld as he fought it, that he made criminals support his campaign against them. Whichever was the case, he worked for no one; he worked against crime. When a major crime or a series of major crimes interested him, he would work on it, sometimes consulting beforehand with the chief of police of the city involved, sometimes working without the chief's knowledge until he would appear in the chief's office and present him with the evidence that would enable him to make an arrest and obtain a conviction.

He himself had never testified, or even appeared, in a courtroom. And while he knew every important underworld character in a dozen cities, no member of the underworld knew him, except fleetingly, under some transient identity which he seldom resumed.

Now, over his morning coffee, Bela Joad read through his micrographer the two stories in the *Sun-Tribune* which had interested him. One concerned a case that had been one of his few failures, the disappearance—possibly the kidnapping—of Dr. Ernst Chappel, professor of criminology at Columbia University. The headline read NEW LEAD IN CHAPPEL CASE, but a careful reading of the story showed the detective that the lead was new only to the newspapers; he himself had followed it into a blind alley two years ago, just after Chappel had vanished. The other story revealed that one Paul (Gyp) Girard had yesterday been acquitted of the slaying of his rival for control of North Chicago gambling. Joad read that one carefully indeed. Just six hours before, seated in a beergarten in New Berlin, Western Germany, he had heard the news of that acquittal on the video, without details. He had immediately taken the first stratoplane to Chicago.

When he had finished with the micronews, he touched the button of his wrist model timeradio, which automatically attuned itself to the nearest timestation, and it said, just loudly enough for him to hear "Nine-oh-four." Chief Dyer Rand would be in his office, then.

Nobody noticed him as he left the superdrug. Nobody noticed him as he walked with the morning crowds along Randolph to the big, new Municipal Building at the corner of Clark. Chief Rand's secretary sent in his name—not his real one, but one Rand would recognize—without giving him a second glance.

Chief Rand shook hands across the desk and then pressed the intercom button that flashed a blue not-to-be-disturbed signal to his secretary. He leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers across the conservatively small (one inch) squares of his mauve and yellow shirt. He said, "You heard about Gyp Girard being acquitted?"

"That's why I'm here."

Rand pushed his lips out and pulled them in again. He said, "The evidence you sent me was perfectly sound, Joad. It should have stood up. But I wish you had brought it in yourself instead of sending it by the tube, or that there had been some way I could have got in touch with you. I could have told you we'd probably not get a conviction. Joad, something rather terrible has been happening. I've had a feeling you would be my only chance. If only there had been some way I could have got in touch with you—"

"Two years ago?"

Chief Rand looked startled. "Why did you say that?" "Because it was two years ago that Dr. Chappel disappeared in New York."

"Oh," Rand said. "No, there's no connection. I thought maybe you knew something when you mentioned two years. It hasn't been quite that long, really, but it was close."

He got up from behind the strangely-shaped plastic desk and began to pace back and forth the length of the office.

He said, "Joad, in the last year—let's consider that period, although it started nearer two years

ago—out of every ten major crimes committed in Chicago, seven are unsolved. Technically unsolved, that is; in five out of those seven we know who's guilty but we can't prove it. We can't get a conviction.

"The underworld is beating us, Joad, worse than they have at any time since the Prohibition era of seventy-five years ago. If this keeps up, we're going back to days like that, and worse.

"For a twenty-year period now we've had convictions for eight out of ten major crimes. Even before twenty years ago—before the use of the lie-detector in court was legalized, we did better than we're doing now. 'Way back in the decade of 1970 to 1980, for instance, we did better than we're doing now by more than two to one; we got convictions for six out of every ten major crimes. This last year, it's been three out of ten.

"And I know the reason, but I don't know what to do about it. The reason is that the underworld is beating the lie-detector!"

Bela Joad nodded. But he said mildly, "A few have always managed to beat it. It's not perfect. Judges always instruct juries to remember that the lie-detector's findings have a high degree of probability but are not infallible, that they should be weighed as indicative but not final, that other evidence must support them. And there has always been the occasional individual who can tell a whopper with the detector on him, and not jiggle the graph needles at all."

"One in a thousand, yes. But, Joad, almost every underworld big-shot has been beating the lie-detector recently."

"I take it you mean the professional criminals, not the amateurs."

"Exactly. Only regular members of the underworld—professionals, the habitual criminals. If it weren't for that, I'd think—I don't know what I'd think. Maybe that our whole theory was wrong."

Bela Joad said, "Can't you quit using it in court in such cases? Convictions were obtained before its use was legalized. For that matter, before it was invented."

Dyer Rand sighed and dropped into his pneumatic chair again. "Sure, I'd like that if I could do it. I wish right now that the detector never had been invented or legalized. But don't forget that the law legalizing it gives either side the opportunity to use it in court. If a criminal knows he can beat it, he's going to demand its use even if we don't. And what chance have we got with a jury if the accused demands the detector and it backs up his plea of innocence?"

"Very slight, I'd say."

"Less than slight, Joad. This Gyp Girard business yesterday. I know he killed Pete Bailey. You know it. The evidence you sent me was, under ordinary circumstances, conclusive. And yet I knew we'd lose the case. I wouldn't have bothered bringing it to trial except for one thing."

"And that one thing?"

"To get you here, Joad. There was no other way I could reach you, but I hoped that if you read of Girard's acquittal, after the evidence you'd given me, you'd come around to find out what had happened."

He got up and started to pace again. "Joad, I'm going mad. How is the underworld beating the machine? That's what I want you to find out, and it's the biggest job you've ever tackled. Take a year, take five years, but crack it, Joad.

"Look at the history of law enforcement. Always the law has been one jump ahead of the criminal in the field of science. Now the criminals—of Chicago, anyway—are one jump ahead of us. And if they stay that way, if we don't get the answer, we're headed for a new dark age, when it'll no longer be safe for a man or a woman to walk down the street. The very foundations of our society can crumble. We're up against something very evil and very powerful."

Bela Joad took a cigarette from the dispenser on the desk; it lighted automatically as he picked it up. It was a green cigarette and he exhaled green smoke through his nostrils before he asked, almost disinterestedly, "Any ideas, Dyer?"

"I've had two, but I think I've eliminated both of them. One is that the machines are being tampered with. The other is that the technicians are being tampered with. But I've had both men and machines checked from every possible angle and can't find a thing. On big cases I've taken special precautions. For example, the detector we used at the Girard trial; it was brand-new and I had it checked right in this office." He chuckled. "I put Captain Burke under it and asked him if he was being faithful to his wife. He

said he was and it nearly broke the needle. I had it taken to the courtroom under special guard."

"And the technician who used it?"

"I used it myself. Took a course in it, evenings, for four months."

Bela Joad nodded. "So it isn't the machine and it isn't the operator. That's eliminated, and I can start from there."

"How long will it take you, Joad?"

The little man in the red suit shrugged. "I haven't any idea."

"Is there any help I can give you? Anything you want to start on?"

"Just one thing, Dyer. I want a list of the criminals who have beaten the detector and a dossier on each. Just the ones you're morally sure actually committed the crimes you questioned them about. If there's any reasonable doubt, leave them off the list. How long will it take to get it ready?"

"It's ready now; I had it made up on the chance that you'd come here. And it's a long report, so I had it microed down for you." He handed Bela Joad a small envelope.

Joad said, "Thank you. I won't contact you till I have something or until I want your cooperation. I think first I'm going to stage a murder, and then have you question the murderer."

Dyer Rand's eyes went wide. "Whom are you going to have murdered?"

Bela Joad smiled. "Me," he said.

He took the envelope Rand had given him back to his hotel and spent several hours studying the microfilms through his pocket micrographer, memorizing their contents thoroughly. Then he burned both films and envelope.

After that Bela Joad paid his hotel bill and disappeared, but a little man who resembled Bela Joad only slightly rented a cheap room under the name of Martin Blue. The room was on Lake Shore Drive, which was then the heart of Chicago's underworld.

The underworld of Chicago had changed less, in fifty years, than one would think. Human vices do not change, or at least they change but slowly. True, certain crimes had diminished greatly but on the other hand, gambling had increased. Greater social security than any country had hitherto known was, perhaps, a factor. One no longer needed to save for old age as, in days gone by, a few people did.

Gambling was a lush field for the crooks and they cultivated the field well. Improved technology had increased the number of ways of gambling and it had increased the efficiency of ways of making gambling crooked. Crooked gambling was big business and underworld wars and killings occurred over territorial rights, just as they had occurred over such rights in the far back days of Prohibition when alcohol was king. There was still alcohol, but it was of lesser importance now. People were learning to drink more moderately. And drugs were passe, although there was still some traffic in them.

Robberies and burglaries still occurred, although not quite as frequently as they had fifty years before.

Murder was slightly more frequent. Sociologists and criminologists differed as to the reason for the increase of crime in this category.

The weapons of the underworld had, of course, improved, but they did not include atomics. All atomic and subatomic weapons were strictly controlled by the military and were never used by either the police or by criminals. They were too dangerous; the death penalty was mandatory for anyone found in possession of an atomic weapon. But the pistols and guns of the underworld of 1999 were quite efficient. They were much smaller and more compact, and they were silent. Both guns and cartridges were made of superhard magnesium and were very light. The commonest weapon was the .19 calibre pistol—as deadly as the .45 of an earlier era because the tiny projectiles were explosive—and even a small pocket-pistol held from fifty to a hundred rounds.

But back to Martin Blue, whose entrance into the underworld coincided with the disappearance of Bela Joad from the latter's hotel.

Martin Blue, as it turned out, was not a very nice man. He had no visible means of support other than gambling and he seemed to lose, in small amounts, almost more often than he won. He almost got in trouble on a bad check he gave to cover his losses in one game, but he managed to avoid being liquidated by making the check good. His only reading seemed to be the *Racing Microform*, and he drank too much, mostly in a tavern (with clandestine gambling at the back) which formerly had been

operated by Gyp Girard. He got beaten up there once because he defended Gyp against a crack made by the current proprietor to the effect that Gyp had lost his guts and turned honest.

For a while fortune turned against Martin Blue and he went so broke that he had to take a job as a waiter in the outside room of a Michigan Boulevard joint called Sloppy Joe's, possibly because Joe Zatelli, who ran it, was the nattiest dresser in Chicago—and in the *fin de siècle* era when leopard-skin suits (synthetic but finer and more expensive than real leopard skin) were a dime a dozen and plain pastel-silk underwear was dated.

Then a funny thing happened to Martin Blue. Joe Zatelli killed him. Caught him, after hours, rifling the till, and just as Martin Blue turned around, Zatelli shot him. Three times for good measure. And then Zatelli, who never trusted accomplices, got the body into his car and deposited it in an alley back of a teletheater.

The body of Martin Blue got up and went to see Chief Dyer Rand and told Rand what he wanted done. "You took a hell of a chance," Rand said.

"Not too much of a chance," Blue said. "I'd put blanks in his gun and I was pretty sure he'd use that. He won't

ever find out, incidentally, that the rest of the bullets in it are blanks unless he tries to kill somebody else with it; they don't look like blanks. And I had a pretty special vest on under my suit. Rigid backing and padded on top to feel like flesh, but of course he couldn't feel a heartbeat through it. And it was gimmicked to make a noise like explosive cartridges hitting—when the duds punctured the compartments."

"But if he'd switched guns or bullets?"

"Oh, the vest was bulletproofed for anything short of atomics. The danger was in his thinking of a fancy way of disposing of the body. If he had, I could have taken care of myself, of course, but it would have spoiled the plan and cost me three months' build-up. But I'd studied his style and I was pretty sure what he'd do. Now here's what I want you to do, Dyer—"

The newspapers and videocasts the next morning carried the story of the finding of a body of an unidentified man in a certain alley. By afternoon they reported that it had been identified as the body of Martin Blue, a small-time crook who had lived on Lake Shore Drive, in the heart of the Tenderloin. And by evening a rumor had gone out through the underworld to the effect that the police suspected Joe Zatelli, for whom Blue had worked, and might pick him up for questioning.

And plainclothesmen watched Zatelli's place, front and back, to see where he'd go if he went out. Watching the front was a small man about the build of Bela Joad or Martin Blue. Unfortunately, Zatelli happened to leave by the back and he succeeded in shaking off the detectives on his trail.

They picked him up the next morning, though, and took him to headquarters. They put the lie-detector on him, and asked him about Martin Blue. He admitted Blue had worked for him but said he'd last seen Blue when the latter had left his place after work the night of the murder. The lie-detector said he wasn't lying.

Then they pulled a tough one on him. Martin Blue walked into the room where Zatelli was being questioned. And the trick fizzled. The gauges of the detector didn't jump a fraction of a millimeter and Zatelli looked at Blue and then at his interrogators with complete indignation. "What's the idea?" he demanded. "The guy ain't even dead, and you're asking me if I bumped him off?"

They asked Zatelli, while they had him there, about some other crimes he might have committed, but obviously—according to his answers and the lie-detector—he hadn't done any of them. They let him go.

Of course that was the end of Martin Blue. After showing up before Zatelli at headquarters, he might as well have been dead in an alley for all the good he was going to do.

Bela Joad told Chief Rand, "Well, anyway, now we know."

"What do we know?"

"We know for sure the detector is being beaten. You might conceivably have been making a series of wrong arrests before. Even the evidence I gave you against Girard might have been misleading. But we know that Zatelli beat the machine. Only I wish Zatelli had come out the front way so I could have tailed him; we might have the whole thing now instead of part of it."

"You're going back? Going to do it all over again?"

"Not the same way. This time I've got to be on the other end of a murder, and I'll need your help on that."

"Of course. But won't you tell me what's on your mind?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Dyer. I've got a hunch within a hunch. In fact, I've had it ever since I started on this business. But will you do one other thing for me?"

"Sure. What?"

"Have one of your men keep track of Zatelli, of everything he does from now on. Put another one on Gyp Girard. In fact, take as many men as you can spare and put one on each of the men you're fairly sure has beaten the detector within the last year or two. And always from a distance; don't let the boys know they're being checked on. Will you?"

"I don't know what you're after, but I'll do it. Won't you tell me *anything*? Joad, this is important. Don't forget it's not just a case; it's something that can lead to the breakdown of law enforcement."

Bela Joad smiled. "Not quite that bad, Dyer. Law enforcement as it applies to the underworld, yes. But you're getting your usual percentage of convictions on non-professional crimes."

Dyer Rand looked puzzled. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Maybe everything. It's why I can't tell you anything yet. But don't worry." Joad reached across the desk and patted the chief's shoulder, looking—although he didn't know it—like a fox terrier giving his paw to an airedale. "Don't worry, Dyer. I'll promise to bring you the answer. Maybe I won't be able to let you keep it."

"Do you really know what you're looking for?"

"Yes. I'm looking for a criminologist who disappeared well over two years ago. Dr. Ernst Chappel."

"You think—?"

"Yes; I think. That's why I'm looking for Dr. Chappel."

But that was all Dyer could get out of him. Bela Joad left Dyer Rand's office and returned to the underworld.

And in the underworld of Chicago a new star arose. Perhaps one should call him a nova rather than merely a star, so rapidly did he become famous—or notorious. Physically, he was rather a small man, no larger than Bela Joad or Martin Blue, but he wasn't a mild little man like Joad or a weak jackal like Blue. He had what it took, and he parlayed what he had. He ran a small night club, but that was just a front. Behind that front things happened, things that the police couldn't pin on him, and—for that matter—didn't seem to know about, although the underworld knew.

His name was Willie Ecks, and nobody in the underworld had ever made friends and enemies faster. He had plenty of each; the former were powerful and the latter were dangerous. In other words, they were both the same type of people.

His brief career was truly—if I may scramble my star-nova metaphor but keep it celestial—a meteoric matter. And for once that hackneyed and inaccurate metaphor is used correctly. Meteors do not rise—as anybody who has ever studied meteorology, which has no connection with meteors, knows. Meteors fall, with a dull thud. And that is what happened to Willie Ecks, when he got high enough.

Three days before, Willie Ecks's worst enemy had vanished. Two of his henchmen spread the rumor that it was because the cops had come and taken him away, but that was obviously malarkey designed to cover the fact that they intended to avenge him. That became obvious when, the very next morning, the news broke that the gangster's body had been found, neatly weighted, in the Blue Lagoon at Washington Park.

And by dusk of that very day rumor had gone from bistro to bistro of the underworld that the police had pretty good proof who had killed the deceased—and with a forbidden atomic at that—and that they planned to arrest Willie Ecks and question him. Things like that get around even when it's not intended that they should.

And it was on the second day of Willie Ecks's hiding out in a cheap little hotel on North Clark Street, an old-fashioned hotel with elevators and windows, his whereabouts known only to a trusted few, that one of those trusted few gave a certain knock on his door and was admitted.

The trusted one's name was Mike Leary and he'd been a close friend of Willie's and a close enemy of the gentleman who, according to the papers, had been found in the Blue Lagoon.

He said, "Looks like you're in a jam, Willie."

"—, yes," said Willie Ecks. He hadn't used facial depilatory for two days; his face was blue with beard and bluer with fear.

Mike said, "There's a way out, Willie. It'll cost you ten grand. Can you raise it?"

"I've got it. What's the way out?"

"There's a guy. I know how to get in touch with him; I ain't used him myself, but I would if I got in a jam like yours. He can fix you up, Willie."

"How?"

"He can show you how to beat the lie-detector. I can have him come around to see you and fix you up. Then you let the cops pick you up and question you, see? They'll drop the charge—or if they bring it to trial, they can't make it stick."

"What if they ask me about—well, never mind what—other things I may have done?"

"He'll take care of that, too. For five grand he'll fix you so you can go under that detector clean as—as clean as hell."

"You said ten grand."

Mike Leary grinned. "I got to live too, don't I, Willie? And you said you got ten grand, so it ought to be worth that much to you, huh?"

Willie Ecks argued, but in vain. He had to give Mike Leary five thousand-dollar bills. Not that it really mattered, because those were pretty special thousand-dollar bills. The green ink on them would turn purple within a few days. Even in 1999 you couldn't spend a purple thousand-dollar bill, so when it happened Mike Leary would probably turn purple too, but by that time it would be too late for him to do anything about it.

It was late that evening when there was a knock on Willie Ecks's hotel room door. He pressed the button that made the main panel of the door transparent from his side.

He studied the nondescript-looking man outside the door very carefully. He didn't pay any attention to facial contours or to the shabby yellow suit the man wore. He studied the eyes somewhat, but mostly he studied the shape and conformation of the ears and compared them mentally with the cars of photographs he had once studied exhaustively.

And then Willie Ecks put his gun back into his pocket and opened the door. He said, "Come in."

The man in the yellow suit entered the room and Willie Ecks shut the door very carefully and locked it.

He said, "I'm proud to meet you, Dr. Chappel."

He sounded as though he meant it, and he did mean it.

It was four o'clock in the morning when Bela Joad stood outside the door of Dyer Rand's apartment. He had to wait, there in the dimly luminous hallway, for as long as it took the chief to get out of bed and reach the door, then activate the one-way-transparent panel to examine his visitor.

Then the magnetic lock sighed gently and the door opened. Rand's eyes were bleary and his hair was tousled. His feet were thrust into red plastic slippers and he wore neonylon sleeping pajamas that looked as though they had been slept in.

He stepped aside to let Bela Joad in, and Joad walked to the center of the room and stood looking about curiously. It was the first time he'd ever been in Rand's private quarters. The apartment was like that of any other well-to-do bachelor of the day. The furniture was unobtrusive and functional, each wall a different pastel shade, faintly fluorescent and emitting gentle radiant heat and the faint but constant caress of ultraviolet that kept people who could afford such apartments healthily tanned. The rug was in alternate one-foot squares of cream and gray, the squares separate and movable so that wear would be equalized. And the ceiling, of course, was the customary one-piece mirror that gave an illusion of height and spaciousness.

Rand said, "Good news, Joad?"

"Yes. But this is an unofficial interview, Dyer. What I'm going to tell you is confidential between us."

"What do you mean?"

Joad looked at him. He said, "You still look sleepy, Dyer. Let's have coffee. It'll wake you up, and I can use some myself."

"Fine," Dyer said. He went into the kitchenette and pressed the button that would heat the coils of the coffee-tap. "Want it laced?" he called back.

"Of course."

Within a minute he came back with two cups of steaming *café royale*. With obvious impatience he waited until they were seated comfortably and each had taken his first sip of the fragrant beverage before he asked, "Well, Joad?"

"When I say it's unofficial, Dyer, I mean it. I can give you the full answer, but only with the understanding that you'll forget it as soon as I tell you, that you'll never tell another person, and that you won't act upon it."

Dyer Rand stared at his guest in amazement. He said, "I can't promise that! I'm chief of police, Joad. I have my duty to my job and to the people of Chicago."

"That's why I came here, to your apartment, instead of to your office. You're not working now, Dyer; you're on your own time."

"But—"

"Do you promise?"

"Of course not."

Bela Joad sighed. "Then I'm sorry for waking you, Dyer." He put down his cup and started to rise.

"Wait! You can't do that. You can't just walk out on me!"

"Can't I?"

"All right, all right, I'll promise. You must have some good reason. Have you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll take your word for it."

Bela Joad smiled. "Good," he said. "Then I'll be able to report to you on my last case. For this is my last case, Dyer. I'm going into a new kind of work."

Rand looked at him incredulously. "What?"

"I'm going to teach crooks how to beat the lie-detector."

Chief Dyer Rand put down his cup slowly and stood up. He took a step toward the little man, about half his weight, who sat at ease on the armless, overstuffed chair.

Bela Joad still smiled. He said, "Don't try it, Dyer. For two reasons. First, you couldn't hurt me and I wouldn't want to hurt you and I might have to. Second, it's all right; it's on the up and up. Sit down."

Dyer Rand sat down.

Bela Joad said, "When you said this thing was big, you didn't know how big. And it's going to be bigger. Chicago is just the starting point. And thanks, by the way, for those reports I asked you for. They are just what I expected they'd be."

"The reports? But they're still in my desk at headquarters."

"They were. I've read them and destroyed them. Your copies, too. Forget about them. And don't pay too much attention to your current statistics. I've read them, too."

Rand frowned. "And why should I forget them?"

"Because they confirm what Ernie Chappel told me this evening. Do you know, Dyer, that your number of major crimes—has gone down in the past year by an even bigger percentage than the percentage by which your convictions for major crimes has gone down?"

"I noticed that. You mean, there's a connection?"

"Definitely. Most crimes—a very high percentage of them—are committed by professional criminals, repeaters. And Dyer, it goes even farther than that. Out of several thousand major crimes a year, ninety percent of them are committed by *a few hundred professional criminals*. And do you know that the number of professional criminals in Chicago has been reduced by almost a third in the last two years? It has. And that's why your number of major crimes has decreased."

Bela Joad took another sip of his coffee and then leaned forward. "Gyp Girard, according to your

report, is now running a vitadrink stand on the West Side; he hasn't committed a crime in almost a year—since he beat your lie-detector." He touched another finger. "Joe Zatelli, who used to be the roughest boy on the Near North Side, is now running his restaurant straight. Carey Hutch. Wild Bill Wheeler— Why should I list them all? You've got the list, and it's not complete because there are plenty of names you haven't got on it, people who went to Ernie Chappel so he could show them how to beat the detector, and then didn't get arrested after all. And nine out of ten of them —and that's conservative, Dyer—*haven't committed a crime since!*"

Dyer Rand said, "Go on. I'm listening."

"My original investigation of the Chappel case showed me that he'd disappeared voluntarily. And I knew he was a good man, and a great one. I knew he was mentally sound because he was a psychiatrist as well as a criminologist. A psychiatrist's got to be sound. So I knew he'd disappeared for some good reason.

"And when, about nine months ago, I heard your side of what had been happening in Chicago, I began to suspect that Chappel had come here to do his work. Are you beginning to get the picture?"

"Faintly."

"Well, don't faint yet. Not until you figure how an expert psychiatrist can help crooks beat the detector. Or have you?"

"Well—"

"That's it. The most elementary form of hypnotic treatment, something any qualified psychiatrist could do fifty years ago. Chappel's clients—of course they don't know who or what he is; he's a mysterious underworld figure who helps them beat the rap—pay him well and tell him what crimes they may be questioned about by the police if they're picked up. He tells them to include every crime they've ever committed and any racket they've ever been in, so the police won't catch them up on any old counts. Then he—"

"Wait a minute," Rand interrupted. "How does he get them to trust him that far?"

Joad gestured impatiently. "Simple. They aren't confessing a single crime, even to him. He just wants a list that includes everything they've done. They can add some ringers and he doesn't know which is which. So it doesn't matter.

"Then he puts them under light waking-hypnosis and tells them they are not criminals and never have been and they have never done any of the things on the list he reads back to them. That's all there is to it.

"So when you put them under the detector and ask them if they've done this or that, they say they haven't and they believe it. That's why your detector gauges don't register. That's why Joe Zatelli didn't jump when he saw Martin Blue walk in. He didn't know Blue was dead—except that he'd read it in the papers."

Rand leaned forward. "Where is Ernst Chappel?"

"You don't want him, Dyer."

"Don't want him? He's the most dangerous man alive today!"

"To whom?"

"To whom? Are you crazy?"

"I'm not crazy. He's the most dangerous man alive today —to the underworld. Look, Dyer, any time a criminal gets jittery about a possible pinch, he sends for Ernie or goes to Ernie. And Ernie washes him whiter than snow and in the process tells him he's not a criminal.

"And so, at least nine times out of ten, he quits being a criminal. Within ten or twenty years Chicago isn't going to have an underworld. There won't be any organized crimes by professional criminals. You'll always have the amateur with you, but he's a comparatively minor detail. How about some more *cafe royale?*"

Dyer Rand walked to the kitchenette and got it. He was wide awake by now, but he walked like a man in a dream.

When he came back, Joad said, "And now that I'm in with Ernie on it, Dyer, we'll stretch it to every city in the world big enough to have an underworld worth mentioning. We can train picked recruits; I've got my eye on two of your men and may take them away from you soon. But I'll have to check them first.

We're going to pick our apostles—about a dozen of them—very carefully. They'll be the right men for the job."

"But, Joad, look at all the crimes that are going to go unpunished!" Rand protested.

Bela Joad drank the rest of his coffee and stood up. He said, "And which is more important—to punish criminals or to end crime? And, if you want to look at it moralistically, should a man be punished for a crime when he doesn't even remember committing it, when he is no longer a criminal?"

Dyer Rand sighed. "You win, I guess. I'll keep my promise. I suppose—I'll never see you again?"

"Probably not, Dyer. And I'll anticipate what you're going to say next. Yes, I'll have a farewell drink with you. A straight one, without the coffee."

Dyer Rand brought the glasses. He said, "Shall we drink to Ernie Chappel?"

Bela Joad smiled. He said, "Let's include him in the toast, Dyer. But let's drink to all men who work to put themselves out of work. Doctors work toward the day when the race will be so healthy it won't need doctors; lawyers work toward the day when litigation will no longer be necessary. And policemen, detectives, and criminologists work toward the day when they will no longer be needed because there will be no more crime."

Dyer Rand nodded very soberly and lifted his glass. They drank.

pi in the sky

ROGER Jerome Phlutter, for whose absurd surname I offer no defense other than it is genuine, was, at the time of the events of this story, a hard-working clerk in the office of the Cole Observatory.

He was a young man of no particular brilliance, although he performed his daily tasks assiduously and efficiently, studied the calculus at home for one hour every evening, and hoped some day to become a chief astronomer of some important observatory.

Nevertheless, our narration of the events of late March in the year 1999 must begin with Roger Phlutter for the good and sufficient reason that he, of all men on earth, was the first observer of the stellar aberration.

Meet Roger Phlutter.

Tall, rather pale from spending too much time indoors, thickish, shell-rimmed glasses, dark hair close-cropped in the style of the nineteen nineties, dressed neither particularly well nor badly, smokes cigarettes rather excessively... .

At a quarter to five that afternoon, Roger was engaged in two simultaneous operations. One was examining, in a blink-microscope, a photographic plate taken late the previous night of a section in Gemini. The other was considering whether or not, on the three dollars remaining of his pay from last week, he dared phone Elsie and ask her to go somewhere with him.

Every normal young man has undoubtedly, at some time or other, shared with Roger Phlutter his second occupation, but not everyone has operated or understands the operation of a blink-microscope. So let us raise our eyes from Elsie to Gemini.

A blink-mike provides accommodation for two photographic plates taken of the same section of sky hut at different times. These plates are carefully juxtaposed and the operator may alternately focus his vision, through the eyepiece, first upon one and then upon the other, by means of a shutter. If the plates are identical, the operation of the shutter reveals nothing, but if one of the dots on the second plate differs from the position it occupied on the first, it will call attention to itself by seeming to jump back and forth as the shutter is manipulated.

Roger manipulated the shutter, and one of the dots jumped. So did Roger. He tried it again, forgetting—as we have—all about Elsie for the moment, and the dot jumped again. It jumped almost a tenth of a second. Roger straightened up and scratched his head. He lighted a cigarette, put it down on the ash tray, and looked into the blink-mike again. The dot jumped again when he used the shutter.

Harry Wesson, who worked the evening shift, had just come into the office and was hanging up his topcoat. "Hey, Harry!" Roger said. "There's something wrong with this blinking blinker."

"Yeah?" said I Harry.

"Yeah. Pollux moved a tenth of a second."

"Yeah?" said Harry. "Well, that's about right for parallax. Thirty-two light years—parallax of Pollux is point one o one. Little over a tenth of a second, so if your comparison plate was taken about six months ago, when the earth was on the other side of her orbit, that's about right."

"But, Harry, the comparison plate was taken night before last. They're twenty-four hours apart."

"You're crazy."

"Look for yourself."

It wasn't quite five o'clock yet, but Harry Wesson magnanimously overlooked that and sat down in front of the blink-mike. He manipulated the shutter, and Pollux obligingly jumped.

There wasn't any doubt about its being Pollux, for it was far and away the brightest dot on the plate. Pollux is a star of 1.2 magnitude, one of the twelve brightest in the sky and by far the brightest in Gemini. And none of the faint stars around it had moved at all.

"Um," said Harry Wesson. He frowned and looked again. "One of those plates is misdated, that's all. I'll check into it first thing."

"Those plates aren't misdated," Roger said doggedly. "I dated them myself."

"That proves it," Harry told him. "Go on home. It's five o'clock. If Pollux moved a tenth of a second last night, I'll move it back for you."

So Roger left.

He felt uneasy somehow, as though he shouldn't have. He couldn't put his finger on just what worried him, but something did. He decided to walk home instead of taking the bus.

Pollux was a fixed star. It couldn't have moved a tenth of a second in twenty-four hours.

"Let's see—thirty-two light years." Roger said to him-self. "Tenth of a second. Why, that would be movement several times faster than the speed of light. Which is positively silly!"

Wasn't it?

He didn't feel much like studying or reading tonight. Was three dollars enough to take out Elsie?

The three balls of a pawnshop loomed ahead, and Roger succumbed to temptation. He pawned his watch and then phoned Elsie. "Dinner and a show?"

"Why certainly, Roger."

So until he took her home at one-thirty, he managed to forget astronomy. Nothing odd about that. It would have been strange if he had managed to remember it.

But his feeling of restlessness came back as soon as he left her. At first, he didn't remember why. He knew merely that he didn't feel quite like going home yet.

The corner tavern was still open, and he dropped in for a drink. He was having his second one when he remembered. He ordered a third.

"Hank," he said to the bartender. "You know Pollux?"

"Pollux who?" asked Hank.

"Skip it," said Roger. He had another drink and thought it over. Yes, he'd made a mistake somewhere. Pollux couldn't have moved.

He went outside and started to walk home. He was almost there when it occurred to him look up at Pollux. Not that, with the naked eye, he could detect a displacement of a tenth of a second, but he felt curious.

He looked up, allocated himself by the sickle of Leo, and then found Gemini—Castor and Pollux were the only stars in Gemini visible, for it wasn't a particularly good night for seeing. They were there, all right, but he thought they looked a little farther apart than usual. Absurd, because that would be a matter of degrees, not minutes or seconds.

He stared at them for a while and then looked across at the Dipper. Then he stopped walking and stood there. He closed his eyes and opened them again, carefully.

The Dipper just didn't look right. It was distorted. There seemed to be more space between Alioth and Mizar, in the handle than between Mizar and Alkaid. Phecda and Merak, in the bottom of the Dipper, were closer together, making the angle between the bottom and the lip steeper. Quite a bit steeper.

Unbelievably, he ran an imaginary line from the pointers, Merak and Dubhe, to the North Star. The line curved. It had to. If he ran it straight, it missed Polaris by maybe five degrees.

Breathing a bit hard, Roger took off his glasses and polished them very carefully with his handkerchief. He put them back on again, and the Dipper was still crooked. So was Leo when he looked back to it. At any rate, Regulus wasn't where it should be by a degree or two. A degree or two! At the distance of Regulus. Was it sixty-five light years? Something like that.

Then, in time to save his sanity, Roger remembered that he'd been drinking. He went home without daring to look upward again. He went to bed but he couldn't sleep.

He didn't feel drunk. He grew more excited, wide awake.

Roger wondered if he dared phone the observatory. Would he sound drunk over the phone? The devil with whether he sounded drunk or not, he finally decided. He went to the telephone in his pajamas.

"Sorry," said the operator.

"What d'ya mean, sorry?"

"I cannot give you that number," said the operator in dulcet tones. And then, "I am sorry. We do not have that information."

He got the chief operator and the information. Cole Observatory had been so deluged with calls from amateur astronomers that they had found it necessary to request the telephone company to discontinue all incoming calls save long distance ones from other observatories.

"Thanks," said Roger. "Will you get me a cab?"

It was an unusual request but the chief operator obliged and got him a cab.

He found the Cole Observatory in a state resembling a madhouse.

The following morning most newspapers carried the news. Most of them gave it two or three inches on an inside page but the facts were there.

The facts were that a number of stars, in general the brightest ones, within the past forty-eight hours had developed noticeable proper motions.

"This does not imply," quipped the New York *Spotlight*, "that their motions have been in any way improper in the 'past. 'Proper motion' to an astronomer means the movement of a star across the face of the sky with relation to other stars. Hitherto, a star named 'Barnard's Star' in the constellation Ophiuchus has exhibited the greatest proper motion of any known star, moving at the rate of ten and a quarter seconds a year. 'Barnard's Star' is not visible to the naked eye."

Probably no astronomer on earth slept that day.

The observatories locked their doors, with their full staffs on the inside, and admitted no one, except occasional newspaper reporters who stayed a while and went away with puzzled faces, convinced at last that something strange was happening.

Blink-microscopes blinked, and so did astronomers. Coffee was consumed in prodigious quantities. Police riot squads were called to six United States observatories. Two of these calls were occasioned by attempts to break in on the part of frantic amateurs without. The other four were summoned to quell fist-fights developing out of arguments within the observatories themselves. The office of Lick Observatory was a shambles, and James Truwell, Astronomer Royal of England, was sent to London Hospital with a mild concussion, the result of having a heavy photographic plate smashed over his head by an irate subordinate.

But these incidents were exceptions. The observatories, in general, were well-ordered madhouses.

The center of attention in the more enterprising ones was the loudspeaker in which reports from the Eastern Hemisphere could be relayed to the inmates. Practically all observatories kept open wires to the night side of earth, where the phenomena were still under scrutiny.

Astronomers under the night skies of Singapore, Shanghai, and Sydney did their observing, as it were, directly into the business end of a long-distance telephone hook-up.

Particularly of interest were reports from Sydney and Melbourne, whence came reports on the southern skies not visible—even at night—from Europe or the United States. The Southern Cross was, by these reports, a cross no longer, its Alpha and Beta being shifted northward. Alpha and Beta Centauri, Canopus and Achernar, all showed considerable proper motion—all, generally speaking,

northward. Triangulum Amtrak and the Magellanic Clouds—were undisturbed. Sigma Octanis, the weak pole star, had not moved.

Disturbance of the southern sky, then, was much less than in the northern one, in point of the number of stars displaced. However, relative proper motion of the stars which were disturbed was greater. While the general direction of movement of the few stars which did move was northward, their paths were not directly north, nor did they converge upon any exact point in space.

United States and European astronomers digested these facts and drank more coffee.

## II

EVENING papers, particularly in America, showed greater awareness that something indeed unusual was happening in the skies. Most of them moved the story to the front page—but not the banner headlines—giving it a half-column with a runover that was long or short, depending upon the editor's luck in obtaining quotable statements from astronomers.

The statements, when obtained, were invariably statements of fact and not of opinion. The facts themselves, said these gentlemen, were sufficiently startling, and opinions would be premature. 'Wait and see. Whatever was happening was happening fast.

"How fast?" asked an editor.

"Faster than possible," was the reply.

Perhaps it is unfair to say that no editor procured expressions of opinion thus early. Charles Wangren, enterprising editor of *The Chicago Blade*, spent a small fortune in long-distance telephone calls. Out of possibly sixty attempts, he finally reached the chief astronomers at five observatories. He asked each of them the same question.

"What, in your opinion, is a possible cause, any possible cause, of the stellar movements of the last night or two?"

He tabulated the results.

"I wish I knew."—Geo. F. Stubbs, Tripp Observatory, Long Island.

"Somebody or something is crazy, and I hope it's me—I mean I."—Henry Collister McAdams, Lloyd Observatory, Boston.

"What's happening is impossible. There can't be any cause."—Letton Tischauer Tinney, Burgoyne Observatory, Albuquerque.

"I'm looking for an expert on astrology. Know one?"—Patrick R. Whitaker, Lucas Observatory, Vermont.

"It's all wacky!"—Giles Mahew *Frazier*, Grant Observatory, Richmond.

Sadly studying this tabulation, which had cost him \$187.35, including tax, to obtain, Editor Wangren signed a voucher to cover the long distance calls and then dropped his tabulation into the wastebasket. He telephoned his regular space-rates writer on scientific subjects.

"Can you give me a series of articles—two-three thousand words each—on all this astronomical excitement?"

"Sure," said the writer. "But what excitement?" It transpired that he'd just got back from a fishing trip and had neither read a newspaper nor happened to look up at the sky. But he wrote the articles. He even got sex appeal into them through illustrations, by using ancient star-charts, showing the constellations in *deshabille*, by reproducing certain famous paintings, such as "The Origin of the Milky Way," and by using a photograph of a girl in a bathing suit sighting a hand telescope, presumably at one of the errant stars. Circulation of *The Chicago Blade* increased by 21.7 percent.

It was five o'clock again in the office of the Cole Observatory, just twenty-four and a quarter hours after the beginning of all the commotion. Roger Phlutter—yes, we're back to him again—woke up suddenly when a hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Go on home, Roger," said Mervin Armbruster, his boss, in a kindly tone.

Roger sat up suddenly.

"But, Mr. Armbruster," he said, "I'm sorry I fell asleep."

"Bosh," said Armbruster. "You can't stay here forever, none of us can. Go on home."

Roger Phlutter went home. But when he'd taken a bath, he felt more restless than sleepy. It was only six-fifteen. He phoned Elsie.

"I'm awfully sorry, Roger, but I have another date. What's going on, Roger? The stars, I mean."

"Gosh, Elsie—they're moving. Nobody knows."

"But I thought all the stars moved," Elsie protested. "The sun's a star, isn't it? Once you told me the sun was moving toward a point in Samson."

"Hercules."

"Hercules, then. Since you said all the stars were moving, what is everybody getting excited about?"

"This is different," said Roger. "Take Canopus. It's started moving at the rate of seven light years a day. It can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Roger patiently, "nothing can move faster than light."

"But if it is moving that fast, then it can," said Elsie. "Or else maybe your telescope is wrong or something. Anyway, it's pretty far off, isn't it?"

"A hundred and sixty light years. So far away that we see it a hundred and sixty years ago."

"Then maybe it isn't moving at all," said Elsie. "I mean, maybe it quit moving a hundred and fifty years ago and you're getting all excited about something that doesn't matter any more because it's all over with. Still love me?"

"I sure do, honey. Can't you break that date?"

"Fraid not, Roger. But I wish I could."

He had to be content with that. He decided to walk uptown to eat.

It was early evening, and too early to see stars over-head, although the clear blue sky was darkening. When the stars did come out tonight, Roger knew few of the constellations would be recognizable.

As he walked, he thought over Elsie's comments and decided that they were as intelligent as anything he'd heard at the Cole Observatory. In one way, they'd brought out one angle he'd never thought of before, and that made it more incomprehensible.

All these movements had started the same evening—yet they hadn't. Centauri must have started moving four years or so ago, and Rigel five hundred and forty years ago when Christopher Columbus was still in short pants, if any, and Vega must have started acting up the year he—Roger, not Vega—was born, twenty-six years ago. Each star out of the hundreds must have started on a date in exact relation to its distance from Earth. Exact relation, to a light-second, for check-ups of all the photographic plates taken night before last indicated that all the new stellar movements had started at four-ten a.m., Greenwich time. What a mess!

Unless this meant that light, after all, had infinite velocity.

If it didn't have—and it is symptomatic of Roger's perplexity that he could postulate that incredible "if—then then what? Things were just as puzzling as before.

Mostly he felt outraged that such events should be happening.

He went into a restaurant and sat down. A radio was blaring out the latest composition in dissarythm, the new quarter-tone dance music in which chorded woodwinds provided background patterns for the mad melodies pounded on tuned tomtoms. Between each number and the next a frenetic announcer extolled the virtues of a product.

Munching a sandwich, Roger listened appreciatively to the dissarythm and managed not to hear the commercials. Most intelligent people of the nineties had developed a type of radio deafness which enabled them not to hear a human voice coming from a loudspeaker, although they could hear and enjoy the then infrequent intervals of music between announcements. In an age when advertising competition was so keen that there was scarcely a bare wall or an unbillboarded lot within miles of a population center, discriminating people could retain normal outlooks on life only by carefully-cultivated partial blindness and partial deafness which enabled them to ignore the bulk of that concerted assault upon their senses.

For that reason a good part of the newscast which followed the dissarrhythm program went, as it were, into one of Roger's ears and out the other before it occurred to him that he was not listening to a panegyric on patent breakfast foods.

He thought he recognized the voice, and after a sentence or two he was sure that it was that of Milton Hale, the eminent physicist whose new theory on the principle of indeterminacy had recently occasioned so much scientific controversy. Apparently, Dr. Hale was being interviewed by a radio announcer.

". . . a heavenly body, therefore, may have position or velocity, but it may not be said to have both at the same time, with relation to any given space-time frame."

"Dr. Hale, can you put that into common everyday language?" said the syrupy-smooth voice of the interviewer.

"That is common language, sir. Scientifically expressed, in terms of the Heisenberg contraction principle, then  $n$  to the seventh power in parentheses, representing the pseudo-position of a Diedrich quantum-integer in relation to the seventh coefficient of curvature of mass—"

"Thank you, Dr. Hale, but I fear you are just a bit over the heads of our listeners."

And your own head, thought Roger Phlutter.

"I am sure, Dr. Hale, that the question of greatest interest to our audience is whether these unprecedented stellar movements are real or illusory."

"Both. They are real with reference to the frame of space but not with reference to the frame of space-time." "Can you clarify that, Doctor?"

"I believe I can. The difficulty is purely epistemological. In strict causality, the impact of the macroscopic—The slithy roves did gyre and gimble in the wabe, thought Roger Phlutter.

"—upon the parallelism of the entropy-gradient."

"Bah!" said Roger aloud.

"Did you say something, sir?" asked the waitress. Roger noticed her for the first time. She was small and blonde and cuddly. Roger smiled at her.

"That depends upon the space-time frame from which one regards it," he said judiciously. "The difficulty is epistemological."

To make up for that, he tipped her more than he should and left.

The world's most eminent physicist, he realized, knew less of what was happening than did the general public. The public knew that the fixed stars were moving or that they weren't. Obviously, Dr. Hale didn't even know that. Under a smoke-screen of qualifications, Hale had hinted that they were doing both.

Roger looked upward but only a few stars, faint in the early evening, were visible through the halation of the myriad neon and spiegel-light signs. Too early yet, he decided.

He had one drink at a nearby bar, but it didn't taste quite right to him so he didn't finish it. He hadn't realized what was wrong but he was punch-drunk from lack of sleep. He merely knew that he wasn't sleepy any more and intended to keep on walking until he felt like going to bed. Anyone hitting him over the head with a well-padded blackjack would have been doing him a signal service, but no one took the trouble.

He kept on walking and, after a while, turned into the brilliantly lighted lobby of a cineplus theater. He bought a ticket and took his seat just in time to see the sticky end of one of the three feature pictures. Followed several advertisements which he managed to look at without seeing.

"We bring you next," said the screen, "a special visicast of the night sky of London, where it is now three o'clock in the morning."

The screen went black, with hundreds of tiny dots that were stars. Roger leaned forward to watch and listen carefully—this would be a broadcast and visicast of facts, not of verbose nothingness.

"The arrow," said the screen, as an arrow appeared upon it, "is now pointing to Polaris, the pole star, which is now ten degrees from the celestial pole in the direction of Ursa Major. Ursa Major itself, the Big Dipper, is no longer recognizable as a dipper, but the arrow will now point to the stars that formerly composed it."

Roger breathlessly followed the arrow and the voice.

"Alkaid and Dubhe," said the voice. "The fixed stars are no longer fixed, but—" the picture changed abruptly to a scene in a modern kitchen—"the qualities and excellences of Stellar's Stoves do not change. Foods cooked by the superinduced vibratory method taste as good as ever. Stellar Stoves are unexcelled."

Leisurely, Roger Phlutter stood up and made his way out into the aisle. He took his pen-knife from his pocket as he walked toward the screen. One easy jump took him up onto the low stage. His slashes into the fabric were not angry ones. They were careful, methodical cuts and intelligently designed to accomplish a maximum of damage with a minimum of expenditure of effort.

The damage was done, and thoroughly, by the time three strong ushers gathered him in. He offered no resistance either to them or to the police to whom they gave him. In night court, an hour later, he listened quietly to the charges against him.

"Guilty or not guilty?" asked the presiding magistrate.

"Your Honor, that is purely a question of epistemology," said Roger earnestly. "The fixed stars move, but Corny Toastys, the world's greatest breakfast food, still represents the pseudo-position of a Diedrich quantum-integer in relation to the seventh coefficient of curvature!" Ten minutes later, he was sleeping soundly. In a cell, it is true, but soundly nonetheless. Soundlessly, too, for the cell was padded. The police left him there because they realized he needed sleep... .

Among other minor tragedies of that night can be included the case of the schooner *Ransagansett*, off the coast of California. Well off the coast of California! A sudden squall had blown her miles off course, how many miles the skipper could only guess.

The *Ransagansett* was an American vessel, with a German crew, under Venezuelan registry, engaged in running booze from Ensenada, Baja California, up the coast to Canada, then in the throes of a prohibition experiment. The *Ransagansett* was an ancient craft with foul engines and an untrustworthy compass. During the two days of the storm, her outdated radio receiver—vintage of 1975—had gone haywire beyond the ability of Gross, the first mate, to repair.

But now only a mist remained of the storm, and the remaining shreds of wind were blowing it away. Hans Gross, holding an ancient astrolabe, stood on the dock, waiting. About him was utter darkness, for the ship was running without lights to avoid the coastal patrols.

"She clearing, Mister Gross?" called the voice of the captain from below.

"Aye, sir. Idt iss Blearing rabbidly."

In the cabin, Captain Randall went back to his game of blackjack with the second mate and the engineer. The crew—an elderly German named Weiss, with a wooden leg—was asleep abaft the scuttlebutt—wherever that may have been.

A half hour went by. An hour, and the captain was losing heavily to the engineer.

"Mister Gross!" he called out.

There wasn't any answer, and he called again and still obtained no response.

"Just a minute, mein fine feathered friends," he said to the second mate and engineer and went up the companionway to the deck.

Gross was standing there, staring upward with his mouth open. The mists were gone.

"Mister Gross," said Captain Randall.

The first mate didn't answer. The captain saw that his first mate was revolving slowly where he stood.

"Hans!" said Captain Randall. "What the devil's wrong with you?" Then he, too, looked up.

Superficially the sky looked perfectly normal. No angels flying around, no sound of airplane motors. The Dipper—Captain Randall turned around slowly, but more rapidly than Hans Gross. Where was the Big Dipper?

For that matter, where was anything? There wasn't a constellation anywhere that he could recognize. No sickle of Leo. No belt of Orion. No horns of Taurus.

Worse, there was a group of eight bright stars that ought to have been a constellation, for they were shaped roughly like an octagon. Yet if such a constellation had ever existed, he'd never seen it, for he'd

been around the Horn and Good Hope. Maybe at that—but no, there wasn't any Southern Cross!

Dazedly, Captain Randall walked to the companionway. "Mistress Weisskopf," he called. "Mister Helmstadt. Come on deck."

They came and looked. Nobody said anything for quite a while.

"Shut off the engines, Mister Helmstadt," said the captain. Helmstadt saluted—the first time he ever had—and went below.

"Captain, shall I wake opp Feiss?" asked Weisskopf.

"What for?"

"I don't know."

The captain considered. "Wake him up," he said.

"I think ve are on der blanet Mars," said Gross.

But the captain had thought of that and had rejected it.

"No," he said firmly. "From any planet in the solar system the constellations would look approximately the same."

"You mean ve are outd of de cosmos?"

The throb of the engines suddenly ceased, and there was only the soft familiar lapping of the waves against the hull and the gentle familiar rocking of the boat.

Weisskopf returned with Weiss, and Helmstadt came on deck and saluted again.

"Veil, Captain?"

Captain Randall waved a hand to the after deck, piled high with cases of liquor under a canvas tarpaulin. "Break out the cargo," he ordered.

The blackjack game was not resumed. At dawn, under a sun they had never expected to see again—and, for that matter, certainly were not seeing at the moment—the five unconscious men were moved from the ship to the Port of San Francisco Jail by members of the coast patrol. During the night the *Rarnsagansett* had drifted through the Golden Gate and bumped gently into the dock of the Berkeley ferry.

In tow at the stern of the schooner was a big canvas tarpaulin. It was transfixed by a harpoon whose rope was firmly tied to the aftermast. Its presence there was never explained officially, although days later Captain Randall had vague recollection of having harpooned a sperm whale during the night. But the elderly able-bodied seaman named Weiss never did find out what happened to his wooden leg, which is perhaps just as well.

### III:

MILTON HALE, PH.D., eminent physicist, had finished broadcasting and the program was off the air.

"Thank you very much, Dr. Hale," said the radio announcer. The yellow light went on and stayed. The mike was dead. "Uh—your check will be waiting for you at the window. You—uh—know where."

"I know where," said the physicist. He was a rotund, jolly-looking little man. With his busy white beard he resembled a pocket edition of Santa Claus. His eyes winkled, and he smoked a short stubby pipe.

He left the sound-proof studio and walked briskly down the hall to the cashier's window. "Hello, sweet-heart," he said to the girl on duty there. "I think you have two checks for Dr. Hale."

"You are Dr. Hale?"

"I sometimes wonder," said the little man. "But I carry identification that seems to prove it."

"Two checks?"

"Two checks. Both for the same broadcast, by special arrangement. By the way, there is an excellent revue at the Mabry Theater this evening."

"Is there? Yes, here are your checks, Dr. Hale. One for seventy-five and one for twenty-five. Is that correct?"

"Gratifyingly correct. Now about that revue at the Mabry?"

"If you wish, I'll call my husband and ask him about it," said the girl. "He's the doorman over there."

Dr. Hale sighed deeply, but his eyes still twinkled. "I think he'll agree," he said. "Here are the tickets, my dear, and you can take him. I find that I have work to do this evening."

The girl's eyes widened, but she took the rickets.

Dr. Hale went into the phone booth and called his home. His home, and Dr. Hale, were both run by his elder sister. "Agatha, I must remain at the office this evening," he said.

"Milton, you know that you can work just as well in your study here at home. I heard your broadcast, Milton. It was wonderful."

"It was sheer balderdash, Agatha. Utter rot. What did I say?"

"Why, you said that—uh—that the stars were—I mean, you were not—"

"Exactly, Agatha. My idea was to avert panic on the part of the populace. If I'd told them the truth, they'd have worried. But by being smug and scientific, I let them get the idea that everything was—uh—under control. Do you know, Agatha, what I mean by the parallelism of an entropy-gradient?"

"Why—not exactly."

"Neither did I."

"Milton, tell me, have you been drinking?"

"Not y— No, I haven't. I really can't come home to work this evening, Agatha, I'm using my study at the university, because I must have access to the library there, for reference. And the starcharts."

"But, Milton, how about that money for your broadcast? You know it isn't safe for you to have money in your pocket, especially when you're feeling like this."

"It isn't money, Agatha: It's a check, and I'll mail it to you before I go to the office. I won't cash it myself. How's that?"

"Well—if you must have access to the library, I suppose you must. Good-by, Milton."

Dr. Hale went across the street to the drug store. There he bought a stamp and envelope and cashed the twenty-five dollar check. The seventy-five dollar one he put into the envelope and mailed.

Standing beside the mailbox, he glanced up at the early evening sky—shuddered, and hastily lowered his eyes. He took the straightest possible line for the nearest double Scotch.

"Y'ain't been in for a long time, Dr. Hale," said Mike, the bartender.

"That I haven't, Mike. Pour me another."

"Sure. On the house, this time. We had your broadcast tuned in on the radio just now. It was swell."

"Yes."

"It sure was. I was kind of worried what was happening up there, with my son an aviator and all. But as long as you scientific guys know what it's all about, I guess it's all right. That was sure a good speech, Doc. But there's one question I'd like to ask you."

"I was afraid of that," said Dr. Hale.

"These stars. They're moving, going somewhere. But where are they going? I mean, like you said, if they are."

"There's no way of telling that, exactly, Mike."

"Aren't they moving in a straight line, each one of them?"

For just a moment the celebrated scientist hesitated.

"Well—yes and no, Mike. According to spectroscopic analysis, they're maintaining the same distance from us, each one of them. So they're really moving—if they're moving—in circles around us. But the circles are straight, as it were. I mean, it seems that we're in the center of those circles, so the stars that are moving aren't coming closer to us or receding."

"You could draw lines for those circles?"

"On a star-globe, yes. It's been done. They all seem to be heading for a certain area of the sky, but not for a given point. They don't intersect."

"What part of the sky they going to?"

"Approximately between Ursa Major and Leo, Mike. The ones farthest from there are moving

fastest, the ones nearest are moving slower. But darn you, Mike, I came in here to forget about stars, not to talk about them. Give me another."

"In a minute, Doc. When they get there, are they going to stop or keep on going?"

"How the devil do I know, Mike? They started suddenly, all at the same time, and with full original velocity—I mean, they started out at the same speed they're going now—without warming up, so to speak—so I suppose they could stop as unexpectedly."

He stopped just as suddenly as the stars might. He stared at his reflection in the mirror back of the bar as though he'd never seen it before.

"What's the matter Doc?"

"Mike!"

"Yes, Doc?"

"Mike you're a genius."

"Me? You're kidding."

Dr. Hale groaned. "Mike, I'm going to have to go to the university to work this out. So I can have access to the library and the star-globe there. You're making an honest man out of me, Mike. Whatever kind of Scotch this is, wrap me up a bottle."

"It's Tartan Plaid. A quart?"

"A quart, and make it snappy. I've got to see a man about a dog-star."

"Serious, Doc?"

Dr. Hale sighed audibly. "You brought that on yourself, Mike, Yes, the dog-star is Sirius. I wish I'd never come in here, Mike. My first night out in weeks, and you ruin it."

He took a cab to the university, let himself in, and turned on the lights in his private study and in the library. Then he took a good stiff slug of Tartan Plaid and went to work.

First, by telling the chief operator who he was and arguing a bit, he got a telephone connection with the chief astronomer of Cole Observatory.

"This is Hale, Armbruster," he said. "I've got an idea, but I want to check my facts before I start to work on it. Last information I had, there were four hundred and sixty-eight stars exhibiting new proper motion. Is that still correct?"

"Yes, Milton. The same ones are still at it, and no others."

"Good. I have a list, then. Has there been any change in speed of motion of any of them?"

"No. Impossible as it seems, it's constant. What is your idea?"

"I want to check my theory first. If it works out into anything, I'll call you." But he forgot to.

It was a long, painful job. First, he made a chart of the heavens in the area between Ursa Major and Leo. Across that chart he drew four hundred and sixty-eight lines representing the projected path of each of the aberrant stars. At the border of the chart, where each line entered, he made a notation of the apparent velocity of the star—not in light years per hour—but in degrees per hour, to the fifth decimal.

Then he did some reasoning.

"Postulate that the motion which began simultaneously will end simultaneously," he told himself. "Try a guess at the time. Let's try ten o'clock tomorrow evening."

He tried it and looked at the series of positions indicated upon the chart. No.

Try one o'clock in the morning. It looked almost like—sense!

Try midnight.

That did it. At any rate, it was close enough. The calculation could be only a few minutes off one way or the other, and there was no point now in working out the exact time. Now that he knew the incredible fact.

He took another drink and stared at the chart grimly.

A trip into the library gave Dr. Hale the further information he needed. The address!

Thus began the saga of Dr. Hale's journey. A useless journey, it is true, but one that should rank with the trip of the message to Garcia.

He started it with a drink. Then, knowing the combination, he rifled the safe in the office of the

president of the university. The note he left in the safe was a master-piece of brevity. It read:

TAKING MONEY. EXPLAIN LATER

Then he took another drink and put the bottle in his pocket. He went outside and hailed a taxicab. He got in. "Where to, sir?" asked the cabby.

Dr. Hale gave an address.

"Fremont Street?" said the cabby. "Sorry, sir, but I don't know where that is."

"In Boston," said Dr. Hale. "I should have told you, in Boston."

"Boston? You mean Boston, Massachusetts? That's a long way from here."

"Therefore, we better start right away," said Dr. Hale reasonably. A brief financial discussion and the passing of money, borrowed from the university safe, set the driver's mind at rest, and they started.

It was a bitter cold night, for March, and the heater in the cab didn't work any too well. But the Tartan Plaid worked superlatively for both Dr. Hale and the cabby, and by the time they reached New Haven, they were singing old-time songs lustily.

"Off we go, into the wide, wild yonder ..." their voices roared.

It is regrettably reported, but possibly untrue that, in Hartford, Dr. Hale leered out of the window at a young woman waiting for a late streetcar and asked her if she wanted to go to Boston. Apparently, however, she didn't, for at five o'clock in the morning, when the cab drew up in front of 614 Fremont Street, Boston, only Dr. Hale and the driver were in the cab.

Dr. Hale got out and looked at the house. It was a millionaire's mansion, and it was surrounded by a high iron fence with barbed wire on top of it. The gate in the fence was locked, and there was no bell button to push.

But the house was only a stone's throw from the sidewalk, and Dr. Hale was not to be deterred. He threw a stone. Then another. Finally he succeeded in smashing a window.

After a brief interval, a man appeared in the window. A butler, Dr. Hale decided.

"I'm Dr. Milton Hale," he called out. "I want to see Rutherford R. Sniveley, right away. It's important."

"Mr. Sniveley is not at home, sir," said the butler. "And about that window—"

"The devil with the window," shouted Dr. Hale. "Where is Sniveley?"

"On a fishing trip."

"Where?"

"I have orders not to give that information."

Dr. Hale was just a little drunk, perhaps. "You'll give it just the same," he roared. "By orders of the President of the United States!"

The butler laughed. "I don't see him."

"You will," said Hale.

He got back in the cab. The driver had fallen asleep, but Hale shook him awake.

"The White House," said Dr. Hale.

"I-huh?"

"The White House, in Washington," said Dr. Hale. "And hurry!" He pulled a hundred-dollar bill from his pocket. The cabby looked at it, and groaned. Then he put the bill into his pocket and started the cab. A light snow was beginning to fall.

As the cab drove off, Rutherford R. Sniveley, grinning, stepped back from the window. Mr. Sniveley had no butler.

If Dr. Hale had been more familiar with the peculiarities of the eccentric Mr. Sniveley, he would have known Sniveley kept no servants in the place overnight but lived alone in the big house at 614 Fremont Street. Each morning at ten o'clock, a small army of servants descended upon the house, did their work as rapidly as possible, and were required to depart before the witching hour of noon. Aside from these two hours of every day, Mr. Sniveley lived in solitary splendor. He had few, if any, social contacts.

Aside from the few hours a day he spent administering his vast interests as one of the country's

leading manufacturers, Mr. Sniveley's time was his own, and he spent practically all of it in his workshop, making gadgets.

Sniveley had an ashtray which would hand him a lighted cigar any time he spoke sharply to it, and a radio receiver so delicately adjusted that it would cut in automatically on Sniveley-sponsored programs and shut off again when they were finished. He had a bathtub that provided a full orchestral accompaniment to his singing therein, and he had a machine which would read aloud to him from any book which he placed in its hopper.

His life may have been a lonely one, but it was not without such material comforts. Eccentric, *yes*, but Mr. Sniveley could afford to be eccentric with a net income of four million dollars a year. Not had for a man who'd started life as the son of a shipping clerk.

Mr. Sniveley chuckled as he watched the taxi drive away, and then he went back to bed and to the sleep of the just.

"So somebody has figured things out nineteen hours ahead of time," he thought. "Well, a lot of good it will do them!"

There wasn't any law to punish him for what he'd done.

Bookstores did a land-office business that day in books on astronomy. The public, apathetic at first, was deeply interested now. Even ancient and musty volumes Newton's *Principia* sold at premium prices.

The ether blared with comment upon the new wonder of the skies. Little of the comment was professional, or even intelligent, for most astronomers were asleep that day. They'd managed to stay awake for the first forty-eight hours from the start of the phenomena, but the third day found them worn out mentally and physically and inclined to let the stars take care of themselves while they—the astronomers, not the stars—caught up on sleep.

Staggering offers from the telecast and broadcast studios enticed a few of them to attempt lectures, but their efforts were dreary things, better forgotten. Dr. Carver Blake, broadcasting from KNB, fell soundly asleep between a perigee and an apogee.

Physicists were also greatly in demand. The most eminent of them all, however, was sought in vain. The solitary clue to Dr. Milton Hale's disappearance, the brief note, "Taking money. Explain later, Hale," wasn't much of a help. His sister Agatha feared the worst.

For the first time in history, astronomical news made banner headlines in the newspapers.

IV:

Snow had started early that morning along the northern Atlantic seaboard and now it was growing steadily worse. Just outside Waterbury, Connecticut, the driver of Dr. Hale's cab began to weaken.

It wasn't human, he thought, for a man to be expected to drive to Boston and then, without stopping, from Boston to Washington. Not even for a hundred dollars.

Not in a storm like this. Why, he could see only a dozen yards ahead through the driving snow, even when he could manage to keep his eyes open. His fare was slumbering soundly in the back seat. Maybe he could get away with stopping here along the road, for an hour, to catch some sleep. Just an hour. His fare wouldn't ever know the difference. The guy must be loony, he thought, or why hadn't he taken a plane or a train?

Dr. Hale would have, of course, if he'd thought of it. But he wasn't used to traveling and besides, there'd been the Tartan Plaid. A taxi had seemed the easiest way to get anywhere—no worrying about tickets and connections and stations. Money was no object, and the plaid condition of his mind had caused him to overlook the human factor involved in an extended journey by taxi.

When he awoke, almost frozen, in the parked taxi, that human factor dawned upon him. The driver was so sound asleep that no amount of shaking could arouse him. Dr. Hale's watch had stopped, so he had no idea where he was or what time it was.

Unfortunately, too, he didn't know how to drive a car. He took a quick drink to keep from freezing and then got out of the cab, and as he did so, a car stopped.

It was a policeman—what is more it was a policeman in a million.

Yelling over the roar of the storm, Hale hailed him. "I'm Dr. Hale," he shouted. "We're lost, where am I?"

"Get in here before you freeze," ordered the policeman. "Do you mean Dr. Milton Hale, by any chance?"

"Yes."

"I've read all your books, Dr. Hale," said the policeman. "Physics is my hobby, and I've always wanted to meet you. I want to ask you about the revised value of the quantum."

"This is life or death," said Dr. Hale. "Can you take me to the nearest airport, quick?"

"Of course, Dr. Hale."

"And look—there's a driver in that cab, and he'll freeze to death unless we send aid."

"I'll put him in the back seat of my car and then run the cab off the road. We'll take care of details later."

"Hurry, please."

The obliging policeman hurried. He got in and started the car.

"About the revised quantum value, Dr. Hale," he began, then stopped talking.

Dr. Hale was sound asleep. The policeman drove to Waterbury Airport, one of the largest in the world since the population shift from New York City in the 1960s and 70s had given it a central position. In front of the ticket office, he gently awakened Dr. Hale.

"This is the airport, sir," he said.

Even as he spoke, Dr. Hale was leaping out of the car and stumbling into the building, yelling, "Thanks," over his shoulder and nearly falling down in doing so.

The warm-up roaring of the motors of a superstratoliner out on the field lent wings to his heels as he dashed for the ticket window.

"What plane's that?" he yelled.

"Washington Special, due out in one minute. But I don't think you can make it."

Dr. Hale slapped a hundred-dollar bill on the ledge. "Ticket," he gasped. "Keep change."

He grabbed the ticket and ran, getting into the plane just as the doors were being closed. Panting, he fell into a seat, the ticket still clutched in his hand. He was sound asleep before the hostess strapped him in for the blind take-off.

An hour later, the hostess awakened him. The passengers were disembarking.

Dr. Hale rushed out of the plane and ran across the field to the airport building. A big clock told him that it was nine o'clock, and he felt elated as he ran for the door marked "Taxis." He got into the nearest one.

"White House," he told the driver. "How long'll it take?"

"Ten minutes."

Dr. Hale gave a sigh of relief and sank back against the cushions. He didn't go back to sleep this time. He was wide awake now. But he closed his eyes to think out the words he'd use in explaining matters...

"Here you are, sir."

Dr. Hale gave a sigh of relief and sank back against the cab into the building. It didn't look as he had expected it to look. But there was a desk, and he ran up to it.

"I've got to see the President, quick. It's vital."

The clerk frowned. "The President of what?"

Dr. Hale's eyes went wide. "The President of wh—say, what building is this? And what town?"

The clerk's frown deepened. "This is the White House Hotel," he said. "Seattle, Washington."

Dr. Hale fainted. He woke up in a hospital three hours later. It was then midnight, Pacific Time, which meant it was three o'clock in the morning on the Eastern seaboard. It had, in fact, been midnight already in Washington, D.C., and in Boston, when he had been leaving the Washington Special in Seattle.

Dr. Hale rushed to the window and shook his fists, both of them, at the sky. A futile gesture.

Back in the East, however, the storm had stopped by twilight, leaving a light mist in the air. The star-conscious public had thereupon deluged the weather bureaus with telephoned requests about the

persistence of the mist.

"A breeze off the ocean is expected," they were told. "It is blowing now, in fact, and within an hour or two will have cleared off the light fog."

By eleven-fifteen the skies of Boston were clear.

Untold thousands braved the bitter cold and stood staring upward at the unfolding pageant of the no longer-eternal stars. It almost looked as though—an incredible development had occurred.

And then, gradually, the murmur grew. By a quarter to twelve, the thing was certain, and the murmur hushed and then grew louder than ever, waxing toward midnight. Different people reacted differently, of course, as might be expected. There was laughter as well as indignation, cynical amusement as well as shocked horror. There was even admiration.

Soon, in certain parts of the city, a concerted movement on the part of those who knew an address on Fremont Street began to take place. Movement afoot and in cars and public vehicles, converging.

At five minutes of twelve, Rutherford R. Sniveley sat waiting within his house. He was denying himself the pleasure of looking until, at the last moment, the thing was complete.

It was going well. The gathering murmur of voices, mostly angry voices, outside his house told him that. He heard his name shouted.

Just the same, he waited until the twelfth stroke of the clock before he stepped out upon the balcony. Much as he wanted to look upward, he forced himself to look down at the street first. The milling crowd was there and it was angry. But he had only contempt for the milling crowd.

Police cars were pulling up, too, and he recognized the mayor of Boston getting out of one of them, and the chief of police was with him. But so what? There wasn't any law covering this.

Then having denied himself the supreme pleasure long enough, he turned his eyes up to the silent sky, and there it was. The four hundred and sixty-eight brightest stars, spelling out:

USE  
SNIVELY'S  
SOAP

For just a second did his satisfaction last. Then his face began to turn an apoplectic purple.

"My heavens!" said Mr. Sniveley. "It's spelled wrong!" His face grew more purple still, and then, as a tree falls, he fell backward through the window.

An ambulance rushed the fallen magnate to the nearest hospital, but he was pronounced dead—of apoplexy—upon entrance.

But misspelled or not, the eternal stars held their positions as of that midnight. The aberrant motion had stopped, and again the stars were fixed. Fixed to spell—SNIVELY'S SOAP.

Of the many explanations offered by all and sundry who professed some physical and astronomical knowledge, none was more lucid—or closer to the actual truth—than that put forth by Wendell Mehan, president emeritus of the New York Astronomical Society.

"Obviously, the phenomenon is a trick of refraction," said Dr. Mehan. "It is manifestly impossible for any force contrived by man to move a star. The stars, therefore, still occupy their old places in the firmament.

"I suggest that Sniveley must have contrived a method of refracting the light of the stars, somewhere in or just above the atmospheric layer of the earth, so that they appear to have changed their positions. This is done, probably, by radio waves or similar waves, sent on some fixed frequency from a set—or possibly a series of four hundred and sixty-eight sets—somewhere upon the surface of the earth. Although we do not understand just how it is done, it is no more unthinkable that light rays should be bent by a field of waves than by a prism or by gravitational force.

"Since Sniveley was not a great scientist, I imagine that his discovery was empiric rather than logical—an accidental find. It is quite possible that even the discovery of his projector will not enable present-day scientists to understand its secret, any more than an aboriginal savage could understand the operation of a simple radio receiver by taking one apart.

"My principal reason for this assertion is the fact that the refraction obviously is a fourth-dimensional phenomenon, or its effect would be purely local to one portion of the globe. Only in the fourth dimension could light be so refracted...."

There was more but it is better to skip to his final paragraph:

"This effect cannot possibly be permanent—more permanent, that is, than the wave-projector which causes it. Sooner or later, Sniveley's machine will be found and shut off or will break down or wear out of its own volition. Undoubtedly it includes vacuum tubes which will some day blow out, as do the tubes in our radios...."

The excellence of Dr. Mehan's analysis was shown two months and eight days later, when the Boston Electric Co. shut off, for non-payment of bills, service to a house situated at 901 West Rogers Street, ten blocks from the Sniveley mansion. At the instant of the shut-off, excited reports from the night side of Earth brought the news that the stars had flashed back to their former positions instantaneously.

Investigation brought out that the description of one Elmer Smith, who had purchased that house six months before, corresponded with the description of Rutherford R. Sniveler, and undoubtedly Elmer Smith and Rutherford R. Sniveler were one and the same person.

In the attic was found a complicated network of four hundred and sixty-eight radio-type antennae, each antenna of different length and running in a different direction. The machine to which they were connected was not larger, strangely, than the average ham's radio projector, nor did it draw appreciably more current, according to the electric company's record.

By special order of the President of the United States, the projector was destroyed without examination of its internal arrangement. Clamorous protests against this high-handed executive order arose from many sides. But inasmuch as the projector had already been broken up, the protests were to no avail.

Serious repercussions were, on the whole, amazingly few.

Persons in general appreciated the stars more but trusted them less.

Roger Phlutter got out of jail and married Elsie.

Dr. Milton Hale found he liked Seattle and stayed there. Two thousand miles away from his sister, Agatha, he found it possible for the first time to defy her openly. He enjoys life more but, it is feared, will write fewer hooks.

There is one fact remaining which is painful to consider, since it casts a deep reflection upon the basic intelligence of the human race. It is proof, though, that the president's executive order was justified, despite scientific protest.

That fact is as humiliating as it is enlightening. During the two months and eight days during which the Sniveler machine was in operation, sales of Sniveley Soap increased nine-hundred-twenty per cent.

knock

There is a sweet little horror story that is only two sentences long:

"The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door..."

Two sentences and an ellipsis of three dots. The horror, of course, isn't in the two sentences at all; it's in the ellipsis, the implication: what knocked at the door? Faced with the unknown, the human mind supplies something vaguely horrible.

But it wasn't horrible, really.

The last man on Earth - or in the universe, for that matter - sat alone in a room. It was a rather peculiar room. He'd just noticed how peculiar it was and he'd been studying out the reason for its peculiarity. His conclusions didn't horrify him, but it annoyed him.

Walter Phelan, who had been associate professor of anthropology at Nathan University up until the time two days ago when Nathan University had ceased to exist, was not a man who horrified easily. Not that Walter Phelan was a heroic figure, by any wild stretch of the imagination. He was slight of stature and mild of disposition. He wasn't much to look at, and he knew it.

Not that his appearance worried him now. Right now, in fact, there wasn't much feeling in him. Abstractedly, he knew that two days ago, within the space of an hour, the human race had been destroyed, except for him and, somewhere, a woman - one woman. And that was a fact which didn't concern Walter Phelan in the slightest degree. He'd probably never see her and didn't care too much if he didn't.

Women just hadn't been a factor in Walter's life since Martha had died a year and a half ago. Not that Martha hadn't been a good wife - albeit a bit on the bossy side. Yes, he'd loved Martha, in a deep, quiet way. He was only forty now, and he'd been only thirty-eight when Martha had died, but - well - he just hadn't thought about women since then. His life had been his books, the ones he read and the ones he wrote. Now there wasn't any point in writing books, but he had the rest of his life to spend in reading them.

True, company would be nice, but he'd get along without it. Maybe after a while, he'd get so he'd enjoy the occasional company of one of the Zan, although that was a bit difficult to imagine. Their thinking was so alien to his that there seemed no common ground for discussion, intelligent though they were, in a way.

An ant is intelligent, in a way, but no man ever established communication with an ant. He thought of the Zan, somehow, as super-ants, although they didn't look like ants, and he had a hunch that the Zan regarded the human race as the human race had regarded ordinary ants. Certainly what they'd done to Earth had been what men did to ant hills-and it had been done much more efficiently.

But they had given him plenty of books. They'd been nice about that, as soon as he had told them what he wanted, and he had told them that the moment he had learned that he was destined to spend the rest of his life alone in this room. The rest of his life, or as the Zan had quaintly expressed it, forever. Even a brilliant mind - and the Zan obviously had brilliant minds - has its idiosyncracies. The Zan had learned to speak Terrestrial English in a manner of hours but they persisted in separating syllables. But we disgress.

There was a knock on the door.

You've got it all now, except the three dots, the ellipsis, and I'm going to fill that in and show you that it wasn't horrible at all.

Walter Phelan called out, "Come in," and the door opened. It was of course, only a Zan. It looked exactly like the other Zan; if there was any way of telling one of them from another, Walter hadn't found it. It was about four feet tall and it looked like nothing on earth - nothing, that is, that had been on Earth until the Zan came there.

Walter said, "Hello, George." When he'd learned that none of them had names he decided to call them all George, and the Zan didn't seem to mind.

This one said, "Hel-lo, Wal-ter." That was ritual; the knock on the door and the greetings. Walter waited.

"Point one," said the Zan "You will please henceforth sit with your chair turned the other way."

Walter said, "I thought so, George. That plain wall is transparent from the other side, isn't it?"

"It is trans-par-ent."

"Just what I thought. I'm in a zoo Right?"

"That is right."

Walter sighed. "I knew it. That plain, blank wall, without a single piece of furniture against it. And made of something different from the other walls. If I persist in sitting with my back to it, what then? You will kill me? - I ask hopefully."

"We will take a-way your books."

"You've got me there George. All right I'll face the other way when I sit and read. How many other animals besides me are in this zoo of yours?"

"Two hun-dred and six-teen."

Walter shook his head. "Not complete, George. Even a bush league zoo can beat that - could beat that, I mean, if there were any bush league zoos left. Did you just pick at random?"

"Ran-dom sam-ples yes All spe-cies would have been too man-y. Male and female each of one hun-dred and eight kinds,"

"What do you feed them? The carnivorous ones, I mean."

"We make food Syn-thet-ic."

"Smart," said Walter. "And the flora? You got a collection of that, too?"

"Flo-ra was not hurt by vi-bra-tions. It is all still grow-ing."

"Nice for the flora," said Walter. "You weren't as hard on it, then, as you were on the fauna, Well, George, you started out with 'point one.' I deduced there is a point two kicking around somewhere. What is it?"

"Some-thing we do not un-der-stand. Two of the oth-er a-nimals sleep and do not wake? They are cold."

"It happens in the best regulated zoos, George," Walter Phelan said. "Probably not a thing wrong with them except that they're dead."

"Dead? That means stopped. But nothing stopped them. Each was a-lone."

Walter stared at the Zan. "Do you mean, George, you don't know what natural death is?"

"Death is when a be-ing is killed, stopped from liv-ing."

Walter Phelan blinked. "How old are you, George?" he asked.

"Six-teen-you would not know the word. Your pla-net went a-round your sun a-bout sev-en thou-sand times, I am still young."

Walter whistled softly. "A babe in arms," he said. He thought hard a moment. "Look, George," he said, "you've got something to learn about this planet you're on. There's a guy here who doesn't hang around where you come from. An old man with a beard and a scythe and an hour-glass. Your vibrations didn't kill him."

"What is he?"

"Call him the Grim Reaper, George. Old Man Death. Our people and animals live until somebody - Old Man Death stops them ticking."

"He stopped the two crea-tures? He will stop more?"

Walter opened his mouth to answer, and then closed it again. Something in the Zan's voice indicated that there would be a worried frown on his face, if he had had a face recognizable as such.

"How about taking me to these animals who won't wake up?" Walter asked. "Is that against the rules?"

"Come," said the Zan.

That had been the afternoon of the second day. It was the next morning that the Zan came back, several of them. They began to move Walter Phelan's books and furniture. When they'd finished that, they moved him. He found himself in a much larger room a hundred yards away.

He sat and waited and this time, too, when there was a knock on the door, he knew what was coming and politely stood up. A Zan opened the door and stood aside. A woman entered.

Walter bowed shghtly, "Walter Phelan," he said, "in case George didn't tell you my name. George tries to be polite, but he doesn't know all of our ways."

The woman seemed calm; he was glad to notice that. She said, "My name is Grace Evans, Mr. Phelan. What's this all about? Why did they bring me here?"

Walter was studying her as she talked. She was tall, fully as tall as he, and well-proportioned. She looked to be somewhere in her early thirties, about the age Martha had been. She had the same calm confidence about her that he'd always liked about Martha, even though it had contrasted with his own easygoing informality. In fact, he thought she looked quite a bit like Martha.

"I think I know why they brought you here but let's go back a bit," he said. "Do you know just what has happened otherwise?"

"You mean that they've killed everyone?"

"Yes. Please sit down. You know how they accomplished it?" She sank into a comfortable chair nearby.

"No," she said, "I don't know just how. Not that it matters does it?"

"Not a lot. But here's the story - what I know of it from getting one of them to talk, and from piecing things together. There isn't a great number of them - here, anyway. I don't know how numerous a race they are where they came from and I don't know where that is, but I'd guess it's outside the Solar System. You've seen the space ship they came in?"

"Yes It's as big as a mountain."

"Almost. Well it has equipment for emitting some sort of a vibration - they call it that, in our language, but I imagine it's more like a radio wave than a sound vibration - that destroys all animal life. It - the ship itself - is insulated against the vibration. I don't know whether its range is big enough to kill off the whole planet at once, or whether they flew in circles around the earth, sending out the vibratory waves. But it killed everybody and everything instantly and, I hope, painlessly. The only reason we, and the other two-hundred-odd animals in this zoo, weren't killed was because we were inside the ship. We'd been picked up as specimens. You do know this is a zoo, don't you?"

"I - I suspected it."

"The front walls are transparent from the outside The Zan were pretty clever at fixing up the inside of each cubicle to match the natural habitat of the creature it contains. These cubicles, such as the one we're in, are of plastic, and they've got a machine that makes one in about ten minutes, If Earth had had a machine and a process like that, there wouldn't have been any housing shortage. Well, there isn't any housing shortage now, anyway. And I imagine that the human race - specifically you and I - can stop worrying about the A-bomb and the next war. The Zan certainly solved a lot of problems for us."

Grace Evans smiled faintly. "Another case where the operation was successful, but the patient died. Things were in an awful mess. Do you remember being captured? I don't. I went to sleep one night and woke up in a cage on the space ship."

"I don't remember either " Walter said. "My hunch is that they used the vibratory waves at low intensity first, just enough to knock us all out. Then they cruised around, picking up samples more or less at random for their zoo. After they had as many as they wanted, or as many as they had space in the ship to hold, they turned on the juice all the way. And that was that. It wasn't until yesterday they knew they'd made a mistake and had underestimated us. They thought we were immortal, as they are."

"That we were - what?"

"They can be killed but they don't know what natural death is. They didn't anyway, until yesterday. Two of us died yesterday."

"Two of - Oh!"

"Yes, two of us animals in their zoo. One was a snake and one was a duck. Two species gone irrevocably. And by the Zan's way of figuring time, the remaining member of each species is going to live only a few minutes, anyway. They figured they had permanent specimens."

"You mean they didn't realize what short-lived creatures we are?"

"That's right," Walter said. "One of them is young at seven thousand years, he told me. They're bi-sexual themselves, incidentally, but they probably breed once every ten thousand years or thereabouts. When they learned yesterday how ridiculously short a life expectancy we terrestrial animals have, they were probably shocked to the core - if they have cores. At any rate they decided to reorganize their zoo - two by two instead of one by one. They figure we'll last longer collectively if not individually."

"Oh!" Grace Evans stood up and there was a taint flush on her face. "If you think - If they think - " She turned toward the door.

"It'll be locked," Walter Phelan said calmly "But don't worry. Maybe they think, but I don't think. You needn't even tell me you wouldn't have me if I was the last man on Earth; it would be corny under the circumstances."

"But are they going to keep us locked up together in this one little room?"

"It isn't so little; we'll get by. I can sleep quite comfortably in one of these overstuffed chairs. And don't think I don't agree with you perfectly, my dear. All personal considerations aside, the least favor we can do the human race is to let it end with us and not be perpetuated for exhibition in a zoo."

She said "Thank you," almost inaudibly, and the flush receded from her cheeks. There was anger in her eyes, but Walter knew that it wasn't anger at him. With her eyes sparkling like that, she looked a lot like Martha, he thought.

He smiled at her and said, "Otherwise -"

She started out of her chair, and for an instant he thought she was going to come over and slap him. Then she sank back wearily. "If you were a man, you'd be thinking of some way to - They can be killed, you said?" Her voice was bitter.

"The Zan? Oh, certainly. I've been studying them. They look horribly different from us, but I think they have about the same metabolism we have, the same type of circulatory system, and probably the same type of digestive system. I think that anything that would kill one of us would kill one of them."

"But you said -"

"Oh, there are differences, of course. Whatever factor it is in man that ages him, they don't have. Or else they have some gland that man doesn't have, something that renews cells."

She had forgotten her anger now. She leaned forward eagerly. She said, "I think that's right. And I don't think they feel pain."

"I was hoping that. But what makes you think so, my dear?"

"I stretched a piece of wire that I found in the desk of my cubicle across the door so my Zan would fall over it. He did, and the wire cut his leg."

"Did he bleed red?"

"Yes but it didn't seem to annoy him. He didn't get mad about it; didn't even mention it. When he came back the next time, a few hours later, the cut was one. Well, almost gone. I could see just enough of a trace of it to be sure it was the same Zan."

Walter Phelan nodded slowly.

"He wouldn't get angry, of course," he said. "They're emotionless. Maybe, if we killed one, they wouldn't even punish us. But it wouldn't do any good. They'd just give us our food through a trap door and treat us as men would have treated a zoo animal that had killed a keeper. They'd just see that he didn't have a crack at any more keepers."

"How many of them are there?" she asked.

"About two hundred, I think, in this particular space ship. But undoubtedly there are many more where they came from. I have a hunch this is just an advance guard, sent to clear off this planet and make it safe for Zan occupancy,"

"They did a good-"

There was a knock at the door, and Walter Phelan called out, "Come in."

A Zan stood in the doorway.

"Hello George," said Walter.

"Hel-lo Wal-ter," said the Zan.

It may or may not have been the same Zan, but it was always the same ritual.

"What's on your mind?" Walter asked.

"An-oth-er crea-ture sleeps and will not wake. A small fur-ry one called a wea-sel."

Walter shrugged.

"It happens, George. Old Man Death. I told you about him."

"And worse. A Zan has died. This morning."

"Is that worse?" Walter looked at him blandly. "Well, George, you'll have to get used to it, if you're going to stay around here."

The Zan said nothing. It stood there.

Finally Walter said, "Well?"

"A-bout wea-sel. You ad-vice same?"

Walter shrugged again. "Probably won't do any good. But sure, why not?"

The Zan left.

Walter could hear his footsteps dying away outside. He grinned. "It might work, Martha," he said.

"Mar - My name is Grace, Mr Phelan. What might work?"

"My name is Walter, Grace. You might as well get used to it. You know, Grace, you do remind me a lot of Martha. She was my wife. She died a couple of years ago."

"I'm sorry," said Grace "But what might work? What were you talking about to the Zan?"

"We'll know tomorrow," Walter said. And she couldn't get another word out of him.

That was the fourth day of the stay of the Zan.

The next was the last.

It was nearly noon when one of the Zan came. After the ritual, he stood in the doorway, looking more alien than ever. It would be interesting to describe him for you, but there aren't words.

He said, "We go. Our coun-cil met and de-cid-ed,"

"Another of you died?"

"Last night This is pla-net of death "

Walter nodded. "You did your share. You're leaving two hundred and thirteen creatures alive, out of quite a few billion. Don't hurry back."

"Is there an-y-thing we can do?"

"Yes. You can hurry. And you can leave our door unlocked, but not the others. We'll take care of the others."

Something clicked on the door; the Zan left.

Grace Evans was standing, her eyes shining.

She asked, "What -? How -?"

"Wait," cautioned Walter. "Let's hear them blast off. It's a sound I want to remember."

The sound came within minutes, and Walter Phelan, realizing how rigidly he'd been holding himself, relaxed in his chair.

"There was a snake in the Garden of Eden, too, Grace, and it got us in trouble," he said musingly. "But this one made up for it. I mean the mate of the snake that died day before yesterday. It was a rattlesnake."

"You mean it killed the two Zan who died? But -"

Walter nodded, "They were babes in the woods here. When they took me to look at the first creatures who 'were asleep and wouldn't wake up,' and I saw that one of them was a rattler, I had an idea, Grace. Just maybe, I thought, poison creatures were a development peculiar to Earth and the Zan wouldn't know about them. And, too, maybe their metabolism was enough like ours so that the poison would kill them. Anyway, I had nothing to lose trying. And both maybes turned out to be right."

"How did you get the snake to -"

Walter Phelan grinned. He said, "I told them what affection was. They didn't know. They were interested, I found, in preserving the remaining one of each species as long as possible, to study the picture and record it before it died. I told them it would die immediately because of the loss of its mate, unless it had affection and petting - constantly. I showed them how with the duck. Luckily it was a tame one, and I held it against my chest and petted it a while to show them. Then I let them take over with it - and the rattlesnake."

He stood up and stretched, and then sat down again more comfortably.

"Well, we've got a world to plan," he said. "We'll have to let the animals out of the ark, and that will take some thinking and deciding. The herbivorous wild ones we can let go right away. The domestic ones, we'll do better to keep and take charge of; we'll need them. But the carnivora - Well, we'll have to decide. But I'm afraid it's got to be thumbs down."

He looked at her. "And the human race. We've got to make a decision about that. A pretty important one."

Her face was getting a little pink again, as it had yesterday; she sat rigidly in her chair.

"No!" she said.

He didn't seem to have heard her. "It's been a nice race, even if nobody won it," he said. "It'll be

starting over again now, and it may go backward for a while until it gets its breath, but we can gather books for it and keep most of its knowledge intact, the important things anyway. We can -"

He broke off as she got up and started for the door. Just the way his Martha would have acted, he thought, back in the days when he was courting her, before they were married.

He said, "Think it over, my dear, and take your time. But come back."

The door slammed. He sat waiting, thinking out all the things there were to do, once he started, but is no hurry to start them; and after a while he heard her hesitant footsteps coming back.

He smiled a little. See? It wasn't horrible, really.

The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door...

all good bems

*The spaceship from Andromeda II spun like a top in the grip of mighty forces. The five-limbed Andromedan strapped into the pilot's seat turned the three protuberant eyes of one of his heads toward the four other Andromedans strapped into bunks around the ship. "Going to be a rough landing," he said. It was.*

ELMO Scott hit the tab key of his typewriter and listened to the carriage zing across and ring the bell. It sounded nice and he did it again. But there still weren't any words on the sheet of paper in the machine. He lit another cigarette and stared at it. At the paper, that is, not the cigarette. There still weren't any words on the paper.

He tilted his chair back and turned to look at the sleek black-and-tan Doberman pinscher lying in the mathematical middle of the rag rug. He said, "You lucky dog." The Doberman wagged what little stump of tail he had. He didn't answer otherwise.

Elmo Scott looked back at the paper. There still weren't any words there. He put his fingers over the keyboard and wrote: "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party." He stared at the words, such as they were, and felt the faintest breath of an idea brush his cheek.

He called out "Toots!" and a cute little brunette in a blue gingham house dress came out of the kitchen and stood by him. His arm went around her. He said, "I got an idea."

She read the words in the typewriter. "It's the best thing you've written in three days," she said, "except for that letter renewing your subscription to the Digest. I think that was better."

"Button your lip," Elmo told her. "I'm talking about what I'm going to do with that sentence. I'm going to change it to a science-fiction plot idea, one word at a time. It can't miss. Watch."

He took his arm from around her and wrote under the first sentence: "Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of the party." He said, "Get the idea, Toots? Already it's beginning to look like a science-fiction sendoff. Good old bug-eyed monsters. Bems to you. Watch the next step."

Under the first sentence and the second he wrote. "Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of—" He stared at it. "What shall I make it, Toots? 'The galaxy' or 'the universe'?"

"Better make it yourself. If you don't get a story finished and the check for it in two weeks, we lose this cabin and walk back to the city and—and you'll have to quit writing full time and go back to the newspaper and—"

"Cut it out, Toots. I know all that. Too well."

"Just the same, Elmo, you'd better make it: 'Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of Elmo Scott.' "

The big Doberman stirred on the rag rug. He said, "You needn't."

Both human heads turned toward him.

The little brunette stamped a dainty foot. "Elmo!" she said. "Trying a trick like that. That's how you've been spending the time you should have spent writing. Learning ventriloquism!"

"No, Toots," said the dog. "It isn't that."

"Elmo! How do you get him to move his mouth like—" Her eyes went from the dog's face to Elmo's and she stopped in mid-sentence. If Elmo Scott wasn't scared stiff, then he was a better actor than Maurice

Evans. She said, "Elmo!" again, but this time her voice was a scared little wail, and she didn't stamp her foot. Instead she practically fell into Elmo's lap and, if he hadn't grabbed her, would probably have fallen from there to the floor.

"Don't be frightened, Toots," said the dog.

Some degree of sanity returned to Elmo Scott. He said, "Whatever you are, don't call my wife Toots. Her name is Dorothy."

"You call her Toots."

"That's—that's different."

"I see it is," said the dog. His mouth lolled open as though he were laughing. "The concept that entered your mind when you used that word 'wife' is an interesting one. This is a bisexual planet, then."

Elmo said, "This is a —uh— What are you talking about?"

"On Andromeda II," said the dog, "we have five sexes. But we are a highly developed race, of course. Yours is highly primitive. Perhaps I should say lowly primitive. Your language has, I find, confusing connotations; it is not mathematical. But, as I started to observe, you are still in the bisexual stage. How long since you were mono-sexual? And don't deny that you once were; I can read the word 'amoeba' in your mind."

"If you can read my mind," said Elmo, "why should I talk?"

"Consider Toots—I mean Dorothy," said the dog. "We cannot hold a three-way conversation since you two are not telepathic. At any rate, there shall shortly be more of us in the conversation. I have summoned my companions." He laughed again. "Do not let them frighten you, no matter in what form they may appear. They are merely Bems."

"B-bems?" asked Dorothy. "You mean you are b-bugeyed monsters? That's what Elmo means by Bems, but you aren't—"

"That is just what I am," said the dog. "You are not, of course, seeing the real me. Nor will you see my companions as they really are. They, like me, are temporarily animating bodies of creatures of lesser intelligence. In our real bodies, I assure you, you would classify us as Bems. We have five limbs each and two heads, each head with three eyes on stalks."

"Where are your real bodies?" Elmo asked.

"They are dead— Wait, I see that word means more to you than I thought at first. They are dormant, temporarily uninhabitable and in need of repairs, inside the fused hull of a spaceship which was warped into this space too near a planet. This planet. That's what wrecked us."

"Where? You mean there's really a spaceship near here? Where?" Elmo's eyes were almost popping from his head as he questioned the dog.

"That is none of your business, Earthman. If it were found and examined by you creatures, you would possibly discover space travel before you are ready for it. The cosmic scheme would be upset." He growled. "There are enough cosmic wars now. We were fleeing a Betelgeuse fleet when we warped into your space."

"Elmo," said Dorothy. "What's beetle juice got to do with it? Wasn't this crazy enough before he started talking about a beetle juice fleet?"

"No," said Elmo resignedly. "It wasn't." For a squirrel had just pushed its way through a hole in the bottom of the screen door.

It said, "Hyah dar, yo-all. We uns got yo message, One." "See what I mean?" said Elmo.

"Everything is all right, Four," said the Doberman. "These people will serve our purpose admirably. Meet Elmo Scott and Dorothy Scott; don't call her Toots."

"Yessir. Yessum. Ah's sho gladda meetcha."

The Doberman's mouth lolled open again in another laugh; it was unmistakable this time.

"Perhaps I'd better explain Four's accent," he said. "We scattered, each entering a creature of low mentality and from that vantage point contacting the mind of some member of the ruling species, learning from that mind the language and the level of intelligence and degree of imagination. I take it from your reaction that Four has learned the language from a mind which speaks a language differing slightly from yours."

"Ah sho did," said the squirrel.

Elmo shuddered slightly. "Not that I'm suggesting it, but I'm curious to know why you didn't take over the higher species directly," he said.

The dog looked shocked. It was the first time Elmo had ever seen a dog look shocked, but the Doberman managed it.

"It would be unthinkable," he declared. "The cosmic ethic forbids the taking over of any creature of an intelligence over the four level. We Andromedans are of the twenty-three level, and I find you Earthlings—"

"Wait!" said Elmo. "Don't tell me. It might give me an inferiority complex. Or would it?"

"Ah fears it might," said the squirrel.

The Doberman said, "So you can see that it is not purely coincidence that we Bems should manifest ourselves to you who are a writer of what I see you call science-fiction. We studied many minds and yours was the first one we found capable of accepting the premise of visitors from Andromeda. Had Four here, for example, tried to explain things to the woman whose mind he studied, she would probably have gone insane."

"She sho would," said the squirrel.

A chicken thrust its head through the hole in the screen, clucked, and pulled its head out again.

"Please let Three in," said the Doberman. "I fear that you will not be able to communicate directly with Three. He has found that subjectively to modify the throat structure of the creature he inhabits in order to enable it to talk would be a quite involved process. It does not matter. He can communicate telepathically with one of us, and we can relay his comments to you. At the moment he sends you his greetings and asks that you open the door."

The clucking of the chicken (it was a big black hen, Elmo saw) sounded angry and Elmo said, "Better open the door, Toots."

Dorothy Scott got off his lap and opened the door. She turned a dismayed face to Elmo and then to the Doberman.

"There's a cow coming down the road," she said. "Do you mean to tell me that she—"

"He," the Doberman corrected her. "Yes, that will be Two. And since your language is completely inadequate in that it has only two genders, you may as well call all of us 'he'; it will save trouble. Of course, we are five different sexes as I explained."

"You didn't explain," said Elmo, looking interested. Dorothy glowered at Elmo. "He'd better not. Five different sexes! All living together in one spaceship. I suppose it takes all five of you to—uh—"

"Exactly," said the Doberman. "And now if you will please open the door for Two, I'm sure that—"

"I will not! Have a cow in here? Do you think I'm crazy?", "We could make you so," said the dog. Elmo looked from the dog to his wife.

"You'd better open the door, Dorothy," he advised.

"Excellent advice," said the Doberman. "We are not, incidentally, going to impose on your hospitality, nor will we ask you to do anything unreasonable."

Dorothy opened the screen door and the cow clumped in.

He looked at Elmo and said, "Hi, Mac. What's cookin'?"

Elmo closed his eyes.

The Doberman asked the cow, "Where's Five? Have you been in touch with him?"

"Yeah," said the cow. "He's comin'. The guy I looked over was a bindlestiff, One. What are these mugs?"

"The one with the pants is a writer," said the dog. "The one with the skirt is his wife."

"What's a wife?" asked the cow. He looked at Dorothy and leered. "I like skirts better," he said. "Hiya, Babe."

Elmo got up out of his chair, glaring at the cow. "Listen, you—" That was as far as he got. He dissolved into laughter, almost hysterical laughter, and sank down into the chair again.

Dorothy looked at him indignantly. "Elmo! Are you going to let a cow—"

She almost strangled on the word as she caught Elmo's eye, and she, too, started laughing. She fell into Elmo's lap so hard that he grunted.

The Doberman was laughing, too, his long pink tongue lolling out. "I'm glad you people have a sense of humor," he said with approval. "In fact, that is one reason we chose you. But let us be serious a moment." There wasn't any laughter in his voice now. He said, "Neither of you will be harmed, but you will be watched. Do not go near the phone or leave the house while we are here. Is that understood?"

"How long are you going to be here?" Elmo said. "We have food for only a few days."

"That will be long enough. We will be able to make a new spaceship within a matter of hours. I see that that amazes you; I shall explain that we can work in a slower dimension."

"I see," said Elmo.

"What is he talking about, Elmo?" Dorothy demanded.

"A slower dimension," said Elmo. "I used it in a story once myself. You go into another dimension where the time rate is different; spend a month there and come back and you get back only a few minutes or hours after you left, by time in your own dimension."

"And you invented it? Elmo, how wonderful!"

Elmo grinned at the Doberman. He said, "That's all you want—to let you stay here until you get your new ship built? And to let you alone and not notify anybody that you're here?"

"Exactly." The dog appeared to beam with delight. "And we will not inconvenience you unnecessarily. But you will be guarded. Five or I will do that."

"Five? Where is he?"

"Don't be alarmed, he is under your chair at the moment, but he will not harm you. You didn't see him come in a moment ago through the hole in the screen. Five, meet Elmo and Dorothy Scott. Don't call her Toots."

There was a rattle under the chair. Dorothy screamed and pulled her feet up into Elmo's lap. Elmo tried to put his there too, with confusing results.

There was hissing laughter from under the chair. A sibilant voice said, "Don't worry, folks. I didn't know until I read in your minds just now that shaking my tail like that was a warning that I was about to— Think of the word for me—thank you. To strike." A five-foot rattlesnake crawled out from under the chair and curled up beside the Doberman.

"Five won't harm you," said the Doberman. "None of us will."

"We sho won't," said the squirrel.

The cow leaned against the wall, crossed its front legs and said, "That's right, Mac." He, or she, or it, leered at Dorothy. It said, "An' Babe, you don't need to worry about what you're worryin' about. I'm housebroke." It started to chew placidly and then stopped. "I won't give you no udder trouble, either," it concluded.

Elmo Scott shuddered slightly.

"You've done worse than that yourself," said the Doberman. "And it's quite a trick to pun in a language you've just learned. I can see one question in your mind. You're wondering that creatures of high intelligence should have a sense of humor. The answer is obvious if you think about it; isn't your sense of humor more highly developed than that of creatures who have even less intelligence than you?"

"Yes," Elmo admitted; "Say, I just thought of something else. Andromeda is a constellation, not a star. Yet you said your planet is Andromeda II. How come?"

"Actually we come from a planet of a star in Andromeda for which you have no name; it's too distant to show up in your telescopes. I merely called it by a name that would be familiar to you. For your convenience I named the star after the constellation."

Whatever slight suspicion (of what, he didn't know) Elmo Scott may have had, evaporated.

The cow uncrossed its legs. "What t'ell we waitin' for?" it inquired.

"Nothing, I suppose," said the Doberman. "Five and I will take turns standing guard."

"Go ahead and get started," said the rattlesnake. "I'll take the first trick. Half an hour; that'll give you a month there."

The Doberman nodded. He got up and trotted to the screen door, pushing it open with his muzzle after lifting the latch with his tail. The squirrel, the chicken and the cow followed.

"Be seein' ya, Babe," said the cow.

"We sho will," the squirrel said.

It was almost two hours later that the Doberman, who was then on duty as guard, lifted his head suddenly. "There they went," he said.

"I beg your pardon," said Elmo Scott.

"Their new spaceship just took off. It has warped out of this space and is heading back toward Andromeda." "You say their. Didn't you go along?"

"Me? Of course not. I'm Rex, your dog. Remember? Only One, who was using my body, left me with an understanding of what happened and a low level of intelligence."

"A low level?"

"About equal to yours, Elmo. He says it will pass away, but not until after I've explained everything to you. But how about some dog food? I'm hungry. Will you get me some, Toots?"

Elmo said, "Don't call my wife— Say, are you really Rex?"

"Of course I'm Rex."

"Get him some dog food, Toots," Elmo said. "I've got an idea. Let's all go out in the kitchen so we can keep talking."

"Can I have two cans of it?" asked the Doberman.

Dorothy was getting them out of the closet. "Sure, Rex," she said.

The Doberman lay down in the doorway. "How about rustling 'some grub for us, too, Toots?" Elmo suggested. "I'm hungry. Look, Rex, you mean they just went off like that without saying good-by to us, or anything?"

"They left me to say good-by. And they did you a favor, Elmo, to repay you for your hospitality. One took a look inside that skull of yours and found the psychological block that's been keeping you from thinking of plots for your stories. He removed it. You'll be able to write again. No better than before, maybe, but at least you won't be snow-blind staring at blank paper."

"The devil with that," said Elmo. "How about the spaceship they didn't repair? Did they leave it?"

"Sure. But they took their bodies out of it and fixed them up. They were really Bems, by the way. Two heads apiece, five limbs—and they could use all five as either arms or legs—six eyes apiece, three to a head, on long stems. You should have seen them."

Dorothy was putting cold food on the table. "You won't mind a cold lunch, will you, Elmo?" she asked.

Elmo looked at her without seeing her and said, "Huh?" and then turned back to the Doberman. The Doberman got up from the doorway and went over to the big dish of dog food that Dorothy had just put down on the floor. He said, "Thanks, Toots," and started eating in noisy gulps.

Elmo made himself a sandwich, and started munching it. The Doberman finished his meal, lapped up some water and went back to the throw rug in the doorway.

Elmo stared at him. "Rex, if I can find that spaceship they abandoned, I won't have to write stories," he said. "I can find enough things in it to— Say, I'll make you a proposition."

"Sure," said the Doberman, "if I tell you where it is, you'll get another Doberman pinscher to keep me company, and you'll raise Doberman pups. Well, you don't know it yet, but you're going to do that anyway. The Bem named One planted the idea in your mind; he said I ought to get something out of this, too."

"Okay, but will you tell me where it is?"

"Sure, now that you've finished that sandwich. It was something that would have looked like a dust mote, if you'd seen it, on the top slice of boiled ham. It was almost submicroscopic. You just ate it."

Elmo Scott put his hands to his head. The Doberman's mouth was open; its tongue lolled out for all the world as though it were laughing at him.

Elmo pointed a finger at him. He said, "You mean I've got to write for a living all the rest of my life?"

"Why not?" asked the Doberman. "They figured out you'd be really happier that way. And with the psychological block removed, it won't be so hard. You won't have to start out. 'Now is the time for all good men—' And, incidentally, it wasn't any coincidence that you substituted Bems for men; that was One's idea. He was already here inside me, watching you. And getting quite a kick out of it."

Elmo got up and started to pace back and forth. "Looks like they outsmarted me at every turn but one,

Rex," he murmured. "I've got 'em there, if you'll co-operate.

"How?"

"We can make a fortune with you. The world's only talking dog. Rex, we'll get you diamond-studded collars and feed you aged steaks and—and get you everything you want. Will you?"

"Will I what?"

"Speak."

"Woof," said the Doberman.

Dorothy Scott looked at Elmo Scott. "Why do that, Elmo?" she asked. "You told me I should never ask him to speak unless we had something to give him, and he's just eaten."

"I dunno," said Elmo. "I forgot. Well, guess I'd better get back to getting a story started." He stepped over the dog and walked to his typewriter in the other room.

He sat down in front of it and then called out. "Hey, Toots," and Dorothy came in and stood beside him. He said, "I think I got an idea. That 'Now is the time for all good Bems to come to the aid of Elmo Scott' has the germ of an idea in it. I can even pick the title out of it. 'All Good Bems.' About a guy trying to write a science-fiction story, and suddenly his—uh—dog—I can make him a Doberman like Rex and—Well, wait till you read it."

He jerked fresh paper into the typewriter and wrote the heading:

ALL GOOD BEMS

daymare

IT started out like a simple case of murder. That was bad enough in itself, because it was the first murder during the five years Rod Caquer had been Lieutenant of Police in Sector Three of Callisto.

Sector Three was proud of that record, or had been until the record became a dead duck.

But before the thing was over, nobody would have been happier than Rod Caquer if it had stayed a simple case of murder-without cosmic repercussions.

Events began to happen when Rod Caquer's buzzer made him look up at the visiscreen.

There he saw the image of Barr Maxon, Regent of Sector Three.

"Morning, Regent," Caquer said pleasantly. "Nice speech you made last night on the—"

Maxon cut him short. "Thanks, Caquer," he said. "You know Willem Deem?"

"The book-and-reel shop proprietor? Yes, slightly." "He's dead," announced Maxon. "It seems to be murder. You better go there."

His image clicked off the screen before Caquer could ask any questions. But the questions could wait anyway. He was already on his feet and buckling on his short-sword.

Murder on Callisto? It did not seem possible, but if it had really happened he should get there quickly. Very quickly, if he was to have time for a look at the body before they took it to the incinerator.

On Callisto, bodies are never held for more than an hour after death because of the hylra spores which, in minute quantity, are always present in the thinnish atmosphere. They are harmless, of course, to live tissue, but they tremendously accelerate the rate of putrefaction in dead animal matter of any sort.

Dr. Skidder, the Medico-in-Chief, was coming out the front door of the book-and-reel shop when Lieutenant Caquer arrived there, breathless.

The medico jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. "Better hurry if you want a look," he said to Caquer. "They're taking it out the back way. But I've examined—"

Caquer ran on past him and caught the white-uniformed utility men at the back door of the shop.

"Hi, boys, let me take a look," Caquer cried as he peeled back the sheet that covered the thing on the stretcher.

It made him feel a bit sickish, but there was not any doubt of the identity of the corpse or the cause of death. He had hoped against hope that it would turn out to have been an accidental death after all. But the skull had been cleaved down to the eyebrows—a blow struck by a strong man with a heavy sword.

"Better let us hurry, Lieutenant. It's almost an hour since they found him."

Caquer's nose confirmed it, and he put the sheet back quickly and let the utility men go on to their

gleaming white truck parked just outside the door.

He walked back into the shop, thoughtfully, and looked around. Everything seemed in order. The long shelves of celluwrapped merchandise were neat and orderly. The row of booths along the other side, some equipped with an enlarger for book customers and the others with projectors for those who were interested in the microfilms, were all empty and undisturbed.

A little crowd of curious persons was gathered outside the door, but Brager, one of the policemen, was keeping them out of the shop.

"Hey. Brager," said Caquer, and the patrolman came in and closed the door behind him.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Know anything about this? Who found him, and when, and so on?"

"I did, almost an hour ago. I was walking by on my beat when I heard the shot."

Caquer looked at him blankly.

"The shot?" he repeated.

"Yeah. I ran in and there he was dead and nobody around. I knew nobody had come out the front way, so I ran to the back and there wasn't anybody in sight from the back door. So I came back and put in the call."

"To whom? Why didn't you call me direct, Brager?"

"Sorry, Lieutenant, but I was excited and I pushed the wrong button and got the Regent. I told him somebody had shot Deem and he said stay on guard and he'd call the Medico and the utility boys and you."

In that order? Caquer wondered. Apparently, because Caquer had been the last one to get there.

But he brushed that aside for the more important question-the matter of Brager having heard a shot. That did not make sense, unless-no, that was absurd, too. If Willem Deem had been shot, the Medico would not have split his skull as part of the autopsy.

"What do you mean by a shot, Brager?" Caquer asked. "An old-fashioned explosive weapon?"

"Yeah," said Brager. "Didn't you see the body? A hole right over the heart. A bullet-hole, I guess. I never saw one before. I didn't know there was a gun on Callisto. They were outlawed even before the blasters were."

Caquer nodded slowly.

"You-you didn't see evidence of any other-uh-wound?" he persisted.

"Earth, no. Why would there be any other wound? A hole through a man's heart's enough to kill him, isn't it?"

"Where did Dr. Skidder go when he left here?" Caquer inquired. "Did he say?"

"Yeah, he said you would be wanting his report so he'd go back to his office and wait till you came around or called him. What do you want me to do, Lieutenant?"

Caquer thought a moment.

"Go next door and use the visiphone there, Brager-I'll be busy on this one," Caquer at last told the policeman. "Get three more men, and the four of you canvass this block and question everyone."

"You mean whether they saw anybody run out the back way, and if they heard the shot, and that sort of thing?" asked Brager.

"Yes. Also anything they may know about Deem, or who might have had a reason to-to shoot him." Brager saluted, and left.

Caquer got Dr. Skidder on the visiphone. "Hello, Doctor," he said. "Let's have it."

"Nothing but what met the eye, Rod. Blaster, of course. Close range."

Lieutenant Rod Caquer steadied himself. "Say that again, Medico."

"What's the matter," jibed Skidder. "Never see a blaster death before? Guess you wouldn't have at that, Rod, you're too young. But fifty years ago when I was a student, we got them once in a while."

"Just how did it kill him?"

Dr. Skidder looked surprised. "Oh, you didn't catch up with the clearance men then. I thought you'd seen it. Left shoulder, burned all the skin and flesh off and charred the bone. Actual death was from shock-the blast didn't hit a vital area. Not that the burn wouldn't have been fatal anyway, in all

probability. But the shock made it instantaneous."

Dreams are like this, Caquer told himself.

"In dreams things happen without meaning anything," he thought. "But I'm not dreaming, this is real."

"Any other wounds, or marks on the body?" he asked, slowly.

"None. I'd suggest, Rod, you concentrate on a search for that blaster. Search all of Sector Three, if you have to. You know what a blaster looks like, don't you?"

"I've seen pictures," said Caquer. "Do they make a noise, Medico? I've never seen one fired."

Dr. Skidder shook his head. "There's a flash and a hissing sound, but no report."

"It couldn't be mistaken for a gunshot?"

The doctor stared at him.

"You mean an explosive gun? Of course not. Just a faint s-s-s-s. One couldn't hear it more than ten feet away."

When Lieutenant Caquer had clicked off the visiphone, he sat down and closed his eyes to concentrate. Somehow he had to make sense out of three conflicting sets of observations. His own, the patrolman's, and the medico's.

Brager had been the first one to see the body, and he said there was a hole over the heart. And that there were no other wounds. He had heard the report of the shot.

Caquer thought, suppose Brager is lying. It still doesn't make sense. Because according to Dr. Skidder, there was no bullet-hole, but a blaster-wound. Skidder had seen the body after Brager had.

Someone could, theoretically at least, have used a blaster in the interim, on a man already dead. But...

But that did not explain the head wound, nor the fact that the medico had not seen the bullet hole.

Someone could, theoretically at least, have struck the skull with a sword between the time Skidder had made the autopsy and the time he, Rod Caquer, had seen the body. But...

But that didn't explain why he hadn't seen the charred shoulder when he'd lifted the sheet from the body on the stretcher. He might have missed seeing a bullet-hole, but he would not, and he could not, have missed seeing a shoulder in the condition Dr. Skidder described it.

Around and around it went, until at last it dawned on him that there was only one explanation possible. The Medico-in-Chief was lying, for whatever mad reason.

Brager's story could be true, in total. That meant, of course, that he, Rod Caquer, had overlooked the bullet hole Brager had seen; but that was possible.

But Skidder's story could not be true. Skidder himself, at the time of the autopsy, could have inflicted the wound in the head. And he could have lied about the shoulder-wound. Why-unless the man was mad-he would have done either of those things, Caquer could not imagine. But it was the only way he could reconcile all the factors.

But by now the body had been disposed of. It would be his word against Dr. Skidder's

But wait!-the utility men, two of them, would have seen the corpse when they put it on the stretcher.

Quickly Caquer stood up in front of the visiphone and obtained a connection with utility headquarters.

"The two clearance men who took a body from Shop 9364 less than an hour ago-have they reported back yet?" he asked.

"Just a minute, Lieutenant ... Yes, one of them was through for the day and went on home. The other one is here."

"Put him on."

Rod Caquer recognized the man who stepped into the screen. It was the one of the two utility men who had asked him to hurry.

"Yes, Lieutenant?" said the man.

"You helped put the body on the stretcher?" "Of course."

"What would you say was the cause of death?"

The man in white looked out of the screen incredulously.

"Are you kidding me, Lieutenant?" he grinned. "Even a moron could see what was wrong with that stiff." Caquer frowned.

"Nevertheless, there are conflicting statements. I want your opinion."

"Opinion? When a man has his head cut off, what two opinions can there be, Lieutenant?"

Caquer forced himself to speak calmly. "Will the man who went with you confirm that?"

"Of course. Earth's Oceans! We had to put it on the stretcher in two pieces. Both of us for the body, and then Walter picked up the head and put it on next to the trunk. The killing was done with a disintegrator beam, wasn't it?"

"You talked it over with the other man?" said Caquer. "There was no difference of opinion between you about the-uh-details?"

"Matter of fact there was. That was why I asked you if it was a disintegrator. After we'd cremated it, he tried to tell me the cut was a ragged one like somebody'd taken several blows with an axe or something. But it was clean."

"Did you notice evidence of a blow struck at the top of the skull?"

"No. Say, lieutenant, you aren't looking so well. Is anything the matter with you?"

That was the setup that confronted Rod Caquer, and one can not blame him for beginning to wish it had been a simple case of murder.

A few hours ago, it had seemed had enough to have Callisto's no-murder record broken. But from there, it got worse. He did not know it then, but it was going to get still worse and that would be only the start.

It was eight in the evening, now, and Caquer was still at his office with a copy of Form 812 in front of him on the duraplast surface of his desk. There were questions on that form, apparently simple questions.

Name of Deceased: Willem Deem

Occupation: Prop. of book-and-reel shop

Residence Apt. 8250, Sector Three, Clsto.

Place of Bus.: Shop 9364, S. T., Clsto.

Time of Death: Approx. 3 P.m. Clsto. Std. Time

Cause of Death:

Yes, the first five questions had been a breeze. But the six? He had been staring at that question an hour now. A Callisto hour, not so long as an Earth one, but long enough when you're staring at a question like that.

But confound it, he would have to put something down.

Instead, he reached for the visiphone button, and a moment later Jane Gordon was looking at him out of the screen. And Rod Caquer looked back, because she was something to look at.

"Hello, Icicle," he said. "Afraid I'm not going to be able to get there this evening. Forgive me?"

"Of course, Rod. What's wrong? The Deem business?" He nodded gloomily. "Desk work. Lot of forms and reports I got to get out for the Sector Coordinator."

"Oh. How was he killed, Rod?"

"Rule Sixty-five," he said with a smile, "forbids giving details of any unsolved crime to a civilian."

"Bother Rule Sixty-five. Dad knew Willem Deem well, and he's been a guest here often. Mr. Deem was practically a friend of ours."

"Practically?" Caquer asked. "Then I take it you didn't like him, Icicle?"

"Well-I guess I didn't. He was interesting to listen to, but he was a sarcastic little beast, Rod. I think he had a perverted sense of humor. How was he killed?"

"If I tell you, will you promise not to ask any more questions?" Caquer said with a sigh.

Her eyes lighted eagerly. "Of course."

"He was shot," said Caquer, "with an explosive-type gun and a blaster. Someone split his skull with a sword, chopped off his head with an axe and with a disintegrator beam. Then after he was on the utility stretcher, some-one stuck his head back on because it wasn't off when I saw him. And plugged up the bullet-hole, and-

"Rod, stop driveling," cut in the girl. "If you don't want to tell me, all right."

Rod grinned. "Don't get mad. Say, how's your father?"

"Lots better. He's asleep now, and definitely on the upgrade. I think he'll be back at the university by next week. Rod, you look tired. When do those forms have to be in?"

"Twenty-four hours after the crime. But--"

"But nothing. Come on over here, right now. You can make out those old forms in the morning."

She smiled at him, and Caquer weakened. He was not getting anywhere anyway, was he?

"All right, Jane," he said. "But I'm going by patrol quarters on the way. Had some men canvassing the block the crime was committed in, and I want their report."

But the report, which he found waiting for him, was not illuminating. The canvass had been thorough, but it had failed to elicit any information of value. No one had been seen to leave or enter the Deem shop prior to Brager's arrival, and none of Deem's neighbors knew of any enemies he might have. No one had heard a shot.

Rod Caquer grunted and stuffed the reports into his pocket, and wondered, as he walked to the Gordon home, where the investigation went from there. How did a detective go about solving such a crime?

True, when he was a college kid back on Earth a few years ago, he had read detective usually trapped someone by discovering a discrepancy in his statements. Generally in a rather dramatic manner, too.

There was Wilder Williams, the greatest of all the fictional detectives, who could look at a man and deduce his whole life history from the cut of his clothes and the shape of his hands. But Wilder Williams had never run across a victim who had been killed in as many ways as there were witnesses.

He spent a pleasant-but futile-evening with Jane Gordon, again asked her to marry him, and again was refused. But he was used to that. She was a bit cooler this evening than usual, probably because she resented his unwillingness to talk about Willem Deem.

And home, to bed.

Out the window of his apartment, after the light was out, he could see the monstrous ball of Jupiter hanging low in the sky, the green-black midnight sky. He lay in bed and stared at it until it seemed that he could still see it after he had closed his eyes.

Willem Deem, deceased. What was he going to do about Willem Deem. Around and around, until at last one orderly thought emerged from chaos.

Tomorrow morning he would talk to the Medico. Without mentioning the sword wound in the head, he would ask Skidder about the bullet hole Brager claimed to have seen over the heart. If Skidder still said the blaster burn was the only wound, he would summon Brager and let him argue with the Medico.

And then--Well, he would worry about what to do then when he got there. He would never get to sleep this way.

He thought about Jane, and went to sleep.

After a while, he dreamed. Or was it a dream? If so, then he dreamed that he was lying there in bed, almost but not quite awake, and that there were whispers coming from all corners of the room. Whispers out of the darkness.

For big Jupiter had moved on across the sky now. The window was a dim, scarcely-discernible outline, and the rest of the room in utter darkness.

Whispers!

"-kill them."

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

"-kill, kill, kill."

"Sector Two gets all the gravy and Sector Three does all the work. They exploit our corla plantations. They are evil. Kill them, take over."

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

"Sector Two is made up of weaklings and usurers. They have the taint of Martian blood. Spill it, spill

Martian blood. Sector Three should rule Callisto. Three the mystic number. We are destined to rule Callisto."

"You hate them, you hate them."

"-kill, kill, kill."

"Martian blood of usurious villians. Yew hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

Whispers.

"Now-now-now."

"Kill them, kill them."

"A hundred ninety miles across the flat planes. Get there in an hour in monocars. Surprise attack. Now. Now. Now."

And Rod Caquer was getting out of bed, fumbling hastily and blindly into his clothing without turning on the light because this was a dream and dreams were in darkness.

His sword was in the scabbard at his belt and he took it out and felt the edge and the edge was sharp and ready to spill the blood of the enemy he was going to kill.

Now it was going to swing in arcs of red death, his unblooded sword-the anachronistic sword that was his badge of office, of authority. He had never drawn the sword in anger, a stubby symbol of a sword, scarce eighteen inches long; enough, though, enough to reach the heart-four inches to the heart.

The whispers continued.

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

"Spill the evil blood; kill, spill, kill, spill."

"Now, now, now, now."

Unsheathed sword in clenched fist, he was stealing silently out the door, down the stairway, past the other apartment doors.

And some of the doors were opening, too. He was not alone, there in the darkness. Other figures moved beside him in the dark.

He stole out of the door and into the night-cooled darkness of the street, the darkness of the street that should have been brightly lighted. That was another proof that this was a dream. Those street-lights were never off, after dark. From dusk till dawn, they were never off.

But Jupiter over there on the horizon gave enough light to see by. Like a round dragon in the heavens, and the red spot like an evil, malignant eye.

Whispers breathed in the night, whispers from all around him.

"Kill-kill-kill-"

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

The whispers did not come from the shadowy figures about him. They pressed forward silently, as he did.

Whispers came from the night itself, whispers that now began to change tone.

"Wait, not tonight, not tonight, not tonight," they said.

"Go back, go back, go back."

"Back to your homes, hack to your beds, back to your sleep."

And the figures about him were standing there, fully as irresolute as he had now become. And then, almost simultaneously, they began to obey the whispers. They turned back, and returned the way they had come, and as silently... .

Rod Caquer awoke with a mild headache and a hangover feeling. The sun, tiny but brilliant, was already well up in the sky.

His clock showed him that he was a bit later than usual, but he took time to lie there for a few minutes, just the same, remembering that screwy dream he'd had. Dreams were like that; you had to think about them right away when you woke up, before you were really fully awake, or you forgot them completely.

A silly sort of dream, it had been. A mad, purposeless, dream. A touch of atavism, perhaps? A throwback to the days when peoples had been at each other's throats half the time, back to the days of wars and hatreds and struggle for supremacy.

This was before the Solar Council, meeting first on one inhabited planet and then another, had brought

order by arbitration, and then union. And now war was a thing of the past. The inhabitable portion of the solar system--Earth, Venus, Mars, and the moons of Jupiter--were all under one government.

But back in the old bloody days, people must have felt as he had felt in that atavistic dream. Back in the days when Earth, united by the discovery of space travel, had subjugated Mars--the only other planet already inhabited by an intelligent race--and then had spread colonies wherever Man could get a foothold.

Certain of those colonies had wanted independence and, next, supremacy. The bloody centuries, those times were called now.

Getting out of bed to dress, he saw something that puzzled and dismayed him. His clothing was not neatly folded over the back of the chair beside the bed as he had left it. Instead, it was strewn about the floor as though he had undressed hastily and carelessly in the dark.

"Earth!" he thought. "Did I sleep-walk last night? Did I actually get out of bed and go out into the street when I dreamed that I did? When those whispers told me to?"

"No," he then told himself, "I've never walked in my sleep before, and I didn't then. I must simply have been careless when I undressed last night. I was thinking about the Deem case. I don't actually remember hanging my clothes on that chair."

So he donned his uniform quickly and hurried down to the office. In the light of morning it was easy to fill out those forms. In the "Cause of Death" blank he wrote, "Medical Examiner reports that shock from a blaster wound caused death."

That let him out from under; he had not said that was the cause of death; merely that the medico said it was.

He rang for a messenger and gave him the reports with instructions to rush them to the mail ship that would be leaving shortly. Then he called Barr Maxon.

"Reporting on the Deems matter, Regent," he said. "Sorry, but we just haven't got anywhere on it yet. Nobody was seen leaving the shop. All the neighbors have been questioned. Today I'm going to talk to all his friends."

Regent Maxon shook his head.

"Use all jets, Lieutenant," he said. "The case must be cracked. A murder, in this day and age, is bad enough. But an unsolved one is unthinkable. It would encourage further crime."

Lieutenant Caquer nodded gloomily. He had thought of that, too. There were the social implications of murder to be worried about--and there was his job as well. A Lieutenant of Police who let anyone get away with murder in his district was through for life.

After the Regent's image had clicked off the visiphone screen, Caquer took the list of Deem's friends from the drawer of his desk and began to study it, mainly with an eye to deciding the sequence of his calls.

He penciled a figure "1" opposite the name of Perry Peters, for two reasons. Peters' place was only a few doors away, for one thing, and for another he knew Perry better than anyone on the list, except possibly Professor Jan Gordon. And he would make that call last, because later there would be a better chance of finding the ailing professor awake--and a better chance of finding his daughter Jane at home.

Perry Peters was glad to see Caquer, and guessed immediately the purpose of the call.

"Hello, Shylock."

"Huh?" said Rod.

"Shylock--the great detective. Confronted with a mystery for the first time in his career as a policeman. Or have you solved it, Rod?"

"You mean Sherlock, you dope--Sherlock Holmes. No, I haven't solved it, if you want to know. Look, Perry, tell me all you know about Deem. You knew him pretty well, didn't you?"

Perry Peters rubbed his chin reflectively and sat down on the work bench. He was so tall and lanky that he could sit down on it instead of having to jump up.

"Willem was a funny little runt," he said. "Most people didn't like him because he was sarcastic, and he had crazy notions on politics. Me, I'm not sure whether he wasn't half right half the time, and anyway he played a swell game of chess."

"Was that his only hobby?"

"No. He liked to make things, gadgets mostly. Some of them were good, too, although he did it for fun and never tried to patent or capitalize anything."

"You mean inventions, Perry? Your own line?"

"Well, not so much inventions as gadgets, Rod. Little things, most of them, and he was better on fine workmanship than on original ideas. And, as I said, it was just a hobby with him."

"Ever help you with any of your own inventions?" asked Caquer.

"Sure, occasionally. Again, not so much on the idea of it as by helping me make difficult parts." Perry Peters waved his hand in a gesture that included the shop around them. "My tools here are all for rough work, comparatively. Nothing under thousandths. But Willem has had a little lathe that's a honey. Cuts anything, and accurate to a fifty-thousandth."

"What enemies did he have, Perry?"

"None that I know of. Honestly, Rod. Lot of people disliked him, but just an ordinary mild kind of dislike. You know what I mean, the kind of dislike that makes 'em trade at another book-and-reel shop, but not the kind that makes them want to kill anybody."

"And who, as far as you know, might benefit by his death?"

"Um-nobody, to speak of," said Peters, thoughtfully. "I think his heir is a nephew on Venus. I met him once, and he was a likable guy. But the estate won't be anything to get excited about. A few thousand credits is all I'd guess it to be."

"Here's a list of his friends, Perry." Caquer handed Peters a paper. "Look it over, will you, and see if you can make any additions to it. Or any suggestions."

The lanky inventor studied the list, and then passed it back.

"That includes them all, I guess," he told Caquer. "Couple on there I didn't know he knew well enough to rate listing. And you have his best customers down, too; the ones that bought heavily from him."

Lieutenant Caquer put the list back in his pocket.

"What are you working on now?" he asked Peters.

"Something I'm stuck on, I'm afraid," the inventor said. "I needed Deem's help-or at least the use of his lathe, to go ahead with this." He picked up from the bench a pair of the most peculiar-looking goggles Rod Caquer had ever seen. The lenses were shaped like arcs of circles instead of full circles, and they fastened in a band of resilient plastic obviously designed to fit close to the face above and below the lenses. At the top center, where it would be against the forehead of the goggles' wearer, was a small cylindrical box an inch and a half in diameter.

"What on earth are they for?" Caquer asked.

"For use in radite mines. The emanations from that stuff, while it's in the raw state, destroys immediately any transparent substance yet made or discovered. Even quartz. And it isn't good on naked eyes either. The miners have to work blindfolded, as it were, and by their sense of touch."

Rod Caquer looked at the goggles curiously.

"But how is the funny shape of these lenses going to keep the emanations from hurting them, Perry?" he asked.

"That part up on top is a tiny motor. It operates a couple of specially-treated wipers across the lenses. For all the world like an old-fashioned windshield wiper, and that's why the lenses are shaped like the wiper-arm arcs."

"Oh," said Caquer. "You mean the wipers are absorbent and hold some kind of liquid that protects the glass?"

"Yes, except that it's quartz instead of glass. And it's protected only a minute fraction of a second. Those wipers go like the devil-so fast you can't see them when you're wearing the goggles. The arms are half as big as the arcs, and the wearer can see out of only a fraction of the lens at a time. But he can see, dimly, and that's a thousand per cent improvement in radite mining."

"Fine, Perry," said Caquer. "And they can get around the dimness by having ultra-brilliant lighting. Have you tried these out?"

"Yes, and they work. Trouble's in the rods; friction heats them and they expand and jam after it's run a

minute, or thereabouts. I have to turn them down on Deem's lathe-or one like it. Think you could arrange for me to use it? Just for a day or so?"

"I don't see why not," Caquer told him. "I'll talk to whomever the Regent appoints executor, and fix it up. And later you can probably buy the lathe from his heir. Or does the nephew go in for such things?"

Perry Peters shook his head. "Hope, he wouldn't know a lathe from a drill-press. Be swell of you, Rod, if you can arrange for me to use it."

Caquer had turned to go, when Perry Peters stopped him.

"Wait a minute," Peters said and then paused and looked uncomfortable.

"I guess I was holding out on you, Rod," the inventor said at last. "I do know one thing about Willem that might possibly have something to do with his death, although I don't see how, myself. I wouldn't tell it on him, except that he's dead, and so it won't get him in trouble."

"What was it, Perry?"

"Illicit political books. He had a little business on the side selling them. Books on the index-you know just what I mean."

Caquer whistled softly. "I didn't know they were made any more. After the council put such a heavy penalty on them-whew!"

"People are still human, Rod. They still want to know the things they shouldn't know-just to find out why they shouldn't, if for no other reason."

"Graydex or Blackdex books, Perry?"

Now the inventor looked puzzled.

"I don't get it. What's the difference?"

"Books on the official index," Caquer explained, "are divided into two groups. The really dangerous ones are in the Blackdex. There's a severe penalty for owning one, and a death penalty for writing or printing one. The mildly dangerous ones are in the Graydex, as they call it."

"I wouldn't know which Willem peddled. Well, off the record, I read a couple Willem lent me once, and I thought they were pretty dull stuff. Unorthodox political theories."

"That would be Graydex." Lieutenant Caquer looked relieved. "Theoretical stuff is all Graydex. The Blackdex books are the ones with dangerous practical information."

"Such as?" The inventor was staring intently at Caquer.

"Instructions how to make outlawed things," explained Caquer. "Like Lethite, for instance. Lethite is a poison gas that's tremendously dangerous. A few pounds of it could wipe out a city, so the council outlawed its manufacture, and any book telling people how to make it for themselves would go on the Blackdex. Some nitwit might get hold of a book like that and wipe out his whole home town."

"But why would anyone?"

"He might be warped mentally, and have a grudge," explained Caquer. "Or he might want to use it on a lesser scale for criminal reasons. Or-by Earth, he might be the head of a government with designs on neighboring states. Knowledge of a thing like that might upset the peace of the Solar System."

Perry Peters nodded thoughtfully. "I get your point," he said. "Well, I still don't see what it could have to do with the murder, but I thought I'd tell you about Willem's sideline. You probably want to check over his stock before whoever takes over the shop reopens."

"We shall," said Caquer. "Thanks a lot, Perry. If you don't mind, I'll use your phone to get that search started right away. If there are any Blackdex books there, we'll take care of them all right."

When he got his secretary on the screen, she looked both frightened and relieved at seeing him.

"Mr. Caquer," she said, "I've been trying to reach you. Something awful's happened. Another death." "Murder again?" gasped Caquer.

"Nobody knows what it was," said the secretary. "A dozen people saw him jump out of a window only twenty feet up. And in this gravity that couldn't have killed him, but he was dead when they got there. And four of them that saw him knew him. It was-"

"Well, for Earth's sake, who?"

"I don't-Lieutenant Caquer, they said, all four of them, that it was Willem Deem!"

With a nightmarish feeling of unreality Lieutenant Roc Caquer peered down over the shoulder of the Medico in-Chief at the body that already lay on the stretcher of the utility men, who stood by impatiently.

"You better hurry, Doc," one of them said. "He won't last much longer and it take us five minutes to get there."

Dr. Skidder nodded impatiently without looking up and went on with his examination. "Not a mark, Rod," he said. "Not a sign of poison. Not a sign of anything He's just dead."

"The fall couldn't have caused it?" said Caquer.

"There isn't even a bruise from the fall. Only verdict I can give is heart failure. Okay, boys, you can take him away."

"You through too, Lieutenant?"

"I'm through," said Caquer. "Go ahead. Skidder, which of them was Willem Deem?"

The medico's eyes followed the white-sheeted burden of the utility men as they carried it toward the truck, and he shrugged helplessly.

"Lieutenant, I guess that's your pigeon," he said. "All I can do is certify to cause of death."

"It just doesn't make sense," Caquer wailed. "Sector Three City isn't so big that he could have had a double living here without people knowing about it. But one of them had to be a double. Off the record, which looked to you like the original?"

Dr. Skidder shook his head grimly.

"Willem Deem had a peculiarly shaped wart on his nose," he said. "So did both of *his* corpses, Rod. And neither one was artificial, or make-up. I'll stake my professional reputation on that. But come on back to the office with me, and I'll tell you which one of them is the real Willem Deem."

"Huh? How?"

"His thumbprint's on file at the tax department, like everybody's is. And it's part of routine to fingerprint a corpse on Callisto, because it has to be destroyed so quickly."

"You have thumbprints of both corpses?" inquired Caquer.

"Of course. Took them before you reached the scene, both times. I have the one for Willem-I mean the other corpse-back in my office. Tell you what-you pick up the print on file at the tax office and meet me there."

Caquer sighed with relief as he agreed. At least one point in the case would be cleared up-which corpse was which.

And in that comparatively blissful state of mind he remained until half an hour later when he and Dr. Skidder compared the time prints-the one Rod Caquer had secured from the tax office, and one from each of the corpses.

They were identical, all three of them.

"Um," said Caquer. "You're sure you didn't get mixed up on those prints, Dr. Skidder."

"How could I? I took only one copy from each body, Rod. If I had shuffled them just now while we were looking at them, the result would be the same. All three prints are alike."

"But they can't be."

Skidder shrugged.

"I think we should lay this before the Regent, direct," he said. "I'll call him and arrange an audience. Okay?"

Half an hour later, he was giving the whole story to Regent Barr Maxon, with Dr. Skidder corroborating the main points. The expression on Regent Maxon's face made Lieutenant Rod Caquer glad, very glad, that he had that corroboration.

"You agree," Maxon asked, "that this should be taken up with the Sector Coordinator, and that a special investigator should be sent here to take over?"

A bit reluctantly, Caquer nodded. "I hate to admit that I'm incompetent, Regent, or that I seem to be," Caquer said. "But this isn't an ordinary crime. Whatever goes on, it's way over my head. And there may be something even more sinister than murder behind it."

"You're right, Lieutenant. I'll see that a qualified man leaves headquarters today and he'll get in touch with you in the morning."

"Regent," Caquer asked, "has any machine or process ever been invented that will-uh-duplicate a human body, with or without the mind being carried over?"

Maxon seemed puzzled by the question.

"You think Deem might have been playing around with something that bit him. No, to my knowledge a discovery like that has never been approached. Nobody has ever duplicated, except by constructive imitation, even an inanimate object. You haven't heard of such a thing, have you, Skidder?"

"No," said the Medical Examiner. "I don't think even your friend Perry Peters could do that, Rod."

From the Regent Maxon's office, Caquer went on Deem's shop. Brager was in charge there, and Brager helped him search the place thoroughly. It was a long and laborious task, because each book and reel had to be examined minutely.

The printers of illicit books, Caquer knew, were clever at disguising their product. Usually, forbidden books bore the cover and title page, often even the opening chapters, of some popular work of fiction, and the projection reels were similarly disguised.

Jupiter-lighted darkness was falling outside when they finished, but Rod Caquer knew they had done a thorough job. There wasn't an indexed book anywhere in the shop, and every reel had been run off on a projector.

Other men, at Rod Caquer's orders, had been searching Deem's apartment with equal thoroughness. He phoned there, and got a report, completely negative.

"Not so much as a Venusian pamphlet," said the man in charge at the apartment, with what Caquer thought was a touch of regret in his voice.

"Did you come across a lathe, a small one for delicate work?" Rod asked.

"Um-no, we didn't see anything like that. One room's turned into a workshop, but there's no lathe in it. Is it important?"

Caquer grunted noncommittally. What was one more mystery, and a minor one at that, to a case like this?

"Well, Lieutenant," Brager said, when the screen had gone blank, "What do we do now?"

Caquer sighed.

"You can go off duty, Brager," he said. "But first arrange to leave men on guard here and at the apartment. I'll stay until whoever you send comes to relieve me."

When Brager had left, Caquer sank wearily into the nearest chair. He felt terrible, physically, and his mind just did not seem to be working. He let his eyes run again around the orderly shelves of the shop and their orderliness oppressed him.

If there was only a clue of some sort. Wilder Williams had never had a case like this in which the only leads were two identical corpses, one of which had been killed five different ways and the other did not have a mark or sign of violence. What a mess, and where did he go from here?

Well, he still had the list of people he was going to interview, and there was time to see at least one of them this evening.

Should he look up Perry Peters again, and see what, if anything, the lanky inventor could make of the disappearance of the lathe? Perhaps he might be able to suggest what had happened to it. But then again, what could a lathe have to do with a mess like this? One cannot turn out a duplicate corpse on a lathe.

Or should he look up Professor Gordon? He decided to do just that.

He called the Gordon apartment on the visiphone, and Jane appeared in the screen.

"How's your father," Jane asked Caquer. "Will he be able to talk to me for a while this evening?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "He's feeling much better, and thinks he'll go back to his classes tomorrow. But get here early if you're coming. Rod, you look terrible; what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, except I feel goofy. But I'm all right, I guess."

"You have a gaunt, starved look. When did you eat last?"

Caquer's eyes widened. "Earth! I forgot all about eating. I slept late and didn't even have breakfast!" Jane Gordon laughed.

"You dope! Well, hurry around, and I'll have something ready for you when you get here."

"But-"

"But nothing. How soon can you start?"

A minute after he had clicked off the visiphone, Lieutenant Caquer went to answer a knock on the shuttered door of the shop.

He opened it. "Oh, hullo, Reese," he said. "Did Brager send you?"

The policeman nodded.

"He said I was to stay here in case. In case what?"

"Routine guard duty, that's all," explained Caquer. "Say, I've been stuck here all afternoon. Anything going on?"

"A little excitement. We been pulling in soap-box orators off and on all day. Screwballs. There's an epidemic of them."

"The devil you say! What are they hipped about?"

"Sector Two, for some reason I can't make out. They're trying to incite people to get mad at Sector Two and do something about it. The arguments they use are plain nutty."

Something stirred uneasily in Rod Caquer's memory but he could not quite remember what it was. Sector Two? Who'd been telling him things about Sector Two recently-usury, unfairness, tainted blood, something silly. Although of course a lot of the people over there did have Martian blood in them ...

"How many of the orators were arrested?" he asked.

"We got seven. Two more slipped away from us, but we'll pick them up if they start spouting that kind of stuff again."

Lieutenant Caquer walked slowly, thoughtfully, to the Gordon apartment, trying his level best to remember where, recently, he heard anti-Sector Two propaganda. There must be something back of the simultaneous appearance of nine soap-box radicals, all preaching the same doctrine.

A sub-rosa political organization? But none such had existed for almost a century now. Under a perfectly democratic government, component part of a stable system-wide organization of planets, there was no need for such activity. Of course an occasional crackpot was dissatisfied, but a group in that state of mind struck him as fantastic.

It sounded as crazy as the Willem Deem case. That did not make sense either. Things happened meaninglessly, as in a dream. Dream? What was he trying to remember about a dream? Hadn't he had an odd sort of dream last night-what was it?

But, as dreams usually do, it eluded his conscious mind.

Anyway, tomorrow he would question-or help question-those radicals who were under arrest. Put men on the job of tracing them back, and undoubtedly a common background somewhere, a tieup, would be found.

It could not be accidental that they should all pop up on the same day. It was screwy, just as screwy as the two inexplicable corpses of a book-and-reel shop proprietor. Maybe because the cases were both screwy, his mind tended to couple the two sets of events. But taken together, they were no more digestible than taken separately. They made even less sense.

Confound it, why hadn't he taken that post on Ganymede when it was offered to him? Ganymede was a nice orderly moon. Persons there did not get murdered twice on consecutive days. But Jane Gordon did not live on Ganymede; she lived right here in Sector Three and he was on his way to see her.

And everything was wonderful except that he felt so tired he could not think straight, and Jane Gordon insisted on looking on him as a brother instead of a suitor, and he was probably going to lose his job. He would be the laughingstock of Callisto if the special investigator from headquarters found some simple explanation of things that he had overlooked... .

Jane Gordon, looking more beautiful than he had ever seen her, met him at the door. She was smiling, but the smile changed to a look of concern as he stepped into the light.

"Rod!" she exclaimed. "You do look ill, really ill. What have you been doing to yourself besides forgetting to eat?"

Rod Caquer managed a grin.

"Chasing vicious circles up blind alleys, Icicle. May I use your visiphone?"

"Of course. I've some food ready for you; I'll put it on the table while you're calling. Dad's taking a nap. He said to wake him when you got here, but I'll hold off until you're fed."

She hurried out to the kitchen. Caquer almost fell into the chair before the visiscreen, and called the police station. The red, beefy face of Borgesen, the night lieutenant, flashed into view.

"Hi, Borg," said Caquer. "Listen, about those seven screwballs you picked up. Have you--"

"Nine," Borgesen interrupted. "We got the other two, and I wish we hadn't. We're going nuts down here." "You mean the other two tried it again?"

"No. Suffering Asteroids, they came in and gave themselves up, and we can't kick them out, because there's a charge against them. But they're confessing all over the place. And do you know what they're confessing?"

"I'll bite," said Caquer.

"That you hired them, and offered one hundred credits apiece to them."

"Huh?"

Borgesen laughed, a little wildly. "The two that came in voluntarily say that, and the other seven--Gosh, why did I ever become a policeman? I had a chance to study for fireman on a spacer once, and I end up doing this."

"Look--maybe I better come around and see if they make that accusation to my face."

"They probably would, but it doesn't mean anything, Rod. They say you hired them this afternoon, and you were at Deem's with Brager all afternoon. Rod, this moon is going nuts. And so am I. Walter Johnson has disappeared. Hasn't been seen since this morning."

"What? The Regent's confidential secretary? You're kidding me, Borg."

"Wish I was. You ought to be glad you're off duty. Maxon's been raising seven brands of thunder for us to find his secretary for him. He doesn't like the Deem business, either. Seems to blame us for it; thinks it's bad enough for the department to let a man get killed once. Say, which was Deem, Rod? Got any idea?"

Caquer grinned weakly.

"Let's call them Deem and Redeem till we find out," he suggested. "I think they were both Deem." "But how could one man be two?"

"How could one man be killed five ways?" countered Caquer. "Tell me that and I'll tell you the answer to yours."

"Nuts," said Borgesen, and followed it with a masterpiece of understatement. "There's something funny about that case."

Caquer was laughing so hard that there were tears in his eyes, when Jane Gordon came to tell him food was ready. She frowned at him, but there was concern behind the frown.

Caquer followed her meekly, and discovered he was ravenous. When he'd put himself outside enough food for three ordinary meals, he felt almost human again. His headache was still there, but it was something that throbbed dimly in the distance.

Frail Professor Gordon was waiting in the living room when they went there from the kitchen. "Rod, you look like something the cat dragged in," he said. "Sit down before you fall down."

Caquer grinned. "Overeating did it. Jane's a cook in a million."

He sank into a chair facing Gordon. Jane Gordon had sat on the arm of her father's chair and Caquer's eyes feasted on her. How could a girl with lips as soft and kissable as hers insist on regarding marriage only as an academic subject? How could a girl with--

"I don't see offhand how it could be a cause of his death Rod, but Willem Deem rented out political books," said Gordon. "There's no harm in my telling that, since the poor chap is dead."

Almost the same words, Caquer remembered, that Perry Peters had used in telling him the same thing. Caquer nodded.

"We've searched his shoe and his apartment and haven't found any, Professor," he said. "You wouldn't know, of course, what kind--"

Professor Gordon smiled. "I'm afraid I would, Rod. Off the record--and I take it you haven't a recorder on our conversation--I've read quite a few of them."

"You?" There was frank surprise in Caquer's voice.

"Never underestimate the curiosity of an educator, my boy. I fear the reading of Graydex books is a more prevalent vice among the instructors in universities than among any other class. Oh, I know it's wrong to encourage the trade, but the reading of such books can't possibly harm a balanced, judicious mind."

"And Father certainly has a balanced, judicious mind, Rod," said Jane, a bit defiantly. "Only-darn him-he wouldn't let me read those books."

Caquer grinned at her. The professor's use of the word "Gravdex" had reassured him.

Renting Graydex books was only a misdemeanor, after all.

"Ever read any Graydex books, Rod?" the professor asked. Caquer shook his head.

"Then you've probably never heard of hypnotism. Some of the circumstances in the Deem case-Well, I've wondered whether hypnotism might have been used."

"I'm afraid I don't even know what it is, Professor."

The frail little man sighed.

"That's because you've never read illicit books, Rod," said Gordon. "Hypnotism is the control of one mind by another, and it reached a pretty high state of development before it was outlawed. You've never heard of the Kaprelian Order or the Vargas Wheel?"

Caquer shook his head.

"The history of the subject is in Gravdex books, in several of them," said the professor. "The actual methods, and how a Vargas Wheel is constructed would be Blackdex, high on the roster of the lawlessness. Of course, I haven't read that, but I have read the history.

"A man by the name of Mesmer, way back in the Eighteenth Century, was one of the first practitioners, if not the discoverer, of hypnotism. At any rate, he put it on a more or less scientific basis. By the Twentieth Century, quite a bit had been learned about it-and it became extensively used in medicine.

"A hundred years later, doctors were treating almost as many patients through hypnotism as through drugs and surgery. True, there were cases of its misuse, but they were relatively few.

"But another hundred years brought a big chance. Mesmerism had developed too far for the public safety. Any criminal or selfish politician who had a smattering of the art could operate with impunity. He could fool all the people all the time, and get away with it."

"You mean he could really make people think any-thing he wanted them to?" Caquer asked.

"Not only that, he could make them do anything he wanted. And by that time, television was in such common use that one speaker could visibly and directly talk to millions of people."

"But couldn't the government have regulated the art?"

Professor Gordon smiled thinly. "How, when legislators were human, too, and as subject to hypnotism as the people under them? And then, to complicate things almost hopelessly, came the invention of the Vargas Wheel.

"It had been known, back as far as the Nineteenth Century, that an arrangement of moving mirrors could throw anyone who watched it into a state of hypnotic submission. And thought transmission had been experimented with in the Twenty-first century. It was in the following one that Vargas combined and perfected the two into the Vargas Wheel. A sort of helmet affair, really, with a revolving wheel of specially constructed tricky mirrors on top of it."

"How did it work, Professor?" asked Caquer.

"The wearer of a Vargas Wheel helmet had immediate and automatic control over anyone who saw him-directly, or in a television screen," said Gordon. "The mirrors in the small turning wheel produced instantaneous hypnosis and the helmet-somehow-brought thoughts of its wearer to bear through the wheel and impressed upon his subjects any thoughts he wished to transmit.

"In fact, the helmet itself-or the wheel-could be set to produce certain fixed illusions without the necessity of the operator speaking, or even concentrating, on those points. Or the control could be direct, from his mind."

"Ouch," said Caquer. "A thing like that would-I can certainly see why instructions in making a Vargas Wheel would be Blackdexed. Suffering Asteroids! A man with one of these could-"

"Could do almost anything. Including killing a man and making the manner of his death appear five different ways to five different observers."

Caquer whistled softly. "And including playing nine-man Morris with soap-box radicals-or they wouldn't even have to be radicals. They could be ordinary orthodox citizens."

"Nine men?" Jane Gordon demanded. "What's this about nine men, Rod? I hadn't heard about it."

But Rod was already standing up.

"Haven't time to explain, Icicle," he said. "Tell you tomorrow, but I must get down to-Wait a minute. Professor, is that all you know about the Vargas Wheel business?"

"Absolutely all, my boy. It just occurred to me as a possibility. There were only five or six of them ever made, and finally the government got hold of them and destroyed them, one by one. It cost millions of lives to do it.

"When they finally got everything cleaned up, colonization of the planets was starting, and an international council had been started with control over all governments. They decided that the whole field of hypnotism was too dangerous, and they made it a forbidden subject. It took quite a few centuries to wipe out all knowledge of it, but they succeeded. The proof is that you'd never heard of it."

"But how about the beneficial aspects of it," Jane Gordon asked. "Were they lost?"

"Of course," said her father. "But the science of medicine had progressed so far by that time that it wasn't too much of a loss. Today the medicos can cure, by physical treatment, anything that hypnotism could handle."

Caquer who had halted at the door, now turned back.

"Professor, do you think it possible that someone could have rented a Blackdex book from Deem, and learned all those secrets?" he inquired.

Professor Gordon shrugged. "It's possible," he said. "Deem might have handled occasional Blackdex books, but he knew better than try to sell or rent any to me. So I wouldn't have heard of it."

At the station, Lieutenant Caquer found Lieutenant Borgesen on the verge of apoplexy.

He looked at Caquer.

"You!" he said. And then, plaintively, "The world's gone nuts. Listen, Brager discovered Willem Deem, didn't he? At ten o'clock yesterday morning? And stayed there on guard while Skidder and you and the clearance men were there?"

"Yes, why?" asked Caquer.

Borgesen's expression showed how much he was upset by developments.

"Nothing, not a thing, except that Brager was in the emergency hospital yesterday morning, from nine until after eleven, getting a sprained ankle treated. He couldn't have been at Deem's. Seven doctors and attendants and nurses swear up and down he was in the hospital at that time."

Caquer frowned.

"He was limping today, when he helped me search Deem's shop," he said. "What does Brager say?"

"He says he was there, I mean at Deem's, and discovered Deem's body. We just happened to find out otherwise accidentally-if it is otherwise. Rod, I'm going nuts. To think I had a chance to be fireman on a spacer and took this celestial job. Have you learned anything new?"

"Maybe. But first I want to ask you, Borg. About these nine nitwits you picked up. Has anybody tried to identify-"

"Them," interrupted Borgesen. "I let them go." Caquer stared at the beefy face of the night lieutenant in utter amazement.

"Let them go?" he repeated. "You couldn't, legally. Man, they'd been charged. Without a trial, you couldn't turn them loose."

"Nuts. I did, and I'll take the responsibility for it. Look, Rod, they were right, weren't they?"

"What?"

"Sure. People ought to be waked up about what's going on over in Sector Two. Those phonies over there need taking down a peg, and we're the only ones to do it. This ought to be headquarters for Callisto, right here. Why listen, Rod, a united Callisto could take over Ganymede."

"Borg, was there anything over the televis tonight? Anybody make a speech you listened to?"

"Sure, didn't you hear it? Our friend Skidder. Must have been while you were walking here, because all the televis turned on automatically-it was a general."

"And-was anything specific suggested, Borg? About Sector Two, and Ganymede, and that sort of thing?"

"Sure, general meeting tomorrow morning at ten. In the square. We're all supposed to go; I'll see you there, won't I?"

"Yeah," said Lieutenant Caquer. "I'm afraid you will. I-I got to go, Borg."

## CILAPTER SIX: TOO FAMILIAR FACE

Ron CAQUER knew what was wrong now. Also the last thing he wanted to do was stay around the station listening to Borgesen talking under the influence of-what seemed to be-a Vargas 'Wheel. Nothing else, nothing less, could have made police Lieutenant Borgesen talk as he had just talked. Professor Gordon's guess was getting righter every minute. Nothing else could have brought about such results.

Caquer walked on blindly through the Jupiter lighted night, past the building in which his own apartment was. He did not want to go there either.

The streets of Sector Three City seemed crowded for so late an hour of the evening. Late? He glanced at his watch and whistled softly. It was not evening any more. It was two o'clock in the morning, and normally the streets would have been utterly deserted.

But they were not, tonight. People wandered about, alone or in small groups that walked together in uncanny silence. Shuffle of feet, but not even the whisper of a voice. Not even

Whispers! Something about those streets and the people on them made Rod Caquer remember now, his dream of the night before. Only now he knew that it had not been a ream. Nor had it been sleepwalking, in the ordinary sense of the word.

He had dressed. He had stolen out of the building. And the street lights had been out too, and that meant that employees of the service department had neglected their posts. They, like others, had been wandering with the crowds.

"Kill-kill-kill-You hate them . . ."

A shiver ran down Rod Caquer's spine as he realized the significance of the fact that last night's dream had been a reality. This was something that dwarfed into insignificance the murder of a petty book-and-reel shop owner.

This was something which was gripping a city, something that could upset a world, something that could lead to unbelievable terror and carnage on a scale that hadn't been known since the Twenty-fourth Century. This-which had started as a simple murder case!

Up ahead somewhere, Rod Caquer heard the voice of a nun addressing a crowd. A frenzied voice, shrill with fanaticism. He hurried his steps to the corner, and walked around it to find himself in the fringe of a crowd of people pressing around a man speaking from the top of a flight of steps.

"-and I tell you that tomorrow is the day. Now we have the Regent himself with us, and it will be unnecessary to depose him. Men are working all night tonight, preparing. After the meeting in the square tomorrow morning, we shall-"

"Hey!" Rod Caquer yelled. The man stopped talking and turned to look at Rod, and the crowd turned slowly, almost as one man, to stare at him.

"You're under-"

Then Caquer saw that this was but a futile gesture.

It was not because of the man surging toward him that convinced him of this. He was not afraid of violence. He would have welcomed it as relief from uncanny terror, welcomed a chance to lay about him with the flat of his sword.

But standing behind the speaker was a man in uniform-Brager. And Caquer remembered, then, that Borgesen, now in charge at the station, was on the other side. How could he arrest the speaker, when Borgesen, now in charge, would refuse to book him. And what good would it do to start a riot and cause injury to innocent people-people acting not under their own volition, but under the insidious influence

Professor Gordon had described to him?

Hand on his sword, he backed away. No one followed. Like automatons, they turned back to the speaker, who resumed his harangue, as though never interrupted. Policeman Brager had not moved, had not even looked in the direction of his superior officer. He alone of all those there had not turned at Caquer's challenge.

Lieutenant Caquer hurried on in the direction he had been going when he had heard the speaker. That way would take him back downtown. He would find a place open where he could use a visiphone, and call the Sector Coordinator. This was an emergency.

And surely the scope of whoever had the Vargas Wheel had not yet extended beyond the boundaries of Sector Three.

He found an all-night restaurant, open but deserted, the lights on but no waiters on duty, no cashier behind the counter. He stepped into the visiphone booth and pushed the button for a long-distance operator. She flashed into sight on the screen almost at once.

"Sector Coordinator, Callisto City," Caquer said. "And rush it."

"Sorry, sir. Out of town service suspended by order of the controller of Utilities, for the duration." "Duration of what?"

"We are not permitted to give out information."

Caquer gritted his teeth. Well, there was *one* someone who might be able to help him. He forced his voice to remain calm.

"Give me Professor Gordon, University Apartments," he told the operator.

"Yes, sir."

But the screen stayed dark, although the little red button that indicated the buzzer was operating flashed on and off, for minutes.

"There is no answer, sir."

Probably Gordon and his daughter were asleep, too soundly asleep to hear the buzzer. For a moment, Caquer considered rushing over there. But it was on the other side of town, and of what help could they be? None, and Professor Gordon was a frail old man, and ill.

No, he would have to—Again he pushed a button of the visiphone and a moment later was talking to the man in charge of the ship hangar.

"Get out that little speed job of the Police Department," snapped Caquer. "Have it ready and I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Sorry, Lieutenant," came the curt reply. "All outgoing power beams shut off, by special order. Everything's grounded for the emergency."

He might have known it, Caquer thought. But what about the special investigator coming in from the Coordinator's office? "Are incoming ships still permitted to land?" he inquired.

"Permitted to land, but not to leave again without special order," answered the voice.

"Thanks," Caquer said. He clicked off the screen and went out into the dawn, outside. There was a chance, then. The special investigator might be able to help.

But he, Rod Caquer would have to intercept him, tell him the story and its implications before he could fall, with the others, under the influence of the Vargas Wheel. Caquer strode rapidly toward the terminal. Maybe it was too late. Maybe his ship had already landed and the damage had been done.

Again he passed a knot of people gathered about a frenzied speaker. Almost everyone must be under the influence by this time. But why had he been spared? Why was not he, too, under the evil influence?

True, he must have been on the street on the way to the police station at the time Skidder had been on the air, but that didn't explain everything. All of these people could not have seen and heard that visicast. Some of them must have been asleep already at that hour.

Also he, Rod Caquer, had been affected, the night before, the night of the whispers. He must have been under the influence of the wheel at the time he investigated the murder—the murders.

Why, then, was he free now? Was he the only one, or were there others who had escaped, who were sane and their normal selves?

If not, if he was the only one, why was he free? Or was he free?

Could it be that what he was doing right now was under direction, was part of some plan?

But no use to think that way, and go mad. He would have to carry on the best he could, and hope that things, with him, were what they seemed to be.

Then he broke into a run, for ahead was the open area of the terminal, and a small space-ship, silver in the dawn, was settling down to land. A small official speedster-it must be the special investigator. He ran around the check-in building, through the gate in the wire fence and toward the ship, which was already down. The door opening.

A small, wiry man stepped out and closed the door behind him. He saw Caquer and smiled.

"You're Caquer?" he asked, pleasantly. "Coordinator's office sent me to investigate a case you fellows are troubled with. My name-

Lieutenant Rod Caquer was staring with horrified fascination at the little man's well-known features, the all too familiar wart on the side of the little man's nose, listening for the announcement he knew this man was going to make

"-is Willem Deem. Shall we go to your office?"

Such a thing as too much can happen to any man!

Lieutenant Rod Caquer, Lieutenant of Police of Sector Three, Callisto, had experienced more than his share. How can you investigate the murder of a man who has been killed twice? How should a policeman act when the victim shows up, alive and happy, to help you solve the case?

Not even when you know he is not there really-or if he is, he is not what your eyes tell you he is and is not saying what your ears hear.

There is a point beyond which the human mind can no longer function sanely with proper sense as when they reach and pass that point, different people react in different ways.

Rod Caquer's reaction was a sudden blind, red anger. Directed, for lack of a better object, at the special investigator-if he was the special investigator and not a hypnotic phantasm which wasn't there at all.

Rod Caquer's fist lashed out, and it met a chin. Which proved nothing except that if the little man who'd just stepped out of the speedster was an illusion, he was an illusion of touch as well as of sight. Rod's fist exploded on his chin like a rocket-blast, and the little man swayed and fell forward. Still smiling, because he had not had time to change the expression on his face.

He fell face down, and then rolled over, his eyes closed but smiling gently up at the brightening sky.

Shakily, Caquer bent down and put his hand against the front of the man's tunic. There was the thump of a beating heart, all right. For a moment, Caquer had feared he might have killed with that blow.

And Caquer closed his eyes, deliberately, and felt the man's face with his hand and it still felt like the face of Willem Deem looked, and the wart was there to the touch as well as to the sense of sight.

Two men had run out of the check-in building and were coming across the field toward him. Rod caught the expression on their faces and then thought of the little speedster only a few paces from him. He had to get out of Sector Three City, to tell somebody what was happening before it was too late.

If only they'd been lying about the outgoing power beam being shut off. He leaped across the body of the man he had struck and into the door of the speedster, jerked at the controls. But the ship did not respond, and no, they hadn't been lying about the power beam.

No use staying here for a fight that could not possibly decide anything. He went out the door of the speedster, on the other side, away from the men coming toward him, and ran for the fence.

It was electrically charged, that fence. Not enough to kill a man, but plenty to hold him stuck to it until men with rubber gloves cut the wire and took him off. But if the power beam was off, probably the current in the fence was off, too.

It was too high to jump, so he took the chance. And the current was off. He scrambled over it safely and his pursuers stopped and went back to take care of the fallen man beside the speedster.

Caquer slowed down to a walk, but he kept on going. He didn't know where, but he had somehow to keep moving. After a while he found that his steps were taking him toward the edge of town, on the northern side, toward Callisto City.

But that was silly. He couldn't possibly walk to Callisto City and get there in less than three days. Even if he could walk across the intervening roadless desert at all. Besides, three days would be too late.

He was in a small park near the north border when the significance, and the futility, of his direction came to him. And he found, at the same time, that his muscles were sore and tired, that he had a raging headache, that he could not keep on going unless he had a worthwhile and possible goal.

He sank down on a park bench, and for a while his head was sunk in his hands. No answer came.

After a while he looked up and saw something that fascinated him. A child's pinwheel on a stick, stuck in the grass of the park, spinning in the wind. Now fast, now slow, as the breeze varied.

It was going in circles, like his mind was. How could a man's mind go other than in circles when he could not tell what was reality and what was illusion? Going in circles, like a Vargas Wheel.

Circles.

But there ought to be some way. A man with a Vargas Wheel was not completely invincible, else how had the council finally succeeded in destroying the few that had been made? True, possessors of the wheels would have cancelled each other out to some extent, but there must have been a last wheel, in someone's hands. Owned by someone who wanted to control the destiny of the solar system.

But they had stopped the wheel.

It could be stopped, then. But how? How, when one could not see it? Rather, when the sight of it put a man so completely under its control that he no longer, after the first glimpse, knew that it was there because, on sight, it had captured his mind.

He must stop the wheel. That was the only answer. But how?

That pinwheel there could be the Vargas Wheel, for all he could tell, set to create the illusion that it was a child's toy. Or its possessor, wearing the helmet, might be standing on the path in front of him at this moment, watching him. The possessor of the wheel might be invisible because Caquer's mind was told not to see.

But if the man was there, he'd be *really* there, and should Rod slash out with his sword, the menace would be ended, wouldn't it? Of course.

But how to find a wheel that one could not see? That one could not see because--

And then, still staring at the pinwheel, Caquer saw a chance, something that might work, a slender chance!

He looked quickly at his wrist watch and saw that it was half past nine which was one half hour before the demonstration in the square. And the wheel and its owner would be there, surely.

His aching muscles forgotten, Lieutenant Rod Caquer started to run back toward the center of town. The streets were deserted. Everyone had gone to the square, of course. They had been told to come.

He was winded after a few blocks, and had to slow down to a rapid walk, but there would be time for him to get there before it was over, even if he missed the start.

Yes, he could get there all right. And then, if his idea worked. . .

It was almost ten when he passed the building where his own office was situated, and kept on going. He turned in a few doors beyond. The elevator operator was gone, but Caquer ran the elevator up and a minute later he had used his picklock on a door and was in Perry Peters' laboratory.

Peters was gone, of course, but the goggles were there, the special goggles with the trick windshield-wiper effect that made them usable in radite mining.

Rod Caquer slipped them over his eyes, put the motive-power battery into his pocket, and touched the button on the side. They worked. He could see dimly as the wipers flashed back and forth. But a minute later they stopped.

Of course. Peters had said that the shafts heated and expanded after a minute's operation. Well, that might not matter. A minute might be long enough, and the metal would have cooled by the time he reached the square.

But he would have to be able to vary the speed. Among the litter of stuff on the workbench, he found a small rheostat and spliced it in one of the wires that ran from the battery to the goggles.

That was the best he could do. No time to try it out. He slid the goggles up onto his forehead and ran out into the hall, took the elevator down to street level. And a moment later he was running toward the

public square, two blocks away.

He reached the fringe of the crowd gathered in the square looking up at the two balconies of the Regency building. On the lower one were several people he recognized; Dr. Skidder, Walther Johnson. Even Lieutenant Borgesen was there.

On the higher balcony, Regent Maxon Barr was alone, and was speaking to the crowd below. His sonorous voice rolled out phrases extolling the might of empire. Only a little distance away, in the crowd, Caquer caught sight of the gray hair of Professor Gordon, and Jane Gordon's golden head beside it. He wondered if they were under the spell, too. Of course they were deluded also or they would not be there. He realized it would be useless to speak to them, then, and tell them what he was trying to do.

Lieutenant Caquer slid the goggles down over his eyes, blinded momentarily because the wiper arms were in the *wrong* position. But his fingers found the rheostat, set at zero, and began to move it slowly around the dial toward maximum.

And then, as the wipers began their frantic dance and accelerated, he could see dimly. Through the arc-shaped lenses, he looked around him. On the lower balcony he saw nothing unusual, but on the upper balcony the figure of Regent Barr suddenly blurred.

There was a man standing there on the upper balcony wearing a strange-looking helmet with wires and atop the helmet was a three-inch wheel of mirrors and prisms.

A wheel that stood still, because of the stroboscopic effect of the mechanized goggles. For an instant, the speed of those wiper arms was synchronized with the spinning of the wheel, so that each successive glimpse of the wheel showed it in the same position, and to Caquer's eyes the wheel stood still, and he could see it.

Then the goggles jammed.

But he did not need them any more now.

He knew that Barr Maxon, or whoever stood up there on the balcony, was the wearer of the wheel.

Silently, and attracting as little attention as possible, Caquer sprinted around the fringe of the crowd and reached the side door of the Regency building.

There was a guard on duty there.

"Sorry, sir, but no one's allowed-"

Then he tried to duck, too late. The flat of Police Lieutenant Rod Caquer's shortsword thudded against his head.

The inside of the building seemed deserted. Caquer ran up the three flights of stairs that would take him to the level of the higher balcony, and down the hall toward the balcony door.

He burst through it, and Regent Maxon turned. Maxon now, no longer wore the helmet on his head. Caquer had lost the goggles, but whether he could see it or not, Caquer knew the helmet and the wheel were still in place and working, and that this was his one chance.

Maxon turned and saw Lieutenant Caquer's face, and his drawn sword.

Then, abruptly, Maxon's figure vanished. It seemed to Caquer-although he knew that it was not-that the figure before him was that of Jane Gordon. Jane, looking at him pleadingly, and spoke in melting tones.

"Rod, don't-" she began to say.

But it was not Jane, he knew. A thought, in self-preservation, had been directed at him by the manipulator of the Vargas Wheel.

Caquer raised his sword, and he brought it down hard.

Glass shattered and there was the ring of metal on metal, as his sword cut through and split the helmet.

Of course it was not Jane now-just a dead man lying there with blood oozing out of the split in a strange and complicated, but utterly shattered, helmet. A helmet that could now be seen by everyone there, and by Lieutenant Caquer himself.

Just as everyone, including Caquer, himself, could recognize the man who had worn it.

He was a small, wiry man, and there was an unsightly wart on the side of his nose.

Yes, it was Willem Deem. And this time, Rod Caquer knew, it *was* Willem Deem. . . .

"I thought," Jane Gordon said, "that you were going to leave for Callisto City without saying goodbye

to us."

Rod Caquer threw his hat in the general direction of a hook.

"Oh, that," he said. "I'm not even sure I'm going to take the promotion to a job as police coordinator there. I have a week to decide, and I'll be around town at least that long. How you been doing, Icicle?"

"Fine, Rod. Sit down. Father will be home soon, and I know he has a lot of things to ask you. Why we haven't seen you since the big mass meeting."

Funny how dumb a smart man can be, at times.

But then again, he had proposed so often and been refused, that it was not all his fault.

He just looked at her.

"Rod, all the story never came out in the newscasts," she said. "I know you'll have to tell it all over again for my father, but while we're waiting for him, won't you give me some information?"

Rod grinned.

"Nothing to it, really, Icicle," he said. "Willem Deem got hold of a Blackdex book, and found out how to make a Vargas Wheel. So he made one, and it gave him ideas.

"His first idea was to kill Barr Maxon and take over as Regent, setting the helmet so he would appear to be Maxon. He put Maxon's body in his own shop, and then had a lot of fun with his own murder. He had a warped sense of humor, and got a kick out of chasing us in circles."

"But just how did he do all the rest?" asked the girl.

"He was there as Brager, and pretended to discover his own body. He gave one description of the method of death, and caused Skidder and me and the clearance men to see the body of Maxon each a different way. No wonder we nearly went nuts."

"But Brager remembered being there too," she objected.

"Brager was in the hospital at the time, but Deem saw him afterward and impressed on his mind the memory pattern of having discovered Deem's body," explained Caquer. "So naturally, Brager thought he had been there.

"Then he killed Maxon's confidential secretary, because being so close to the Regent, the secretary must have suspected something was wrong even though he couldn't guess what. That was the second corpse of Willem Deem, who was beginning to enjoy himself in earnest when he pulled that on us.

"And of course he never sent to Callisto City for a special investigator at all. He just had fun with me, by making me seem to meet one and having the guy turn out to be Willem Deem again. I nearly did go nuts then, I guess."

"But why, Rod, weren't you as deeply in as the others-I mean on the business of conquering Callisto and all of that?" she inquired. "You were free of that part of the hypnosis."

Caquer shrugged.

"Maybe it was because I missed Skidder's talk on the televis," he suggested. "Of course it wasn't Skidder at all, it was Deem in another guise and wearing the helmet. And maybe he deliberately left me out, because he was having a psychopathic kind of fun out of my trying to investigate the murders of two Willem Deems. It's hard to figure. Perhaps I was slightly cracked from the strain, and it might have been that for that reason I was partially resistant to the group hypnosis."

"You think he really intended to try to rule all of Callisto, Rod?" asked the girl.

"We'll never know, for sure, just how far he wanted, or expected to go later. At first, he was just experimenting with the powers of hypnosis, through the wheel. That first night, he sent people out of their houses into the streets, and then sent them back and made them forget it. Just a test, undoubtedly."

Caquer paused and frowned thoughtfully.

"He was undoubtedly psychopathic, though, and we don't dare even guess what all his plans were," he continued. "You understand how the goggles worked to neutralize the wheel, don't you, Icicle?"

"I think so. That was brilliant, Rod. It's like when you take a moving picture of a turning wheel, isn't it? If the camera synchronizes with the turning of the wheel, so that each successive picture shows it after a complete revolution, then it looks like it's standing still when you show the movie."

Caquer nodded.

"That's it on the head," he said. "Just luck I had access to those goggles, though. For just a second I

could see a man wearing a helmet up there on the balcony-but that was all I had to know."

"But Rod, when you rushed out on the balcony, you didn't have the goggles on any more. Couldn't he have stopped you, by hypnosis?"

"Well, he didn't. I guess there wasn't time for him to take over control of me. He did flash an illusion at me. It wasn't either Barr Maxon or Willem Deem I saw standing there at the last minute. It was you, Jane."

"I?"

"Yep, you. I guess he knew I'm in love with you, and that's the first thing flashed into his mind; that I wouldn't dare use the sword if I thought it was you standing there. But I knew it wasn't you, in spite of the evidence of my eyes, so I swung it."

He shuddered slightly, remembering the will power he had needed to bring that sword down.

"The worst of it was that I saw you standing there like I've always wanted to see you-with your arms out toward me, and looking at me as though you loved me."

"Like this, Rod?"

And he was not too dumb to get the idea, that time.

nothing sirius

HAPPILY, I was taking the last coins out of our machines and counting them while Ma entered the figures in the little red book as I called them out. Nice figures they were.

Yes, we'd had a good play on both of the Sirian planets, Thor and Freda. Especially on Freda. Those little Earth colonies out there are starved to death for entertainment of any kind, and money doesn't mean a thing to them. They'd stood in line to get into our tent and push their coins into our machines—so even with the plenty high expenses of the trip we'd done all right by ourselves.

Yes, they were right comforting, those figures Ma was entering. Of course she'd add them up wrong, but then Ellen would straighten it out when Ma finally gave up. Ellen's good at figures. And got a good one herself, even if I do say it of my only daughter. Credit for that goes to Ma anyway, not to me. I'm built on the general lines of a space tug.

I put back the coin box of the Rocket-Race and looked up. "Ma—" I started to say. Then the door of the pilot's compartment opened and John Lane stood there. Ellen, across the table from Ma, put down her book and looked up too. She was all eyes and they were shining.

Johnny saluted smartly, the regulation salute which a private ship pilot is supposed to give the owner and captain of the ship. It always got under my skin, that salute, but I couldn't talk him out of it because the rules said he should do it.

He said, "Object ahead, Captain Wherry."

"Object?" I queried. "What kind of object?"

You see, from Johnny's voice and Johnny's face you couldn't guess whether it meant anything or not. Mars City Polytech trains 'em to be strictly deadpan and Johnny had graduated magna cum laude. He's a nice kid but he'd announce the end of the world in the same tone of voice he'd use to announce dinner, if it was a pilot's job to announce dinner.

"It seems to be a planet, sir," was all he said.

It took quite awhile for his words to sink in.

"A planet?" I asked, not particularly brilliantly. I stared at him, hoping that he'd been drinking or something. Not because I had any objections to his seeing a planet sober but because if Johnny ever unbent to the stage of taking a few drinks, the alky would probably dissolve some of the starch out of his backbone. Then I'd have someone to swap stories with. It gets lonesome traveling through space with only two women and a Polytech grad who follows all the rules.

"A planet, sir. An object of planetary dimensions, I should say. Diameter about three thousand miles, distance two million, course apparently an orbit about the star Sirius A."

"Johnny," I said, "we're inside the orbit of Thor, which is Sirius I, which means it's the first planet of Sirius, and how can there be a planet inside of that? You wouldn't be kidding me, Johnny?"

"You may inspect the viewplate, sir, and check my calculations," he replied stiffly.

I got up and went into the pilot's compartment. There was a disk in the center of the forward viewplate, all right. Checking his calculations was something else again. My mathematics end at checking coins out of coin machines. But I was willing to take his word for the calculations. "Johnny," I almost shouted, "we've discovered a new planet! Ain't that something?"

"Yes, sir," he commented, in his usual matter-of-fact voice.

It was something, but not too much. I mean, the Sirius system hasn't been colonized long and it wasn't too surprising that a little three-thousand-mile planet hadn't been noticed yet. Especially as (although this wasn't known then) its orbit is very eccentric.

There hadn't been room for Ma and Ellen to follow us into the pilot's compartment, but they stood looking in, and I moved to one side so they could see the disk in the viewplate.

"How soon do we get there, Johnny?" Ma wanted to know.

"Our point of nearest approach on this course will be within two hours, Mrs. Wherry," he replied. "We come within half a million miles of it."

"Oh, *do* we?" I wanted to know.

"Unless, sir, you think it advisable to change course and give it more clearance."

I gave clearance to my throat instead and looked at Ma and Ellen and saw that it would be okay by them. "Johnny," I said, "we're going to give it less clearance. I've always hankered to see a new planet untouched by human hands. We're going to land there, even if we can't leave the ship without oxygen masks."

He said, "Yes, sir," and saluted, but I thought there was a bit of disapproval in his eyes. Oh, if there had been, there was cause for it. You never know what you'll run into busting into virgin territory out here. A cargo of canvas and slot machines isn't the proper equipment for exploring, is it?

But the Perfect Pilot never questions an owner's orders, dog-gone him! Johnny sat down and started punching keys on the calculator and we eased out to let him do it.

"Ma," I said, "I'm a blamed fool."

"You would be if you weren't," she came back. I grinned when I got that sorted out, and looked at Ellen.

But she wasn't looking at me. She had that dreamy look in her eyes again. It made me want to go into the pilot's compartment and take a poke at Johnny to see if it would wake him up. "Listen, honey," I said, "that Johnny—"

But something burned the side of my face and I knew it was Ma looking at me, so I shut up. I got out a deck of cards and played solitaire until we landed.

Johnny popped out of the pilot's compartment and saluted. "Landed, sir," he said. "Atmosphere one-oh-sixteen on the gauge."

"And what," Ellen asked, "does that mean in English?"

"It's breathable, Miss Wherry. A bit high in nitrogen and low in oxygen compared to Earth air, but nevertheless definitely breathable."

He was a caution, that young man was, when it came to being precise.

"Then what are we waiting for?" I wanted to know. "Your orders, sir."

"Shucks with my orders, Johnny. Let's get the door open and get going."

We got the door open. Johnny stepped outside first, strapping on a pair of heatjectors as he went. The rest of us were right behind him.

It was cool outside, but not cold. The landscape looked just like Thor, with bare rolling hills of hard-baked greenish clay. There was plant life, a brownish bushy stuff that looked a little like tumbleweed.

I took a look up to gauge the time and Sirius was almost at zenith, which meant Johnny had landed us smack in the middle of the day side. "Got any idea, Johnny," I asked, "what the period of rotation is?"

"I had time only for a rough check, sir. It came out twenty-one hours and seventeen minutes."

Rough check, he had said.

Ma said, "That's rough enough for us. Gives us a full afternoon for a walk, and what are we waiting

for?"

"For the ceremony, Ma," I told her. "We got to name the place don't we? And where did you put that bottle of champagne we were saving for my birthday? I reckon this is a more important occasion than that is."

She told me where, and I went and got it and some glasses. "Got any suggestions for a name, Johnny? You saw it first."

"No, sir."

I said, "Trouble is that Thor and Freda are named wrong now. I mean, Thor is Sirius I and Freda is Sirius II, and since this orbit is inside theirs, they ought to be II and III respectively. Or else this ought to be Sirius O. Which means it's Nothing Sirius."

Ellen smiled and I think Johnny would have except that it would have been undignified.

But Ma frowned. "William—" she said, and would have gone on in that vein if something hadn't happened.

Something looked over the top of the nearest hill. Ma was the only one facing that way and she let out a whoop and grabbed me. Then we all turned and looked.

It was the head of something that looked like an ostrich, only it must have been bigger than an elephant. Also there was a collar and a blue polka-dot bow tie around the thin neck of the critter, and it wore a hat. The hat was bright yellow and had a long purple feather. The thing looked at us a minute, winked quizzically, and then pulled its head back.

None of us said anything for a minute and then I took a deep breath. "That," I said, "tears it, right down the middle. Planet, I dub thee Nothing Sirius."

I bent down and hit the neck of the champagne bottle against the clay and it just dented the clay and wouldn't break. I looked around for a rock to hit it on. There wasn't any rock.

I took out a corkscrew from my pocket and opened the bottle instead. We all had a drink except Johnny, who took only a token sip because he doesn't drink or smoke. Me, I had a good long one. Then I poured a brief libation on the ground and recorked the bottle; I had a hunch that I might need it more than the planet did. There was lots of whiskey in the ship and some Martian green-brew but no more champagne. I said, "Well, here we go."

I caught Johnny's eye and he said, "Do you think it wise, in view of the fact that there are—uh—inhabitants?"

"Inhabitants?" I said. "Johnny, whatever that thing that stuck its head over the hill was, it wasn't an inhabitant. And if it pops up again, I'll conk it over the head with this bottle."

But just the same, before we started out, I went inside the *Chitterling* and got a couple more heatjectors. I stuck one in my belt and gave Ellen the other; she's a better shot than I am. Ma couldn't hit the side of an administration building with a spraygun, so I didn't give her one.

We started off, and sort of by mutual consent, we went the other direction from where we'd seen the whatever-it-was. The hills all looked alike for a while and as soon as we were over the first one, we were out of sight of the *Chitterling*. But I noticed Johnny studying a wrist-compass every couple of minutes, and I knew he'd know the way home.

Nothing happened for three hills and then Ma said, "Look," and we looked.

About twenty yards to our left there was a purple bush. There was a buzzing sound coming from it. We went a little closer and saw that the buzzing came from a lot of things that were flying around the bush. They looked like birds until you looked a second time and then you saw that their wings weren't moving. But they zoomed up and down and around just the same. I tried to look at their heads, but where the heads ought to be there was only a blur. A circular blur.

"They got propellers," Ma said. "Like old-fashioned airplanes used to have."

It did look that way.

I looked at Johnny and he looked at me and we started over toward the bush. But the birds, or whatever, flew away quick, the minute we started toward them. They skimmed off low to the ground and were out of sight in a minute.

We started off again, none of us saying anything, and Ellen came up and walked alongside me. We

were just far enough ahead to be out of earshot, and she said, "Pop—"

And didn't go on with it, so I answered, "What, kid?"

"Nothing," she replied sorrowful-like. "Skip it."

So of course I knew what she wanted to talk about, but I couldn't think of anything to say except to cuss out Mars Polytech and that wouldn't have done any good. Mars Polytech is just too good for its own good and so are its ramrods or graduates. After a dozen years or so outside, though, some of them manage to unbend and limber up.

But Johnny hadn't been out that long, by ten years or so. The chance to pilot the *Chitterling* had been a break for him, of course, as his first job. A few years with us and he'd be qualified to skipper something bigger. He'd qualify a lot faster than if he'd had to start in as a minor officer on a bigger ship.

The only trouble was that he was too good-looking, and didn't know it. He didn't know anything they hadn't taught him at Polytech and all they'd taught him was math and astrogation and how to salute, and they hadn't taught him how not to.

"Ellen," I started to say, "don't—"

"Yes, Pop?"

"Uh—nothing. Skip it." I hadn't started to say that at all, but suddenly she grinned at me and I grinned back and it was just like we'd talked the whole thing over. True, we hadn't got anywhere, but then we wouldn't have got anywhere if we had, if you know what I mean.

So just then we came to the top of a small rise, and we stopped because just ahead of us was the blank end of a paved street.

An ordinary everyday plastipaved street just like you'd see in any city on Earth, with curb and sidewalks and gutters and the painted traffic line down the middle. Only it ran out to nowhere, where we stood, and from there at least until it went over the top of the next rise, and there wasn't a house or a vehicle or a creature in sight.

I looked at Ellen and she looked at me and then we both looked at Ma and Johnny Lane, who had just caught up with us. I said, "What is it, Johnny?"

"It seems to be a street, sir."

He caught the look I was giving him and flushed a little. He bent over and examined the paving closely and when he straightened up his eyes were even more surprised.

I queried, "Well, what is it? Caramel icing?"

"It's Permaplast, sir. We aren't the discoverers of this planet because that stuff's a trademarked Earth product."

"Urn," I mumbled. "Couldn't the natives here have discovered the same process? The same ingredients might be available."

"Yes, sir. But the blocks are trademarked, if you'll look closely."

"Couldn't the natives have—" Then I shut up because I saw how silly that was. But it's tough to think your party has discovered a new planet and then have Earth-trademarked bricks on the first street you come to. "But what's a street doing here at all?" I wanted to know.

"There's only one way to find out," said Ma sensibly. "And that's to follow it. So what are we standing here for?"

So we pushed on, with much better footing now, and on the next rise we saw a building. A two-story red brick with a sign that read "Bon-Ton Restaurant" in Old English script lettering.

I said, "I'll be a—" But Ma clapped her hand over my mouth before I could finish, which was maybe just as well, for what I'd been going to say had been quite inadequate. There was the building only a hundred yards ahead, facing us at a sharp turn in the street.

I started walking faster and I got there first by a few paces. I opened the door and started to walk in. Then I stopped cold on the doorstep, because there wasn't any "in" to that building. It was a false front, like a cinema set, and all you could see through the door was more of those rolling greenish hills.

I stepped back and looked up at the "Bon-Ton Restaurant" sign, and the others walked up and looked through the doorway, which I'd left open. We just stood there until Ma got impatient and said, "Well, what are you going to do?"

"What do you want me to do?" I wanted to know. "Go in and order a lobster dinner? With champagne?—Hey, I forgot."

The champagne bottle was still in my jacket pocket and I took it out and passed it first to Ma and then to Ellen, and then I finished most of what was left; I must have drunk it too fast because the bubbles tickled my nose and made me sneeze.

I felt ready for anything, though, and I took another walk through the doorway of the building that wasn't there. Maybe, I figured, I could see some indication of how recently it had been put up, or something. There wasn't any indication that I could see. The inside, or rather the back of the front, was smooth and plain like a sheet of glass. It looked like a synthetic of some sort.

I took a look at the ground back of it, but all I could see was a few holes that looked like insect holes. And that's what they must have been, because there was a big black cockroach sitting (or maybe standing; how can you tell whether a cockroach is sitting or standing?) by one of them. I took a step closer and he popped down the hole.

I felt a little better as I went back through the front doorway. I said, "Ma, I saw a cockroach. And do you know what was peculiar about it?"

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing," I told her. "That's the peculiar thing, there was nothing peculiar. Here the ostriches wear hats and the birds have propellers and the streets go nowhere and the houses haven't any backs to them, but that cockroach didn't even have feathers."

"Are you sure?" Ellen wanted to know.

"Sure I'm sure. Let's take the next rise and see what's over it."

We went, and we saw. Down in between that hill and the next, the road took another sharp turn and facing us was the front view of a tent with a big banner that said, "Penny Arcade."

This time I didn't even break stride. I said, "They copied that banner from the show Sam Heideman used to have. Remember Sam, and the good old days, Ma?"

"That drunken no-good," Ma said.

"Why, Ma, you liked him too."

"Yes, and I liked you too, but that doesn't mean that you aren't or he isn't—"

"Why, Ma," I interrupted. But by that time we were right in front of the tent. Looked like real canvas because it billowed gently. I said, "I haven't got the heart. Who wants to look through this time?"

But Ma already had her head through the flap of the tent. I heard her say, "Why, hello Sam, you old soak."

I said, "Ma, quit kidding or I'll—"

But by that time I was past her and inside the tent, and it was a tent, all four sides of one, and a good big one at that. And it was lined with the old familiar coin machines. There, counting coins in the change booth, was Sam Heideman, looking up with almost as much surprise on his face as there must have been on mine.

He said, "Pop Wherry! I'll be a dirty name." Only he didn't say "dirty name"—but he didn't get around to apologizing to Ma and Ellen for that until he and I had pounded each other's backs and he had shaken hands around and been introduced to Johnny Lane.

It was just like old times on the carny lots of Mars and Venus. He was telling Ellen how she'd been "so high" when he'd seen her last and did she really remember him?

And then Ma sniffed.

When Ma sniffs like that, there's something to look at, and I got my eyes off dear old Sam and looked at Ma and then at where Ma was looking. I didn't sniff, but I gasped.

A woman was coming forward from the back of the tent, and when I call her a woman it's because I can't think of the right word if there is one. She was St. Cecilia and Guinevere and a Petty girl all ironed into one. She was like a sunset in New Mexico and the cold silver moons of Mars seen from the Equatorial Gardens. She was like a Venusian valley in the spring and like Dorzalski playing the violin. She was really something.

I heard another gasp from alongside me, and it was unfamiliar. Took me a second to realize why it

was unfamiliar; I'd never heard Johnny Lane gasp before. It was an effort, but I shifted my eyes for a look at his face. And I thought, "Oh—oh. Poor Ellen." For the poor boy was gone, no question about it.

And just in time—maybe seeing Johnny helped me—I managed to remember that I'm pushing fifty and happily married. I took hold of Ma's arm and hung on. "Sam," I said, "what on Earth—I mean on whatever planet this is—"

Sam turned around and looked behind him. He said, "Miss Ambers, I'd like you to meet some old friends of mine who just dropped in. Mrs. Wherry, this is Miss Ambers, the movie star."

Then he finished the introductions, first Ellen, then me, and then Johnny. Ma and Ellen were much too polite. Me, I maybe went the other way by pretending not to notice the hand Miss Ambers held out. Old as I am, I had a hunch I might forget to let go if I took it. That's the kind of girl she was.

Johnny did forget to let go.

Sam was saying to me, "Pop, you old pirate, what are you doing here? I thought you stuck to the colonies, and I sure didn't look for you to drop in on a movie set."

"A movie set?" Things were beginning to make sense, almost.

"Sure. Planetary Cinema, Inc. With me as the technical advisor on carnny scenes. They wanted inside shots of a coin arcade, so I just brought my old stuff out of storage and set it up here. All the boys are over at the base camp now."

Light was just beginning to dawn on me. "And that restaurant front up the street? That's a set?" I queried.

"Sure, and the street itself. They didn't need it, but they had to film the making of it for one sequence."

"Oh." I went on, "But how about the ostrich with the bow tie and the birds with the propellers? They couldn't have been movie props. Or could they?" I'd heard that Planetary Cinema did some pretty impossible things.

Sam shook his head a bit blankly. "Nope. You must have come across some of the local fauna. There are a few but not many, and they don't get in the way."

Ma said, "Look here, Sam Heideman, how come if this planet has been discovered we hadn't heard about it? How long has it been known, and what's it all about?"

Sam chuckled. "A man named Wilkins discovered this planet ten years ago. Reported it to the Council, but before it got publicized Planetary Cinema got wind of it and offered the Council a whopping rental for the place on the condition that it be kept secret. As there aren't any minerals or anything of value here and the soil ain't worth a nickel, the Council rented it to them on those terms."

"But why secret?"

"No visitors, no distractions, not to mention a big jump on their competitors. All the big movie companies spy on one another and swipe one another's ideas. Here they got all the space they want and can work in peace and privacy."

"What'll they do about our finding the place?" I asked. Sam chuckled again. "Guess they'll entertain you royally now that you're here and try to persuade you to keep it under your hat. You'll probably get a free pass for life to all Planetary Cinema theaters too."

He went over to a cabinet and came back with a tray of bottles and glasses. Ma and Ellen declined, but Sam and I had a couple apiece and it was good stuff. Johnny and Miss Ambers were over in a corner of the tent whispering together earnestly, so we didn't bother them, especially after I told Sam that Johnny didn't drink.

Johnny still had hold of her hand and was gazing into her eyes like a sick pup. I noticed that Ellen moved around so she was facing the other way and didn't have to watch. I was sorry for her, but there wasn't anything I could do. Something like that happens if it happens. And if it hadn't been for Ma—

But I saw that Ma was getting edgy and I said we'd better get back to the ship and get dressed up if we were due to be entertained royally. Then we could move the ship in closer. I reckoned we could spare a few days on Nothing Sirius. I left Sam in stitches by telling him how we'd named the planet after a look at the local fauna.

Then I gently pried Johnny loose from the movie star and led him outside. It wasn't easy. There was a

blank, blissful expression on his face, and he'd even forgotten to salute me when I'd spoken to him. Hadn't called me "sir" either. In fact, he didn't say anything at all.

Neither did any of the rest of us, walking up the street.

There was something knocking at my mind and I couldn't quite figure out what it was. There was something wrong, something that didn't make sense.

Ma was worried too. Finally I heard her say, "Pop, if they really want to keep this place a secret, wouldn't they maybe—uh—"

"No, they wouldn't," I answered, maybe a bit snappishly. That wasn't what I was worried about, though.

I looked down at that new and perfect road, and there was something about it I didn't like. I diagonaled over to the curb and walked along that, looked down at the greenish clay beyond, but there wasn't anything to see except more holes and more bugs like I'd seen back at the Bon-Ton Restaurant.

Maybe they weren't cockroaches, though, unless the movie company had brought them. But they were near enough like cockroaches for all practical purposes—if a cockroach has a practical purpose, that is. And they still didn't have bow ties or propellers or feathers. They were just plain cockroaches.

I stepped off the paving and tried to step on one or two of them, but they got away and popped into holes. They were plenty fast and shifty on their feet.

I got back on the road and walked with Ma. When she asked, "What were you doing?" I answered, "Nothing."

Ellen was walking on the other side of Ma and keeping her face a studious blank. I could guess what she was thinking and I wished there was something could be done about it. The only thing I could think of was to decide to stay on Earth awhile at the end of this trip, and give her a chance to get over Johnny by meeting a lot of other young sprigs. Maybe even finding one she liked.

Johnny was walking along in a daze. He was gone all right, and he'd fallen with awful suddenness, like guys like that always do. Maybe it wasn't love, just infatuation, but right now he didn't know what planet he was on.

We were over the first rise now, out of sight of Sam's tent. "Pop, did you see any movie cameras around?" Ma asked suddenly.

"Nope, but those things cost millions. They don't leave them sitting around loose when they're not being used."

Ahead of us was the front of that restaurant. It looked funny as the devil from a side view, walking toward it from that direction. Nothing in sight but that, the road and green clay hills.

There weren't any cockroaches on the street, and I realized that I'd never seen one there. It seemed as though they never got up on it or crossed it. Why would a cockroach cross the road? To get on the other side?

There was still something knocking at my mind, something that made less sense than anything else.

It got stronger and stronger and it was driving me as crazy as it was. I got to wishing I had another drink. The sun Sirius was getting down toward the horizon, but it was still plenty hot. I even began to wish I had a drink of water.

Ma looked tired too. "Let's stop for a rest," I said, "we're about halfway back."

We stopped. It was right in front of the Bon-Ton and I looked up at the sign and grinned. "Johnny, will you go in and order dinner for us?"

He saluted and replied, "Yes, sir," and started for the door. He suddenly got red in the face and stopped. I chuckled but I didn't rub it in by saying anything else.

Ma and Ellen sat down on the curb.

I walked through the restaurant door again and it hadn't changed any. Smooth like glass on the other side. The same cockroach—I guess it was the same one—was still sitting or standing by the same hole.

I said, "Hello, there," but it didn't answer, so I tried to step on it but again it was too fast for me. I noticed something funny. It had started for the hole the second I decided to step on it, even before I had actually moved a muscle.

I went back through to the front again, and leaned against the wall. It was nice and solid to lean

against. I took a cigar out of my pocket and started to light it, but I dropped the match. *Almost*, I knew what was wrong.

Something about Sam Heideman.

"Ma," I said, "isn't Sam Heideman—dead?"

And then, with appalling suddenness I wasn't leaning against a wall anymore because the wall just wasn't there and I was falling backward.

I heard Ma yell and Ellen squeal.

I picked myself up off the greenish clay. Ma and Ellen were getting up too, from sitting down hard on the ground because the curb they'd been sitting on wasn't there any more either. Johnny was staggering a bit from having the road disappear under the soles of his feet, and dropping a few inches.

There wasn't a sign anywhere of road or restaurant, just the rolling green hills. And—yes, the cockroaches were still there.

The fall had jolted me plenty, and I was mad. I wanted something to take out my mad on. There were only cockroaches. They hadn't gone up into nothingness like the rest of it. I made another try at the nearest one, and missed again. This time I was positive that he'd moved before I did.

Ellen looked down at where the street ought to be, at where the restaurant front ought to be, and then back the way we'd come as though wondering if the Penny Arcade tent was still there.

"It isn't," I said.

Ma asked, "It isn't what?"

"Isn't there," I explained.

Ma glowered at me. "What isn't where?"

"The tent," I said, a bit peeved. "The movie company. The whole shebang. And especially Sam Heideman. It was when I remembered about Sam Heideman—five years ago in Luna City we heard he was dead—so he wasn't there. None of it was there. And the minute I realized that, they pulled it all out from under us."

"'They?' What do you mean, *'they'*, Pop Wherry? Who is 'they'?"

"You mean who *are* 'they'?" I said, but the look Ma gave me made me wince.

"Let's not talk here," I went on. "Let's get back to the ship as quick as we can, first. You can lead us there, Johnny, without the street?"

He nodded, forgetting to salute or "sir" me. We started off, none of us talking. I wasn't worried about Johnny getting us back; he'd been all right until we'd hit the tent; he'd been following our course with his wrist-compass.

After we got to where the end of the street had been, it got easy because we could see our own footprints in the clay, and just had to follow them. We passed the rise where there had been the purple bush with the propeller birds, but the birds weren't there now, nor was the purple bush.

But the *Chitterling* was still there, thank Heavens. We saw it from the last rise and it looked just as we had left it. It looked like home, and we started to walk faster.

I opened the door and stood aside for Ma and Ellen to go in first. Ma had just started in when we heard the voice. It said, "We bid you farewell."

I said, "We bid you farewell, too. And the hell with you."

I motioned Ma to go on into the ship. The sooner I was out of this place, the better I'd like it.

But the voice said, "Wait," and there was something about it that made us wait. "We wish to explain to you so that you will not return."

Nothing had been further from my mind, but I said, "Why not?"

"Your civilization is not compatible with ours. We have studied your minds to make sure. We projected images from the images we found in your minds, to study your reactions to them. Our first images, our first thought-projections, were confused.

But we understood your minds by the time you reached the farthest point of your walk. We were able to project beings similar to yourselves."

"Sam Heideman, yeah," I said. "But how about the da—the woman? She couldn't have been in the memory of any of us because none of us knew her."

"She was a composite—what you would call an idealization. That, however, doesn't matter. By studying you we learned that your civilization concerns itself with things, ours with thoughts. Neither of us has anything to offer the other. No good could come through interchange, whereas much harm might come. Our planet has no material resources that would interest your race.

I had to agree with that, looking out over that monotonous rolling clay that seemed to support only those few tumble-weedlike bushes, and not many of them. It didn't look like it would support anything else. As for minerals, I hadn't seen even a pebble.

"Right you are," I called back. "Any planet that raises nothing but tumbleweeds and cockroaches can keep itself, as far as we're concerned. So—" Then something dawned on me. "Hey, just a minute. There must be something else or who the devil am I talking to?"

"You are talking," replied the voice, "to what you call cockroaches, which is another point of incompatibility between us. To be more precise, you are talking to a thought-projected voice, but we are projecting it. And let me assure you of one thing—that you are more repugnant physically to us than we are to you."

I looked down then and saw them, three of them, ready to pop into holes if I made a move.

Back inside the ship, I said, "Johnny, blast off. Destination, Earth."

He saluted and said, "Yes, sir," and went into the pilot's compartment and shut the door. He didn't come out until we were on an automatic course, with Sirius dwindling behind us.

Ellen had gone to her room. Ma and I were playing cribbage.

"May I go off duty, sir?" Johnny asked, and walked stiffly to his room when I answered, "Sure."

After a while, Ma and I turned in. Awhile after that we heard noises. I got up to investigate, and investigated.

I came back grinning. "Everything's okay, Ma," I said. "It's Johnny Lane and he's as drunk as a hoot owl!" And I slapped Ma playfully on the fanny.

"Ouch, you old fool," she sniffed. "I'm sore there from the curb disappearing from under me. And what's wonderful about Johnny getting drunk? *You* aren't, are you?"

"No," I admitted, regretfully perhaps. "But, Ma, he told me to go to blazes. And without saluting. Me, the owner of the ship."

Ma just looked at me. Sometimes women are smart, but sometimes they're pretty dumb.

"Listen, he isn't going to keep on getting drunk," I said. "This is an occasion. Can't you see what happened to his pride and dignity?"

"You mean because he—"

"Because he fell in love with the thought-projection of a cockroach," I pointed out. "Or anyway he thought he did. He has to get drunk once to forget that, and from now on, after he sobers up, he's going to be human. I'll bet on it, any odds. And I'll bet too that once he's human, he's going to *see* Ellen and realize how pretty she is. I'll bet he's head-over-heels before we get back to Earth. I'll get a bottle and we'll drink a toast on it. To Nothing Sirius!"

And for once I was right. Johnny and Ellen were engaged before we got near enough to Earth to start decelerating.

star mouse

MITKEY, the mouse, wasn't Mitkey then.

He was just another mouse, who lived behind the floorboards and plaster of the house of the great Herr Professor Oberburger, formerly of Vienna and Heidelberg; then a refugee from the excessive admiration of the more powerful of his fellow-countrymen. The excessive admiration had concerned, not Herr Oberburger himself, but a certain gas which had been a by-product of an unsuccessful rocket fuel—which might have been a highly successful something else.

If, of course, the Professor had given them the correct formula. Which he-Well, anyway, the Professor had made good his escape and now lived in a house in Connecticut. And so did Mitkey.

A small gray mouse, and a small gray man. Nothing unusual about either of them. Particularly there

was nothing unusual about Mitkey; he had a family and he liked cheese and if there were Rotarians among mice, he would have been a Rotarian.

The Herr Professor, of course, had his mild eccentricities. A confirmed bachelor, he had no one to talk to except himself, but he considered himself an excellent conversationalist and held constant verbal communion with himself while he worked. That fact, it turned out later, was important, because Mitkey had excellent ears and heard those night-long soliloquies. He didn't understand them, of course. If he thought about them at all, he merely thought of the Professor as a large and noisy super-mouse who squeaked over-much.

"Und now," he would say to himself, "ve vill see vether this eggshaupt tube vas broberly machined. It should fidt vithin vun vunhundredth thousandth of an indtch. Ahhh, it iss berfect. Und now-"

Night after night, day after day, month after month. The gleaming thing grew, and the gleam in Herr Oberburger's eyes grew apace.

It was about three and a half feet long, with weirdly shaped vanes, and it rested on a temporary framework on a table in the center of the room that served the Herr Professor for all purposes. The house in which he and Mitkey lived was a four room structure, but the Professor hadn't yet found it out, seemingly. Originally, he had planned to use the big room as a laboratory only, but he found it more convenient to sleep on a cot in one corner of it, when he slept at all, and to do the little cooking he did over the same gas burner over which he melted down golden grains of TNT into a dangerous soup which he salted and peppered with strange condiments, but did not eat.

"Und now I shall bour it into tubes, and see vether vun tube adjacendt to another eggsploides der secondt tube vhen der virst tube iss-"

That was the night Mitkey almost decided to move himself and his family to a more stable abode, one that did not rock and sway and try to turn handsprings on its foundations. But Mitkey didn't move after all, because there were compensations. New mouse-holes all over, and-joy of joy!-a big crack in the back of the refrigerator where the Professor kept, among other things, food.

Of course the tubes had been not larger than capillary size, or the house would not have remained around the mouseholes. And of course Mitkey could not guess what was coming nor understand the Herr Professor's brand of English (nor any other brand of English, for that matter) or he would not have let even a crack in the refrigerator tempt him.

The Professor was jubilant that morning.

"Der fuel, idt vorks! Der secondt tube, idt did not eggsploide.Und der virst, in seggtions, as I had eggspectedt! Und it is more bowerful; there will be blenty of room for der combartment-"

Ah, yes, the compartment. That was where Mitkey came in, although even the Professor didn't know it yet. In fact the Professor didn't even know that Mitkey existed.

"Und now," he was saying to his favourite listener, "idt is budt a madter of combining der fuel tubes so they work in obbosite bairs. Und then-"

That was the moment when the Herr Professor's eyes first fell on Mitkey. Rather, they fell upon a pair of gray whiskers and a black, shiny little nose protruding from a hole in the baseboards.

"Veil!" he said, "vot haff ve here! Mitkey Mouse himself! Mitkey, how would you like to go for a ride, negst veek? Ve shall see."

That is how it came about that the next time the Professor sent into town for supplies, his order included a mousetrap-not one of the vicious kind that kills, but one of the wire-cage kind. And it had not been set, with cheese, for more than ten minutes before Mitkey's sharp little nose had smelled out that cheese and he had followed his nose into captivity.

Not, however, an unpleasant captivity. Mitkey was an honored guest. The cage reposed now on the table at which the Professor did most of his work, and cheese in indigestion-giving abundance was pushed through the bars, and the Professor didn't talk to himself any more.

"You see, Mitkey, I vas going to sendt to der laboratory in Hardtfordt for a white mouse, budt vhy should I, mit you here? I am sure you are more soundt and healthy and able to vithstand a long chourney than those laboratory mices. No? Ah, you viggles your viskers and that means yes, no? Und being used to

living in dark holes, you should suffer less than they from claustrophobia, no?"

And Mitkey grew fat and happy and forgot all about trying to get out of the cage. I fear that he even forgot about the family he had abandoned, but he knew, if he knew anything, that he need not worry about them in the slightest. At least not until and unless the Professor discovered and repaired the hole in the refrigerator. And the Professor's mind was most emphatically not on refrigeration.

"Und so, Mitkey, ve shall place this vane so-it iss only of assistance in der landing, in an atmosphere. It and these vill bring you down safely and slowly enough that der shock-absorbers in der movable compartment vill keep you from bumping your head too hard, I think." Of course, Mitkey missed the ominous note to that "I think" qualification because he missed all the rest of it. He did not, as has been explained, speak English. Not then.

But Herr Oberburger talked to him just the same. He showed him pictures. "Did you effer see der Mouse you vas named after, Mitkey? Vhat? No? Loogk, this is der original Mitkey Mouse, by Valt Dissney. Budt I think you are cuter, Mitkey."

Probably the Professor was a bit crazy to talk that way to a little gray mouse. In fact, he must have been crazy to make a rocket that worked. For the odd thing was that the Herr Professor was not really an inventor. There was, as he carefully explained to Mitkey, not one single thing about that rocket that was *new*. The Herr Professor was a technician; he could take other people's ideas and make them work. His only real invention-the rocket fuel that wasn't one-had been turned over to the United States Government and had proved to be something already known and discarded because it was too expensive for practical use.

As he explained very carefully to Mitkey, "It iss burely a matter of absolute accuracy and mathematical correctness, Mitkey. Idt iss all here-ve merely combine-und ve achieff vhat, Mitkey?"

"Eggscape velocity, Mitkey! Chust barely, it adds up to eggscape velocity. Maybe. There are yet unknown facgtors, Mitkey, in der ubper atmosphere, der troposphere, der stratosphere. Ve think ve know eggsactly how much air there iss to calculate resistance against, but are ve absolutely sure? No, Mitkey, ve are not. Ve haff not been there. Und der marchin iss so narrow that so much as an air current might affect idt."

But Mitkey cared not a whit. In the shadow of the tapering aluminum-alloy cylinder he waxed fat and happy.

"Der tag, Mitkey, der tag! Und I shall not lie to you, Mitkey. I shall not giff you valse assurances. You go on a dancherous chourney, mein little friendt.

"A vifty-vifty chance ve giff you, Mitkey. Not der moon or bust, but der moon und bust, or else maybe safely back to earth. You see, my boor little Mitkey, der moon iss not made of green cheese und if it were, you vould not live to eat it because there iss not enough atmosphere to bring you down safely und vith your viskers still on.

"Und vhy then, you may veil ask, do I send you? Because der rocket may not attain eggscape velocity. Und in that case, it issstill an eggperiment, budt a different vun. Der rocket, if it goes not to der moon, falls back on der earth, no? Und in that case certain instruments shall giff us further information than ve haff yet about things up there in space. Und you shall giff us information, by vether or not you are yet alive, vether der shock absorbers und vanes are sufficient in an earth-equivalent atmosphere. You see?"

"Then ladter, vhen ve send rockets to Venus maybe vhere an atmosphere eggists, ve shall haff data to calculate the needed size of vanes und shock-absorbers, no? Und in either case, und vether or not you return, Mitkey, you shall be vamous! You shall be der virst liffig greature to go oudt beyond der stratosphere of der earth, out into space.

"Mitkey, you shall be der Star-Mouse! I enfy you, Mitkey, und I only vish I vere your size, so I could go, too."

Der tag, and the door to the compartment. "Gootbye, little Mitkey Mouse." Darkness. Silence. Noise!

"Der rocket-if it goes not to der moon-falls back on der earth, no?" That was what the Herr Professor thought. But the best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley. Even star-mice.

All because of Prxl.

The Herr Professor found himself very lonely. After having had Mitkey to talk to, soliloquies were somehow empty and inadequate.

There may be some who say that the company of a small gray mouse is a poor substitute for a wife; but others may disagree. And, anyway, the Professor had never had a wife, and he had a mouse to talk to, so he missed one and, if he missed the other, he didn't know it.

During the long night after the launching of the rocket, he had been very busy with his telescope, a sweet little eight-inch reflector, checking its course as it gathered momentum. The exhaust explosions made a tiny fluctuating point of light that was possible to follow, if one knew where to look.

But the following day there seemed to be nothing to do, and he was too excited to sleep, although he tried. So he compromised by doing a spot of housekeeping, cleaning the pots and pans. It was while he was so engaged that he heard a series of frantic little squeaks and discovered that another small gray mouse, with shorter whiskers and a shorter tail than Mitkey, had walked into the wire-cage mousetrap.

"Veil, yell," said the Professor, "vot haff ve here? Minnie? Iss it Minnie come to look for her Mitkey?"

The Professor was not a biologist, but he happened to be right. It was Minnie. Rather, it was Mitkey's mate, so the name was appropriate. What strange vagary of mind had induced her to walk into an unbaited trap, the Professor neither knew nor cared, but he was delighted. He promptly remedied the lack of bait by pushing a sizable piece of cheese through the bars.

Thus it was that Minnie came to fill the place of her far-traveling spouse as repository for the Professor's confidences. Whether she worried about her family or not there is no way of knowing, but she need not have done so. They were now large enough to fend for themselves, particularly in a house that offered abundant cover and easy access to the refrigerator.

"Ah, and now it iss dargk enough, Minnie, that ve can loogk for that husband of yours. His viery trail across the sky. True, Minnie, it iss a very small viery trail and der astronomers vill not notice it, because they do not know vhere to loogk. But ve do.

"He iss going to be a very vamous mouse, Minnie, this Mitkey of ours, vhen ve tell der vorld about him and about mein rocket. You see, Minnie ve haff not told them yet. Ve shall vait and gill der complete story all at vunce. By dawn of tomorrow yell

"Ah, there he iss, Minnie! Vaint, but there. I'd hold you up to der scope and let you loogk, but it would not be vocused right for your eyes, and I do not know how to

"Almost vun hundred thousand miles, Minnie, and still agcelerating, but not for much longer. Our Mitkey iss on schedule; in fagt he iss going vaster than ve had vigured, no? It iss sure now that he vill eggscap the gravitation of der earth, and fall upon der moon!"

Of course, it was purely coincidental that Minnie squeaked.

"Ah, yess, Minnie, little Minnie. I know, I know. Ve shall neffer see our Mitkey again, and I almost vish our eggperiment hadt vailed. Budt there are gompensations, Minnie. He shall be der most vamous of all mites. Der Star-Mouse! Virst lifting greature effer to go beyond der gravitational bull of earth!"

The night was long. Occasionally high clouds obscured vision.

"Minnie, I shall make you more gomfortable than in that so-small vire cage. You would like to seem to be vree, would you not, vithout bars, like der animals at modern zoos, vith moats insteadt?"

And so, to fill in an hour when a cloud obscured the sky, the Herr Professor made Minnie her new home. It was the end of a wooden crate, about half an inch thick and a foot square, laid flat on the table, and with no visible barrier around it.

But he covered the top with metal foil at the edges, and he placed the board on another larger board which also had a strip of metal foil surrounding the island of Minnie's home. And wires from the two areas of metal foil to opposite terminals of a small transformer which he placed near by.

"Und now, Minnie, I shall blace you on your island, which shall be liberally supplied mitt cheese and vater, and you shall vind it iss an eggcelent blace to liff. But you vill get a mild shock 'or two vhen you try to step off der edge of der island. It vill not hurt much, but you vill not like it, and after a few tries you vill learn not to try again, no? Und-

And night again.

Minnie happy on her island, her lesson well learned. She would no longer so much as step on the inner strip of metal foil. It was a mouse-paradise of an island, though. There was a cliff of cheese bigger than Minnie herself. It kept her busy. Mouse and cheese; soon one would be a transmutation of the other.

But Professor Oberburger wasn't thinking about that. The Professor was worried. When he had calculated and recalculated and aimed his eight-inch reflector through the hole in the roof and turned out the lights

Yes, there are advantages to being a bachelor after all. If one wants a hole in the roof, one simply knocks a hole in the roof and there is nobody to tell one that one is crazy. If winter comes, or if it rains, one can always call a carpenter or use a tarpaulin.

But the faint trail of light wasn't there. The Professor frowned and re-calculated and re-re-calculated and shifted his telescope three-tenths of a minute and still the rocket wasn't there.

"Minnie, something 'iss wrong. Either der tubes haff stopped viring, or-"

Or the rocket was no longer traversing a straight line relative to its point of departure. By straight, of course, is meant parabolically curved relative to everything other than velocity.

So the Herr Professor did the only thing remaining for him to do, and began to search, with the telescope, in widening circles. It was two hours before he found it, five degrees off course already and veering more and more into a- Well, there was only one thing you could call it. A tailspin.

The darned thing was going in circles, circles which appeared to constitute an orbit about something that couldn't possibly be there. Then narrowing into a concentric spiral.

Then-out. Gone. Darkness. No rocket flares.

The Professor's face was pale as he turned to Minnie.

"It iss imbossible, Minnie. Mein own eyes, but it could not be. Even if vun side stopped viring, it could not haff gone into such sudden circles." His pencil verified a suspicion. "Und, Minnie, it decelerated vaster than bossible. Even mitt no tubes viring, its momentum would haff been more-"

The rest of the night-telescope and calculus-yielded no clue. That is, no believable clue. Some force not inherent in the rocket itself, and not accountable by gravitation-even of a hypothetical body-had acted.

"Mein poor Mitkey."

The gray, inscrutable dawn. "Mein Minnie, it vill haff to be a secret. Ve dare not publish vhat ve saw, for it would not be believed. I am not sure I believe it myself, Minnie. Berhaps because I vas offertired vrom not sleeping, I chust imachined that I saw-"

Later. "But, Minnie, ve shall hope. Vun hundred vifty thousand miles out, it vas. It vill fall back upon der earth. But I gannot tell vhere! I thought that if it did, I would be able to galculate its course, und- But after those goncentric circles-Minnie, not even Einstein could galculate vhere it vill land. Not effen me. All ve can do iss hope that ve shall hear of vhere it falls."

Cloudy day. Black night jealous of its mysteries.

"Minnie, our poor Mitkey. There is nothing could have gauzed-" But something had.

Prxl.

Prxl is an asteroid. It isn't called that by earthly astronomers, because-for excellent reasons-they have not discovered it. So we will call it by the nearest possible transliteration of the name its inhabitants use. Yes, it's inhabited.

Come to think of it, Professor Oberburger's attempt to send a rocket to the moon had some strange results. Or rather, Prxl did.

You wouldn't think that an asteroid could reform a drunk, would you? But one Charles Winslow, a besotted citizen of Bridgeport, Connecticut, never took a drink when-right on Grove Street-a mouse asked him the road to Hartford. The mouse was wearing bright red pants and vivid yellow gloves.

But that was fifteen months after the Professor lost his rocket. We'd better start over again.

Prxl is an asteroid. One of those despised celestial bodies which terrestrial astronomers call vermin of the sky, because the darned things leave trails across the plates that clutter up the more important

observations of novae and nebulae. Fifty thousand fleas on the dark dog of night.

Tiny things, most of them. Astronomers have been discovering recently that some of them come close to Earth. Amazingly close. There was excitement in 1932 when Amor came within ten million miles; astronomically, a mere mashie shot. Then Apollo cut that almost in half, and in 1936 Adonis came within less than one and a half million miles.

In 1937, Hermes, less than half a million but the astronomers got really excited when they calculated its orbit and found that the little mile-long asteroid can come within a mere 220,000 miles, closer than Earth's own moon.

Some day they may be still more excited, if and when they spot the 3/8-mile asteroid Prxl, that obstacle of space, making a transit across the moon and discover that it frequently comes within a mere hundred thousand miles of our rapidly whirling world.

Only in event of a transit will they ever discover it, though, for Prxl does not reflect light. It hasn't, anyway, for several million years since its inhabitants coated it with a black, light-absorbing pigment derived from its interior. Monumental task, painting a world, for creatures half an inch tall. But worth it, at the time. When they'd shifted its orbit, they were safe from their enemies. There were giants in those days-eight-inch tall marauding pirates from Diemos. Got to Earth a couple of times too, before they faded out of the picture, Pleasant little giants who killed because they enjoyed it. Records in now-buried cities on Diemos might explain what happened to the dinosaurs. And why the promising Cro-Magnons disappeared at the height of their promise only a cosmic few minutes after the dinosaurs went west.

But Prxl survived. Tiny world no longer reflecting the sun's rays, lost to the cosmic killers when its orbit was shifted.

Prxl. Still civilized, with a civilization millions of years old. Its coat of blackness preserved and renewed regularly, more through tradition than fear of enemies in these later degenerate days. Mighty but stagnant civilization, standing still on a world that whizzes like a bullet.

And Mitkey Mouse.

Klarloth, head scientist of a race of scientists, tapped his assistant Bemj on what would have been Bemj's shoulder if he had had one. "Look," he said, "what approaches Prxl. Obviously artificial propulsion."

Bemj looked into the wall-plate and then directed a thought-wave at the mechanism that jumped the magnification of a thousand-fold through an alteration of the electronic field.

The image leaped, blurred, then steadied. "Fabricated," said Bemj. "Extremely crude, I must say. Primitive explosive-powered rocket. Wait, I'll check where it came from."

He took the readings from the dials about the viewplate, and hurled them as thoughts against the psychocoil of the computer, then waited while that most complicated of machines digested all the factors and prepared the answer. Then, eagerly, he slid his mind into rapport with its projector. Klarloth likewise listened in to the silent broadcast.

Exact point on Earth and exact time of departure. Untranslatable expression of curve of trajectory, and point on that curve where deflected by gravitational pull of Prxl. The destination-or rather the original intended destination--of the rocket was obvious, Earth's moon. Time and place of arrival on Prxl if present course of rocket was unchanged.

"Earth," said Klarloth meditatively. "They were a long way from rocket travel the last time we checked them. Some sort of a crusade, or battle of beliefs, going on, wasn't there?"

Bemj nodded. "Catapults. Bows and arrows. They've taken a long stride since, even if this is only an early experimental thing of a rocket. Shall we destroy it before it gets here?"

Klarloth shook his head thoughtfully. "Let's look it over. May save us a trip to Earth; we can judge their present state of development pretty well from the rocket itself."

"But then we'll have to--"

"Of course. Call the Station. Tell them to train their attractorepulsors on it and to swing it into a temporary orbit until they prepare a landing-cradle. And not forget to damp out the explosive before they bring it down."

"Temporary force-field around point of landing-in case?"

"Naturally."

So despite the almost complete absence of atmosphere in which the vanes could have functioned, the rocket came down safely and so softly that Mitkey, in the dark compartment, knew only that the awful noise had stopped.

Mitkey felt better. He ate some more of the cheese with which the compartment was liberally provided. Then he resumed trying to gnaw a hole in the inch-thick wood with which the compartment was lined. That wooden lining was a kind thought of the Herr Professor for Mitkey's mental well-being. He knew that trying to gnaw his way out would give Mitkey something to do en route which would keep him from getting the screaming meemies. The idea had worked; being busy, Mitkey hadn't suffered mentally from his dark confinement. And now that things were quiet, he chewed away more industriously and more happily than ever, sublimely unaware that when he got through the wood, he'd find only metal which he couldn't chew. But better people than Mitkey have found things they couldn't chew.

Meanwhile, Klarloth and Bemj and several thousand other Prxlians stood gazing up at the huge rocket which, even lying on its side, towered high over their heads. Some of the younger ones, forgetting the invisible field of force, walked too close and came back, ruefully rubbing bumped heads.

Klarloth himself was at the psychograph.

"There is life inside the rocket," he told Bemj. "But the impressions are confused. One creature, but I cannot follow its thought processes. At the moment it seems to be doing something with its teeth."

"It could not be an Earthling, one of the dominant race. One of them is much larger than this huge rocket. Gigantic creatures. Perhaps, unable to construct a rocket large enough to hold one of themselves, they sent an experimental creature, such as our wooraths."

"I believe you've guessed right, Bemj. Well, when we have explored its mind thoroughly, we may still learn enough to save us a check-up trip to Earth. I am going to open the door."

"But air-creatures of Earth would need a heavy, almost a dense atmosphere. It could not live."

"We retain the force-field, of course. It will keep the air in. Obviously there is a source of supply of air within the rocket or the creature would not have survived the trip."

Klarloth operated controls, and the force-field itself put forth invisible pseudo-pods and turned the outer screw-door, then reached within and unlatched the inner door to the compartment itself.

All Prxl watched breathlessly as a monstrous gray head pushed out of the huge aperture yawning overhead. Thick whiskers, each as long as the body of a Prxlian--

Mitkey jumped down, and took a forward step that bumped his black nose hard-into something that wasn't there. He squeaked, and jumped backward against the rocket.

There was disgust in Bemj's face as he looked up at the monster. "Obviously much less intelligent than a woorath. Might just as well turn on the ray."

"Not at all," interrupted Klarloth. "You forget certain very obvious facts. The creature is unintelligent, of course, but the subconscious of every animal holds in itself every memory, every impression, every sense-image, to which it has ever been subjected. If this creature has ever heard the speech of the Earthlings, or seen any of their works--besides this rocket--every word and every picture is indelibly graven. You see now what I mean?"

"Naturally. How stupid of me, Klarloth. Well, one thing is obvious from the rocket itself: we have nothing to fear from the science of Earth for at least a few millennia. So there is no hurry, which is fortunate. For to send back the creature's memory to the time of its birth, and to follow each sensory impression in the psychograph will require--well, a time at least equivalent to the age of the creature, whatever that is, plus the time necessary for us to interpret and assimilate each."

"But that will not be necessary, Bemj."

"No? Oh, you mean the X-19 waves?"

"Exactly. Focused upon this creature's brain-center, they can, without disturbing his memories, be so delicately adjusted as to increase his intelligence--now probably about .0001 in the scale--to the point where he is a reasoning creature. Almost automatically, during the process, he will assimilate his own memories, and understand them just as he would if he had been intelligent at the time he received those

impressions.

"See, Bemj? He will automatically sort out irrelevant data, and will be able to answer our questions."

"But would you make him as intelligent as-?"

"As we? No, the X-19 waves would not work so far. I would say to about .2 on the scale. That, judging from the rocket, coupled with what we remember of Earthlings from our last trip there, is about their present place on the intelligence scale."

"Ummm, yes. At that level, he would comprehend his experiences on Earth just sufficiently that he would not be dangerous to us, too. Equal to an intelligent Earthling. Just about right for our purpose. Then, shall we teach him our language?"

"Wait," said Klarloth. He studied the psychograph closely for a while. "No, I do not think so. He will have a language of his own. I see in his subconscious, memories of many long conversations. Strangely, they all seem to be monologues by one person. But he will have a language-a simple one. It would take him a long time, even under treatment, to grasp the concepts of our own method of communication. But we can learn his, while he is under the X-19 machine, in a few minutes."

"Does he understand, now, any of that language?"

Klarloth studied the psychograph again. "No, I do not believe he- Wait, there is one word that seems to mean something to him. The word 'Mitkey.' It seems to be his name, and I believe that, from hearing it many times, he vaguely associates it with himself."

"And quarters for him-with air-locks and such?"

"Of course. Order them built."

To say it was a strange experience for Mitkey is understatement. Knowledge is a strange thing, even when it is acquired gradually. To have it thrust upon one--

And there were little things that had to be straightened out. Like the matter of vocal chords. His weren't adapted to the language he now found he knew. Bemj fixed that; you would hardly call it an operation because Mitkey-even with his new awareness--did know what was going on, and he was wide awake at the time. And they didn't explain to Mitkey about the J-dimension with which one can get at the inwardness of things without penetrating the outside.

They figured things like that weren't in Mitkey's line, and anyway they were more interested in learning from him than teaching him. Bemj and Klarloth, and a dozen others deemed worthy of the privilege. If one of them wasn't talking to him, another was.

Their questioning helped his own growing understanding. He would not, usually, know that he knew the answer to a question until it was asked. Then he'd piece together, without knowing just how he did it (any more than you or I know how we know things) and give them the answer.

Bemj: "Iss this language which you sbeak a universal vun?"

And Mitkey, even though he'd never thought about it before, had the answer ready: "No, it iss nodt. It iss Englitch, but I remember der Herr Brofessor sbeaking of other tongues. I belief he sboke another himself originally, budt in America he always sboke Englitch to become more vamiiliar mitt it. It iss a beaudiful sbeech, is it nodt?"

"HmMMM," said Bemj.

Klarloth: "Und your race, the mices. Are they treated veil?"

"Nodt by most people," Mitkey told him. And explained. "I would like to do something for them," he added. "Loogk, could I nodt take back mitt me this brocess which you used upon me? Abbly it to other mices, and greate a race of super-mices?"

"Why not?" asked Bemj.

He saw Klarloth looking at him strangely, and threw his mind into rapport with the chief scientist's, with Mitkey left out of the silent communion.

"Yes, of course," Bemj told Klarloth, "it will lead to trouble on Earth, grave trouble. Two equal classes of beings so dissimilar as mice and men cannot live together in amity. But why should that concern us, other than favorably? The resultant mess will slow down progress on Earth-give us a few more millennia of peace before Earthlings discover we are here, and trouble starts. You know these

Earthlings."

"But you would give them the X-19 waves? They might-"

"No, of course not. But we can explain to Mitkey here how to make a very crude and limited machine for them. A primitive one which would suffice for nothing more than the specific task of converting mouse mentality from .0001 to .2, Mitkey's own level and that of the bifurcated Earthlings."

"It is possible," communicated Klarloth. "It is certain that for aeons to come they will be incapable of understanding its basic principle."

"But could they not use even a crude machine to raise their own level of intelligence?"

"You forget, Bemj, the basic limitation of the X-19 rays; that no one can possibly design a projector capable of raising any mentality to a point on the scale higher than his own. Not even we." All this, of course, over Mitkey's head, in silent Prxlian. More interviews, and more.

Klarloth again: "Mitkey, ve varn you of vun thing. Avoid carelessness vith electricity. Der new molecular rearranchement of your brain center-it iss unstable, and-"

Bemj: "Mitkey, are you sure your Herr Brofessor iss der most advanced of all who eggspexperiment vith der rockets?"

"In cheneral, yess, Bemj. There are others who on vun specific boint, such as eggsplosives, mathematics, astrovisics, may know more, but not much more. Und for combining these knowledges, he iss ahead."

"It iss veil," said Bemj.

Small gray mouse towering like a dinosaur over tinier half-inch Prxlians. Meek, herbivorous creature though he was, Mitkey could have killed any one of them with a single bite. But, of course, it never occurred to him to do so, nor to them to fear that he might.

They turned him inside out mentally. They did a pretty good job of study on him physically, too, but that was through the J-dimension, and Mitkey didn't even know about it.

They found out what made him tick, and they found out everything he knew and some things he didn't even know he knew. And they grew quite fond of him.

"Mitkey," said Klarloth one day, "all der civilized races on Earth year glothing, do they nodt? Vell, if you are to raise der level of mices to men, vould it not be vitting that you year glothes, too?"

"An eggcelent idea, Herr Klarloth. Und I know chust vhat kind I should like. Der Herr Brofessor vunce showed me a bicture of a mouse bainted by der artist Dissney, and der mouse yore glothing. Der mouse vas not a real-life vun, budt an imachinary mouse in a barable, and der Brofessor named me after der Dissney mouse."

"Vot kind of glothing vas it, Mitkey?"

"Bright red bants mitt two big yellow buttons in frondt and two in back, and yellow shoes for der back feet and a pair of yellow gloves for der front. A hole in der seat of der bants to aggomodate der tail."

"Ogay, Mitkey. Such shall be ready for you in fife minutes."

That was on the eve of Mitkey's departure. Originally Bemj had suggested awaiting the moment when Prxl's eccentric orbit would again take it within a hundred and fifty thousand miles of Earth. But, as Klarloth pointed out, that would be fifty-five Earth-years ahead, and Mitkey wouldn't last that long. Not unless they-And Bemj agreed that they had better not risk sending a secret like that back to Earth.

So they compromised by refueling Mitkey's rocket with something that would cancel out the million and a quarter odd miles he would have to travel. That secret they didn't have to worry about, because the fuel would be gone by the time the rocket landed.

Day of departure.

"Ve haff done our best, Mitkey, to set and time der rocket so it vill land on or near der spot from vvhich you left Earth. But you gannot eggspect agguracy in a voyach so long as this. But you vill land near. The rest iss up to you. Ve haff equvipped the rocket ship for effery contingency."

"Thank you, Herr Klarloth, Herr Bemj. Gootbye."

"Gootbye, Mitkey. Ve hate to loose you."

"Gootbye, Mitkey."

"Gootbye, gootbye ..."

For a million and a quarter miles, the aim was really excellent. The rocket landed in Long Island Sound, ten miles out from Bridgeport, about sixty miles from the house of Professor Oberburger near Hartford.

They had prepared for a water landing, of course. The rocket went down to the bottom, but before it was more than a few dozen feet under the surface, Mitkey opened the door-especially re-equipped to open from the inside-and stepped out.

Over his regular clothes he wore a neat little diving suit that would have protected him at any reasonable depth, and which, being lighter than water, brought him to the surface quickly where he was able to open his helmet.

He had enough synthetic food to last him for a week, but it wasn't necessary, as things turned out. The night-boat from Boston carried him in to Bridgeport on its anchor chain, and once in sight of land he was able to divest himself of the diving suit and let it sink to the bottom after he'd punctured the tiny compartments that made it float, as he'd promised Klarloth he would do.

Almost instinctively, Mitkey knew that he'd do well to avoid human beings until he'd reached Professor Oberburger and told his story. His worst danger proved to be the rats at the wharf where he swam ashore. They were ten times Mitkey's size and had teeth that could have taken him apart in two bites.

But mind has always triumphed over matter. Mitkey pointed an imperious yellow glove and said, "Scram," and the rats scrambled. They'd never seen anything like Mitkey before, and they were impressed.

So for that matter, was the drunk of whom Mitkey inquired the way to Hartford. We mentioned that episode before. That was the only time Mitkey tried direct communication with strange human beings. He took, of course, every precaution. He addressed his remarks from a strategic position only inches away from a hole into which he could have popped. But it was the drunk who did the popping, without even waiting to answer Mitkey's question.

But he got there, finally. He made his way afoot to the north side of town and hid out behind a gas station until he heard a motorist who had pulled in for gasoline inquire the way to Hartford. And Mitkey was a stowaway when the car started up.

The rest wasn't hard. The calculations of the Prxlians showed that the starting point of the rocket was five Earth miles north-west of what showed on their telescopomaps as a city, and which from the Professor's conversation Mitkey knew would be Hartford.

He got there.

"Hello, Brofessor."

The Herr Professor Oberburger looked up, startled. There was no one in sight. "Vot?" he asked, of the air. "Who iss?"

"It iss I, Brofessor. Mitkey, der mouse whom you sent to der moon. But I vas not there. Insteadt, I-"

"Vot?? It iss imbossible. Somebody blays der choke. Budt-budt nobody knows about that rocket. Vhen it vailed, I didn't told nobody. Nobody budt me knows-"

"And me, Brofessor."

The Herr Professor sighed heavily. "Offervork. I am going vhat they call battly in der bel-"

"No, Brofessor. This is really me, Mitkey. I can talk now. Chust like you."

"You say you can- I do not belief it. Vhy can I not see you, then. Vhere are you? Vhy don't you-"

"I am hiding, Brofessor, in der vall chust behind der big hole. I wanted to be sure efferything vas ogay before I showed myself.

Then you would not get eggcited und throw something at me maybe."

"Vot? Vhy, Mitkey, if it iss really you und I am nodt asleep or going- Vhy, Mitkey, you know better than to think I might do something like that!"

"Ogay, Brofessor."

Mitkey stepped out of the hole in the wall, and the Professor looked at him and rubbed his eyes and looked again and rubbed his eyes and

"I am crazy," he said finally. "Red bants he years yet, und yellow- It gannot be. I am crazy."

"No, Brofessor. Listen, I'll tell you all aboutt."

And Mitkey told him.

Gray dawn, and a small gray mouse still talking earnestly.

"Yess, Brofessor. I see your boint, that you think an intelligent race of mices und an intelligent race of men couldt nodt get along side by sides. But it vould not be side by sides; as I said, there are only a ferry few beople in the smallest continent of Australia. Und it vould cost little to bring them back und turn offer that continent to us mices. Ve vould call it Moustralia instead Australia, und ve vould instead of Sydney call der capital Dissney, in honor of-"

"But, Mitkey-"

"But, Brofessor, look vot we offer for that continent. All mices vould go there. Ve civilize a few und the few help us catch others und bring them in to put them under red ray machine, und the others help catch more und build more machines und it grows like a snowball rolling down hill Und ve sign a nonaggression pact mitt humans und stay on Moustralia und raise our own food und-"

"But, Mitkey-"

"Und look vot ve offer you in eggsschange, Her Brofessor! Ve vill eggsterminate your vorst enemy-der rats. Ve do not like them either. Und vun battalion of vun thousand mices, armed mitt gas masks und small gas bombs, could go right in effery hole after der rats und could eggsterminate effery rat in a city in vun day or two. In der whole world ve could eggsterminate effery last rat in a year, und at the same time catch und civilize effery mouse und ship him to Moustralia, und-"

"But, Mitkey-"

"Vot, Brofessor?"

"It vould vork, but it vould not work. You could eggsterminate der rats, yess. But how long vould it be before conflicts of interests vould lead to der mices trying to eggsterminate de people or der people trying to eggsterminate der-"

"They vould not dare, Brofessor! Ve could make weapons that vould-"

"You see, Mitkey?"

"But it vould not habben. If men vill honor our rights, ve vill honor-"

The Herr Professor sighed.

"I-I vill act as your intermediary, Mitkey, und offer your broposition, und- Veil, it iss true that getting rid of rats vould be a greadt boon to der human race. Budt-"

"Thank you, Brofessor."

"By der vay, Mitkey. I haff Minnie. Your wife, I guess it iss, unless there vas other mices around. She iss in der other room; I put her there chust before you ariffed, so she vould be in der dark und could sleep. You vant to see her?"

"Wife?" said Mitkey. It had been so long that he had really forgotten the family he had perforce abandoned. The memory returned slowly.

"Veil," he said "-ummm, yess. Ve vill get her und I shall construct quvick a small X-19 prochector und-Yess, it vill help you in your negotiations mitt der governments if there are sefferal of us already so they can see I am not chust a freak like they might otherwise suspegt."

It wasn't deliberate. It couldn't have been, because the Professor didn't know about Klarloth's warning to Mitkey about carelessness with electricity-"Der new molecular rearranchement of your brain center-it iss unstable, und-"

And the Professor was still back in the lighted room when Mitkey ran into the room where Minnie was in her barless cage. She was asleep, and the sight of her- Memory of his earlier days came back like a flash and suddenly Mitkey knew how lonesome he had been.

"Minnie!" he called, forgetting that she could not understand.

And stepped up on the board where she lay. "Squeak!" The mild electrical current between the two

strips of tinfoil got him.

There was silence for a while.

Then: "Mitkey," called the Herr Professor. "Come on back und ve vill discuss this-"

He stepped through the doorway and saw them, there in the gray light of dawn, two small gray mice cuddled happily together. He couldn't tell which was which, because Mitkey's teeth had torn off the red and yellow garments which had suddenly been strange, confining and obnoxious things.

"Vot on earth?" asked Professor Oberburger. Then he remembered the current, and guessed.

"Mitkey! Can you no longer talk? Iss der-"

Silence.

Then the Professor smiled. "Mitkey," he said, "my little star-mouse. I think you are more happier now.

He watched them a moment, fondly, then reached down and flipped the switch that broke the electrical barrier. Of course they didn't know they were free, but when the Professor picked them up and placed them carefully on the floor, one ran immediately for the hole in the wall. The other followed, but turned around and looked back-still a trace of puzzlement in the little black eyes, a puzzlement that faded.

"Gootbye, Mitkey. You vill be happier this vay. Und there vill always be cheese."

"Squeak," said the little gray mouse, and it popped into the hole.

"Gootbye-" it might, or might not, have meant.

come and go mad

HE had known it, somehow, when he had awakened that morning. I to knew it more surely now, staring out of the editorial room window into the early afternoon sunlight slanting down among the buildings to cast a pattern of light and shadow. He knew that soon, perhaps even today, something important was going to happen. Whether good or bad he did not know, but he darkly suspected. And with reason; there are few good things that may unexpectedly happen to a man, things, that is, of lasting importance. Disaster can strike from innumerable directions, in amazingly diverse ways.

A voice said, "Hey, Mr. Vine," and he turned away from the window, slowly. That in itself was strange for it was not his manner to move slowly; he was a small, volatile man, almost cat-like in the quickness of his reactions and his movements.

But this time something made him turn slowly from the window, almost as though he never again expected to see that chiaroscuro of an early afternoon.

He said, "Hi, Red."

The freckled copy boy said, "His Nibs wants to see ya."

"Now?"

"Naw. Atcher convenience. Sometime next week, maybe. If yer busy, give him an apperntment." He put his fist against Red's chin and shoved, and the copy boy staggered back in assumed distress.

He got up out of his chair and went over to the water cooler. He pressed his thumb on the button and water gurgled into the paper cup.

Harry Wheeler sauntered over and said, "Hiya, Nappy. What's up? Going on the carpet?"

He said, "Sure, for a raise."

He drank and crumpled the cup, tossing it into the waste basket. He went over to the door marked Private and went through it.

Walter J. Candler, the managing editor, looked up from the work on his desk and said affably, "Sit down, Vine. Be with you in a moment," and then looked down again.

He slid into the chair opposite Candler, worried a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lighted it. He studied the back of the sheet of paper of which the managing editor was reading the front. There wasn't anything on the back of it.

The M. E. put the paper down and looked at him. "Vine, I've got a screwy one. You're good on screwy ones."

He grinned slowly at the M. E. He said, "If that's a compliment, thanks."

"It's a compliment, all right. You've done some pretty tough things for us. This one's different. I've never yet asked a reporter to do anything I wouldn't do myself. I wouldn't do this, so I'm not asking you to."

The M. E. picked up the paper he'd been reading and then put it down again without even looking at it. "Ever hear of Ellsworth Joyce Randolph?"

"Head of the asylum? Hell yes, I've met him. Casually."

"How'd he impress you?"

He was aware that the managing editor was staring at him intently, that it wasn't too casual a question. He parried. "What do you mean: In what way? You mean is he a good Joe, is he a good politician, has he got a good bedside manner for a psychiatrist, or what?"

"I mean, how sane do you think he is?"

He looked at Candler and Candler wasn't kidding. Candler was strictly deadpan.

He began to laugh, and then he stopped laughing. He leaned forward across Candler's desk. "Ellsworth Joyce Randolph," he said. "You're talking about Ellsworth Joyce Randolph?"

Candler nodded. "Dr. Randolph was in here this morning. He told a rather strange story. He didn't want me to print it. He did want me to check on it, to send our best man to check on it. He said if we found it was true we could print it in hundred and twenty line type in red ink." Candler grinned wryly. "We could, at that."

He stumped out his cigarette and studied Candler's face. "But the story itself is so screwy you're not sure whether Dr. Randolph himself might be insane?"

"Exactly."

"And what's tough about the assignment?"

"The doc says a reporter could get the story only from the inside."

"You mean, go in as a guard or something?" Candler said, "Something."

"Oh."

He got up out of the chair and walked over to the window, stood with his back to the managing editor, looking out. The sun had moved hardly at all. Yet the shadow pattern in the streets looked different, obscurely different. The shadow pattern inside himself was different, too. This, he knew, was what had been going to happen. He turned around. He said, "No, Hell no."

Candler shrugged imperceptibly. "Don't blame you. I haven't even asked you to. I wouldn't do it myself."

He asked, "What does Ellsworth Joyce Randolph think is going on inside his nuthouse? It must be something pretty screwy if it made you wonder whether Randolph himself is sane."

"I can't tell you that, Vine. Promised him I wouldn't, whether or not you took the assignment."

"You mean-even if I took the job I still wouldn't know what I was looking for?"

"That's right. You'd be prejudiced. You wouldn't be objective. You'd be looking for something, and you might think you found it whether it was there or not. Or you might be so prejudiced against finding it that you'd refuse to recognize it if it bit you in the leg."

He strode from the window over to the desk and banged his fist down on it.

He said, "God damn it, Candler, why *me*? You know what happened to me three years ago."

"Sure. Amnesia."

"Sure, amnesia. Just like that. But I haven't kept it any secret that I never got *over* that amnesia. I'm thirty years old-or am I? My memory goes back three years. Do you know what it feels like to have a blank wall in your memory only three years back?"

"Oh sure, I know what's on the other side of that wall. I know because everybody tells me. I know I started here as a copy boy ten years ago. I know where I was born and when and I know my parents are both dead. I know what they look like-because I've seen their pictures. I know I didn't have a wife and kids, because everybody who knew me told me I didn't. Get that part everybody who knew me, not everybody I knew. I didn't know anybody."

"Sure, I've done all right since then. After I got out of the hospital-and I don't even remember the accident that put me there-I did all right back here because I still knew how to write news stories, even

though I had to learn everybody's name all over again. I wasn't any worse off than a new reporter starting cold on a paper in a strange city. And everybody was as helpful as hell."

Candler raised a placating hand to stem the tide. He said, "Okay, Nappy. You said no, and that's enough. I don't see what all that's got to do with this story, but all you had to do was say 'no'. So forget about it."

The tenseness hadn't gone out of him. He said, "You don't see what *that's* got to do with the story? You ask-or, all right, you don't ask, you suggest-that I get myself certified as a madman, go into an asylum as a patient."

When-how much confidence does anyone have in his own mind when he can't remember going to school, can't remember the first time he met any of the people he works with every day, can't remember starting on the job he works at, can't remember anything back of three years before?"

Abruptly he struck the desk again with his fist, and then looked foolish about it. He said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get wound up about it like that."

Candler said, "Sit down."

"The answer's still no."

"Sit down, anyway."

He sat down and fumbled a cigarette out of his pocket, got it lighted.

Candler said, "I didn't even mean to mention it, but I've got to now. Now that you talked that way. I didn't know you felt like that about your amnesia. I thought that was water under the bridge."

"Listen, when Dr. Randolph asked me what reporter we had that could best cover it, I told him about you. What your background was. He remembered meeting you, too, incidentally. But he hadn't known you'd had amnesia."

"Is that why you suggested me?"

"Skip that till I make my point. He said that while you were there, he'd be glad to try one of the newer, milder forms of shock treatment on you, and that it might restore your lost memories. He said it would be worth trying."

"He didn't say it would work."

"He said it might; that it wouldn't do any harm."

He stubbed out the cigarette from which he'd taken only three drags. He glared at Candler. He didn't have to say what was in his mind; the managing editor could read it.

Candler said, "Calm down, boy. Remember I didn't bring it up until you yourself started in on how much that memory-wall bothered you. I wasn't saving it for ammunition. I mentioned it only out of fairness to you, after the way you talked."

"Fairness!"

Candler shrugged. "You said no. I accepted it. Then you started raving at me and put me in a spot where I had to mention something I'd hardly thought of at the time. Forget it. How's that graft story coming? Any new leads?"

"You going to put someone else on the asylum story?"

"No. You're the logical one for it."

"What is the story? It must be pretty woolly if it makes you wonder if Dr. Randolph is sane. Does he think his patients ought to trade places with his doctors, or what?"

He laughed. "Sure, you can't tell me. That's really beautiful double bait. Curiosity-and hope of knocking down that wall. So what's the rest of it? If I say yes instead of no, how long will I be there, under what circumstances? What chance have I got of getting out again? How do I get in?"

Candler said slowly, "Vine, I'm not sure any more I want you to try it. Let's skip the whole thing."

"Let's not. Not until you answer my questions, anyway."

"All right. You'd go in anonymously, so there wouldn't be any stigma attached if the story wouldn't work out. If it does, you can tell the whole truth—including Dr. Randolph's collusion in getting you in and out again. The cat will be out of the bag, then."

"You might get what you want in a few days-and you wouldn't stay on it more than a couple of weeks in any case."

"How many at the asylum would know who I was and what I was there for, besides Randolph?"

"No one." Candler leaned forward and held up four fingers of his left hand. He pointed to the first. "Four people would have to be in on it. You." He pointed to one finger. "Me." A second. "Dr. Randolph." The third finger. "And one other reporter from here."

"Not that I'd object, but why the other reporter?"

"Intermediary. In two ways. First, he'll go with you to some psychiatrist; Randolph will recommend one you can fool comparatively easily. He'll be your brother and request that you be examined and certified. You convince the psychiatrist you're nuts and he'll certify you. Of course it takes two doctors to put you away, but Randolph will be the second. Your alleged brother will want Randolph for the second one."

"All this under an assumed name?"

"If you prefer. Of course there's no real reason why it should be."

"That's the way I feel about it. Keep it out of the papers, of course. Tell everybody around here-except my-hey, in that case we couldn't make up a brother. But Charlie Doerr, in Circulation, is my first cousin and my nearest living relative. He'd do, wouldn't he?"

"Sure. And he'd have to be intermediary the rest of the way, then. Visit you at the asylum and bring back anything you have to send back."

"And if, in a couple of weeks, I've found nothing, you'll spring me?"

Candler nodded. "I'll pass the word to Randolph; he'll interview you and pronounce you cured, and you're out. You come back here, and you've been on vacation. That's all."

"What kind of insanity should I pretend to have?"

He thought Candler squirmed a little in his chair. Candler said, "Well-wouldn't this Nappy business be a natural? I mean, paranoia is a form of insanity which, Dr. Randolph told me, hasn't any physical symptoms. It's just a delusion supported by a systematic framework of rationalization. A paranoiac can be sane in every way except one."

He watched Candler and there was a faint twisted grin on his lips. "You mean I should think I'm Napoleon?"

Candler gestured slightly. "Choose your own delusion. But-Isn't that one a natural? I mean, the boys around the office always kidding you and calling you Nappy. And-" He finished weakly, "-and everything."

And then Candler looked at him squarely. "Want to do it?"

He stood up. "I think so. I'll let you know for sure tomorrow morning after I've slept on it, but unofficially-yes. Is that good enough?"

Candler nodded.

He said, "I'm taking the rest of the afternoon off; I'm going to the library to read up on paranoia. Haven't anything else to do anyway. And I'll talk to Charlie Doerr this evening. Okay?"

"Fine. Thanks."

He grinned at Candler. He leaned across the desk. He said, "I'll let you in on a little secret, now that things have gone his far. Don't tell anyone. *I am* Napoleon!"

It was a good exit line, so he went out.

II:

HE car his hat and coat and went outside, out of the air-conditioning and into the hot sunlight. Out of the quiet madhouse of a newspaper office after deadline, into the quieter madhouse of the streets on a sultry July afternoon.

He tilted his panama back on his head and ran his hand-kerchief across his forehead. Where was he going? Not to the library to bone up on paranoia; that had been a gag to get off for the rest of the afternoon. He'd read everything the library had on paranoia-and on allied subjects-over two years ago. He was an expert on it. He could fool any psychiatrist in the country into thinking that he was sane-or that he wasn't.

He walked north to the park and sat down on one of the benches in the shade. He put his hat on the bench beside him and mopped his forehead again.

He stared out at the grass, bright green in the sunlight, at the pigeons with their silly- head-bobbing method of walking, at a red squirrel that came down one side of a tree, looked about him and scurried up the other side of the same tree.

And he thought back to the wall of amnesia of three years ago.

The wall that hadn't been a wall at all. The phrase intrigued him: a wall at all. Pigeons on the grass, alas. A wall at all.

It wasn't a wall at all; it was a shift, an abrupt change. A line had been drawn between two lives. Twenty-seven years of a life before the accident. Three years of a life since the accident.

They were not the same life.

But no one knew. Until this afternoon he had never even hinted the truth-if it *was* the truth-to anyone. He'd used it as an exit line in leaving Candler's office, knowing Candler would take it as a gag. Even so, one had to be careful; use a gagline like that often, and people begin to wonder.

The fact that his extensive injuries from that accident had included a broken jaw was probably responsible for the fact that today he was free and not in an insane asylum. That broken jaw-it had been in a cast when he'd returned to consciousness forty-eight hours after his car had run head-on into a truck ten miles out of town-had prevented him from talking for three weeks.

And by the end of three weeks, despite the pain and the confusion that had filled them, he'd had a chance to think things over. He'd invented the wall. The amnesia, the convenient amnesia that was so much more believable than the truth as he knew it.

But *was* the truth as he knew it?

That was the haunting ghost that had ridden him for three years now, since the very hour when he had awakened to whiteness in a white room and a stranger, strangely dressed, had been sitting beside a bed the like of which had been in no field hospital he'd ever heard of or seen. A bed with an overhead framework. And when he looked from the stranger's face down at his own body, he saw that one of his legs and both of his arms were in casts and that the cast of the leg stuck upward at the angle, a rope running over a pulley holding it so.

He'd tried to open his mouth to ask where he was, what had happened to him, and that was when he had discovered the cast on his jaw.

He'd stared at the stranger, hoping the latter would have sense enough to volunteer the information and the stranger had grinned at him and said, "Hi, George. Back with us, huh? You'll be all right."

And there was something strange about the language until he placed what it was. English. Was he in the hands of the English? And it was a language, too, which he knew little of, yet he understood the stranger perfectly. And why did the stranger call him George?

Maybe some of the doubt, some of the fierce bewilderment, showed in his eyes, for the stranger leaned closer to the bed. He said, "Maybe you're still confused, George. You were in a pretty bad smashup. You ran that coupe of yours head-on into a gravel truck. That was two days ago, and you're just coming out of it for the first time. You're all right, but you'll be in the hospital for a while, till all the bones you busted knit. Nothing seriously wrong with you."

And then waves of pain had come and swept away the confusion, and he had closed his eyes.

Another voice in the room said, "We're going to give you a hypo, Mr. Vine," but he hadn't dared open his eyes again. It was easier to fight the pain without seeing.

There had been the prick of a needle in his upper arm. And pretty soon there'd been nothingness.

When he came back again-twelve hours later, he learned afterwards-it had been to the same white room, the same strange bed, but this time there was a woman in the room, a woman in a strange white costume standing at the foot of the bed studying a paper that was fastened on a piece of board.

She had smiled at him when she saw that his eyes were open. She said, "Good morning, Mr. Vine. Hope you're feeling better. I'll tell Dr. Holt that you're back with us."

She went away and came back with a man who was also strangely dressed, in roughly the same

fashion as had been the stranger who had called him George.

The doctor looked at him and chuckled. "Got a patient, for once, who can't talk back to me. Or even write notes." Then his face sobered. "Are you in pain, though? Blink once if you're not, twice if you are."

The pain wasn't really very bad this time, and he blinked once. The doctor nodded with satisfaction. "That cousin of yours," he said, "has kept calling up. He'll be glad to know you're going to be back in shape to-well, to listen if not to talk. Guess it won't hurt you to see him a while this evening."

The nurse rearranged his bedclothing and then, mercifully, both she and the doctor had gone, leaving him alone to straighten out his chaotic thoughts.

Straighten them out? That had been three years ago, and he hadn't been able to straighten them out yet:

The startling fact that they'd spoken English and that he'd understood that barbaric tongue perfectly, despite his slight previous knowledge of it. How could an accident have made him suddenly fluent in a language which he had known but slightly?

The startling fact that they'd called him by a different name. "George" had been the name used by the man who'd been beside his bed last night. "Mr. Vine," the nurse had called him. George Vine, an English name, surely.

But there was one thing a thousand times more startling than either of those: It was what last night's stranger (Could he be the "cousin" of whom the doctor had spoken?) had told him about the accident. "You ran that coupe of yours head-on into a gravel truck."

The amazing thing, the contradictory thing, was that he *knew* what a coupe was and what a truck was. Not that he had any recollection of having driven either, of the accident itself, or of anything beyond that moment when he'd been sitting in the tent after Lodi-but-but how could a picture of a coupe, something driven by a gasoline engine, arise to his mind when such a concept had never been *in* his mind before.

There was that mad mingling of two worlds-the one sharp and clear and definite. The world he'd lived his twenty-seven years of life in, in the world into which he'd been born twenty-seven years ago, on August 15th, 1769, in Corsica. The world in which he'd gone to sleep-it seemed like last night-in his tent at Lodi, as General of the Army in Italy, after his first important victory in the field.

And then there was this disturbing world into which he had awakened, this white world in which people spoke an English-now that he thought of it-which was different from the English he had heard spoken at Brienne, in Valence, at Toulon, and yet which he understood perfectly, which he knew instinctively that he could speak if his jaw were not in a cast. This world in which people called him George Vine, and in which, strangest of all, people used words that he did not know, could not conceivably know, and yet which brought pictures to his mind.

Coupe, truck. They were both forms of-the word came to his mind unbidden-automobiles. He concentrated on what an automobile was and how it worked, and the information was there. The cylinder block, the pistons driven by explosions of gasoline vapor, ignited by a spark of electricity from a generator.

Electricity. He opened his eyes and looked upward at the shaded light in the ceiling, and he knew, somehow, that it was an *electric* light, and in a general way he knew what electricity was.

The Italian Galvani-yes, he'd read of some experiments of Galvani, but they hadn't encompassed anything practical such as a light like that. And staring at the shaded light, he visualized behind it water power running dynamos, miles of wire, motors running generators. He caught his breath at the concept that came to him out of his own mind, or part of his own mind.

The faint, fumbling experiments of Galvani with their weak currents and kicking frogs' legs had scarcely fore-shadowed the unmysterious mystery of that light up in the ceiling; and that was the strangest thing yet; part of his mind found it mysterious and another part took it for granted and understood in a general sort of way how it all worked.

Let's see, he thought, the electric light was invented by Thomas Alva Edison somewhere around-Ridiculous; he'd been going to say around 1900, and it was now only 1796!

And then the really horrible thing came to him and he tried-painfully, in vain-to sit up in bed. It *had*

been 1900, his memory told him, and Edison had died in 1931. And a man named Napoleon Bonaparte had died a hundred and ten years before that, in 1821.

He'd nearly gone insane then.

And, sane or insane, only the fact that he could not speak had kept him out of a madhouse; it gave him time to think things out, time to realize that his only chance lay in pretending amnesia, in pretending that he remembered nothing of life prior to the accident. They don't put you in a madhouse for amnesia. They tell you who you are, let you go back to what they tell you your former life was. They let you pick up the threads and weave them, while you try to remember.

Three years ago he'd done that. Now, tomorrow, he was going to a psychiatrist and say that he was-Napoleon!

III:

THE slant of the sun was greater. Overhead a big bird of a plane droned by and he looked up at it and began laughing, quietly to himself-not the laughter of madness. True laughter because it sprang from the conception of Napoleon Bonaparte riding in a plane like that and from the overwhelming incongruity of that idea.

It came to him then that he'd never ridden in a plane, that he remembered. Maybe George Vine had; at some time in the twenty-seven years of life George Vine had spent, he must have. But did that mean that *he* had ridden in one? That was a question that was part of the big question.

He got up and started to walk again. It was almost five o'clock; pretty soon Charlie Doerr would be leaving the paper and going home for dinner. Maybe he'd better phone Charlie and he sure he'd be home this evening.

He headed for the nearest bar and phoned; he got Charlie just in time. He said, "This is George. Going to be home this evening?"

"Sure, George. I was going to a poker game, but I called it off when I learned you'd be around."

"When you learned-Oh, Candler talked to you?"

"Yeah. Say, I didn't know you'd phone me or I'd have called Marge, but how about coming out for dinner? It'll be all right with her; I'll call her now if you can."

He said, "Thanks, no, Charlie. Got a dinner date. And say, about that card game; you can go. I can get there about seven and we won't have to talk all evening; an hour'll be enough. You wouldn't be leaving before eight anyway."

Charlie said, "Don't worry about it; I don't much want to go anyway, and you haven't been out for a while. So I'll see you at seven, then."

From the phone booth, he walked over to the bar and ordered a beer. He wondered why he'd turned down the invitation to dinner; probably because, subconsciously, he wanted another couple of hours by himself before he talked to anyone, even Charlie and Marge.

He sipped his beer slowly, because he wanted to make it last; he had to stay sober tonight, plenty sober. There was still time to change his mind; he'd left himself a loophole, however small. He could still go to Candler in the morning and say he'd decided not to do it.

Over the rim of his glass he stared at himself in the back-bar mirror. Small, sandy-haired, with freckles on his nose, stocky. The small and stocky part fitted all right; but the rest of it! Not the remotest resemblance.

He drank another beer slowly, and that made it half past five.

He wandered out again and walked, this time toward town. He walked past the *Blade* and looked up to the third floor and at the window he'd been working out of when Candler had sent for him. He wondered if he'd ever sit by that window again and look out across a sunlit afternoon.

Maybe. Maybe not.

He thought about Clare. Did he want to see her tonight?

Well, no, to be honest about it, he didn't. But if he disappeared for two weeks or so without having even said good-bye to her, then he'd have to write her off his books; she wouldn't like that.

He'd better.

He stopped in at a drug store and called her home. He said, "This is George, Clare. Listen, I'm being sent out of town tomorrow on an assignment; don't know how long I'll be gone. One of those things that might be a few days or a few weeks. But could I see you late this evening, to say so-long?"

"Why sure, George. What time?"

"It might be after nine, but not much after. That be okay? I'm seeing Charlie first, on business; may not be able to get away before nine."

"Of course, George. Any time."

He stopped in at a hamburger stand, although he wasn't hungry, and managed to eat a sandwich and a piece of pie. That made it a quarter after six and, if he walked, he'd get to Charlie's at just about the right time. So he walked.

Charlie met him at the door. With finger on his lips, he jerked his head backward toward the kitchen where Marge was wiping dishes. He whispered, "I didn't tell Marge, George. It'd worry her."

He wanted to ask Charlie why it would, or should, worry Marge, but he didn't. Maybe he was a little afraid of the answer. It would have to mean that Marge was worrying about him already, and that was a bad sign. He thought he'd been carrying everything off pretty well for three years now.

Anyway, he couldn't ask because Charlie was leading him into the living room and the kitchen was within easy earshot, and Charlie was saying, "Glad you decided you'd like a game of chess, George. Marge is going out tonight; movie she wants to see down at the neighborhood show. I was going to that card game out of self-defense, but I didn't want to."

He got the chessboard and men out of the closet and started to set up a game on the coffee table.

Marge came in with a tray bearing tall cold glasses of beer and put it down beside the chessboard. She said, "Hi, George. Hear you're going away a couple of weeks."

He nodded. "But I don't know where. Candler-the managing editor-asked me if I'd be free for an out of town assignment and I said sure, and he said he'd tell me about it tomorrow."

Charlie was holding out clenched hands, a pawn in each, and he touched Charlie's left hand and got white. He moved pawn to king's fourth and, when Charlie did the same, advanced his queen's pawn.

Marge was fussing with her hat in front of the mirror. She said, "If you're not here when I get back, George, so long and good luck."

He said, "Thanks, Marge. Bye."

He made a few more moves before Marge came over, ready to go, kissed Charlie goodbye and then kissed him lightly on the forehead. She said, "Take care of yourself, George."

For a moment his eyes met her pale blue ones and he thought, she *is* worrying about me. It scared him a little.

After the door had closed behind her, he said, "Let's not finish the game, Charlie. Let's get to the brass tacks, because I've got to see Clare about nine. Dunno how long I'll be gone, so I can't very well not say good-bye to her."

Charlie looked up at him. "You and Clare serious, George?"

"I don't know."

Charlie picked up his beer and took a sip. Suddenly his voice was brisk and businesslike. He said, "All right, let's sit on the brass tacks. We've got an appointment for eleven o'clock tomorrow morning with a guy named Irving, Dr. J. E. Irving, in the Appleton Block. He's a psychiatrist; Dr. Randolph recommended him."

"I called him up this afternoon after Candler had talked to me; Candler had already phoned Randolph. My story was this: I gave my right name. I've got a cousin who's been acting queer lately and whom I wanted him to talk to. I didn't give the cousin's name. I didn't tell him in what way you'd been acting queer; I ducked the question and said I'd rather have him judge for himself without prejudice. I said I'd talked you into talking to a psychiatrist and that the only one I knew of was Randolph; that I'd called Randolph who said he didn't do much private practice and recommended Irving. I told him I was your nearest living relative."

"That leaves the way open to Randolph for the second name on the certificate. If you can talk Irving into thinking you're really insane and he wants to sign you up, I can insist on having Randolph, whom I wanted in the first place. And this time, of course, Randolph will agree."

"You didn't say a thing about what kind of insanity you suspected me of having?"

Charlie shook his head. He said, "So, anyway, neither of us goes to work at the *Blade* tomorrow. I'll leave home the usual time so Marge won't know anything, but I'll meet you downtown-say, in the lobby of the Christina-at a quarter of eleven. And if you can convince Irving that you're committable-if that's the word-we'll get Randolph right away and get the whole thing settled tomorrow."

"And if I change my mind?"

"Then I'll call the appointment off. That's all. Look, isn't that all there is to talk over? Let's play this game of chess out; it's only twenty after seven."

He shook his head. "I'd rather talk. Charlie. One thing you forgot to cover, anyway. After tomorrow. How often you coming to see me to pick up bulletins for Candler?"

"Oh, sure, I forgot that. As often as visiting hours will permit-three times a week. Monday, Wednesday, Friday afternoons. Tomorrow's Friday, so if you get in, the first time I'll be able to see you is Monday."

"Okay. Say, Charlie, did Candler even hint to you at what the story is that I'm supposed to get in there?"

Charlie Doerr shook his head slowly. "Not a word. 'What is it? Or is it too secret for you to talk about?'"

He stared at Charlie, wondering. And suddenly he felt that he couldn't tell the truth; that he didn't know either. It would make him look too silly. It hadn't sounded so foolish when Candler had given the reason-a reason, anyway-for not telling him, but it would sound foolish now.

He said, "If he didn't tell you, I guess I'd better not either, Charlie." And since that didn't sound too convincing, he added, "I promised Candler I wouldn't."

Both glasses of beer were empty by then, and Charlie took them into the kitchen for refilling.

He followed Charlie, somehow preferring the informality of the kitchen. He sat a-straddle on a kitchen chair, leaning his elbows on the back of it, and Charlie leaned against the refrigerator.

Candler said, "Prosit!" and they drank, and then Charlie asked, "Have you got your story ready for Doc Irving?"

He nodded. "Did Candler tell you what I'm to tell him?"

"You mean, that you're Napoleon?" Charlie chuckled. Did that chuckle quite ring true? He looked at Charlie, and he knew that what he was thinking was completely incredible. Charlie was square and honest as they came. Charlie and Marge were his best friends; they'd been his best friends for three years that he knew of. Longer than that, a hell of a lot longer, according to Charlie. But beyond those three years-that was something else again.

He cleared his throat because the words were going to stick a little. But he had to ask, he had to be sure. "Charlie, I'm going to ask you a hell of a question. Is this business on the up and up?"

"Huh?"

"It's a hell of a thing to ask. But-look, you and Candler don't think I'm crazy, do you? You didn't work this out between you to get me put away-or anyway examined-painlessly, without my knowing it was happening, till too late, did you?"

Charlie was staring at him. He said, "Jeez, George, you don't think I'd do a thing like that, do you?"

"No, I don't. But you could think it was for my own good, and you might on that basis. Look, Charlie, if it is that, if you *think* that, let me point out that this isn't fair. I'm going up against a psychiatrist tomorrow to lie to him, to try to convince him that I have delusions. Not to be honest with him. And that would be unfair as hell, to me. You see that, don't you, Charlie?"

Charlie's face got a little white. He said slowly, "Before God, George, it's nothing like that. All I know about this is what Candler and you have told me."

"You think I'm sane, fully sane?"

Charlie licked his lips. He said, "You want it straight?"

"Yes."

"I never doubted it, until this moment. Unless-well, amnesia is a form of mental aberration, I suppose, and you've never got over that, but that isn't what you mean, is it?"

"No."

"Then, until right now-George, that sounds like a persecution complex, if you really meant what you asked me. A conspiracy to get you to-Surely you can see how ridiculous it is. What possible reason would either Candler or I have to get you to lie yourself into being committed?"

He said, "I'm sorry, Charlie. It was just a screwy momentary notion. No, I don't think that, of course." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Let's finish that chess game, huh?"

"Fine. Wait till I give us a refill to take along."

He played carelessly and managed to lose within fifteen minutes. He turned down Charlie's offer of a chance for revenge and leaned back in his chair.

He said, "Charlie, ever hear of chessmen coming in red and black?"

"N-no. Either black and white, or red and white, any I've ever seen. Why?"

"Well-" He grinned. "I suppose I oughtn't to tell you this after just making you wonder whether I'm really sane after all, but I've been having recurrent dreams recently. No crazier than ordinary dreams except that I've been dreaming the same things over and over. One of them is something about a game between the red and the black; I don't even know whether it's chess. You know how it is when you dream; things seem to make sense whether they do or not. In the dream, I don't wonder whether the red-and-black business is chess or not; I know, I guess, or seem to know. But the knowledge doesn't carry over. You know what I mean?"

"Sure. Go on."

"Well, Charlie, I've been wondering if it just might have something to do with the other side of that wall of amnesia I've never been able to cross. This is the first time in my-well, not in my life, maybe, but in the three years I remember of it, that I've had recurrent dreams. I wonder if-if my memory may not be trying to get through.

"Did I ever have a set of red and black chessman, for instance? Or, in any school I went to, did they have intramural basketball or baseball between red teams and black teams, or-or anything like that?"

Charlie thought for a long moment before he shook his head. "No," he said, "nothing like that. Of course there's red and black in roulette-rouge et noir. And it's the two colors in a deck of playing cards."

"No, I'm pretty sure it doesn't tie in with cards or roulette. It's not-not like that. It's a game *between* the red and the black. They're the players, somehow. Think hard, Charlie; not about where you might have run into that idea, but where I might have."

He watched Charlie struggle and after a while he said, "Okay, don't sprain your brain, Charlie. Try this one. *The brightly shining.*"

"The brightly shining what?"

"Just that phrase, *the brightly shining*. Does it mean anything to you, at all?"

"No."

"Okay," he said. "Forget it."

IV:

HE WAS early and he walked past Clare's house, as far as the corner and stood under the big elm there, smoking the rest of his cigarette, thinking bleakly.

There wasn't anything to think about, really; all he had to do was say good-bye to her. Two easy syllables. And stall off her questions as to where he was going, exactly how long he'd be gone. Be quiet and casual and unemotional about it, just as though they didn't mean anything in particular to each other.

It *had* to be that way. He'd known Clare Wilson a year and a half now, and he'd kept her dangling that long; it wasn't fair. This had to be the end, for her sake. He had about as much business asking a woman to marry him as-as a madman who thinks he's Napoleon!

He dropped his cigarette and ground it viciously into the walk with his heel, then went back to the house, up on the porch, and rang the bell.

Clare herself came to the door. The light from the hallway behind her made her hair a circlet of spun gold around her shadowed face.

He wanted to take her into his arms so badly that he clenched his fists with the effort it took to keep his arms down.

Stupidly, he said, "Hi, Clare. How's everything?"

"I don't know, George. How is everything? Aren't you coming in?"

She'd stepped back from the doorway to let him past and the light was on her face now, sweetly grave. She knew something was up, he thought; her expression and the tone of her voice gave that away.

He didn't want to go in. He said, "It's such a beautiful night, Clare. Let's take a stroll."

"All right, George." She came out onto the porch. "It is a fine night, such beautiful stars." She turned and looked at him. "Is one of them yours?"

He started a little. Then he stepped forward and took her elbow, guiding her down the porch steps. He said lightly, "All of them are mine. Want to buy any?"

"You wouldn't *give* me one? Just a teeny little dwarf star, maybe? Even one that I'd have to use a telescope to see?"

They were out on the sidewalk then, out of hearing of the house, and abruptly her voice changed, the playful note dropped from it, and she asked another question, "What's wrong, George?"

He opened his mouth to say nothing was wrong, and then closed it again. There wasn't any lie that he could tell her, and he couldn't tell her the truth, either. Her asking of that question, in that way, should have made things easier; it made them more difficult.

She asked another, "You mean to say good-bye for-for good, don't you George?"

He said, "Yes," and his mouth was very dry. He didn't know whether it came out as an articulate monosyllable or not, and he wetted his lips and tried again. He said, "Yes, I'm afraid so, Clare."

"Why?"

He couldn't make himself turn to look at her, he stared blindly ahead. He said, "I-I can't tell you, Clare. But it's the only thing I can do. It's best for both of us."

"Tell me one thing, George. Are you really going away? Or was that just an excuse?"

"It's true. I'm going away; I don't know for how long. But don't ask me where, please. I can't tell you that."

"Maybe I can tell you, George. Do you mind if I do?"

He minded all right; he minded terribly. But how could he say so? He didn't say anything, because he couldn't say yes, either.

They were beside the park now, the little neighborhood park that was only a block square and didn't offer much in the way of privacy, but which did have benches. And he steered her-or she steered him; he didn't know which-into the park and they sat down on a bench. There were other people in the park, but not too near till he hadn't answered her question.

She sat very close to him on the bench. She said, "You've been worried about your mind, haven't you George?"

"Well-yes, in a way, yes, I have."

"And you're going away has something to do with that, hasn't it? You're going somewhere for observation or treatment, or both?"

"Something like that. It's not as simple as that, Clare, and I-I just can't tell you about it."

She put her hand on his hand, lying on his knee. She said, "I knew it was something like that, George. And I don't ask you to tell me anything about it."

"Just-just don't say what you meant to say. Say so-long instead of good-bye. Don't even write me, if you don't want to. But don't be noble and call everything off here and now, for my sake. At least wait until you've been wherever you're going. Will you?"

He gulped. She made it sound so simple when actually it was so complicated. Miserably he said, "All

right, Clare. If you want it that way."

Abruptly she stood up. "Let's get back, George." He stood beside her. "But it's early."

"I know, but sometimes-Well, there's a psychological moment to end a date, George. I know that sounds silly, but after what we've said, wouldn't it be-uh-anticlimactic-to-"

He laughed a little. He said, "I see what you mean."

They walked back to her home in silence. He didn't know whether it was happy or unhappy silence; he was too mixed up for that.

On the shadowed porch, in front of the door, she turned and faced him. "George," she said. Silence.

"Oh, damn you, George; quit being so *noble* or whatever you're being. Unless, of course, you *don't* love me. Unless this is just an elaborate form of-of runaround you're giving me. Is it?"

There were only two things he could do. One was run like hell. The other was what he did. He put his arms around her and kissed her. Hungrily.

When that was over, and it wasn't over too quickly, he was breathing a little hard and not thinking too clearly, for he was saying what he hadn't meant to say at all, "I love you, Clare. I love you; I love you."

And she said, "I love you, too, dear. You'll come back to me, won't you?" And he said, "Yes. *Yes.*"

It was four miles or so from her home to his rooming house, but he walked, and the walk seemed to take only seconds.

He sat at the window of his room, with the light out, thinking, but the thoughts went in the same old circles they'd gone in for three years.

No new factor had been added except that now he was going to stick his neck out, way out, miles out. Maybe, just maybe, this thing was going to be settled one way or the other.

Out there, out his window, the stars were bright diamonds in the sky. Was one of them his star of destiny? If so, he was going to follow it, follow it even into the madhouse if it led there. Inside him was a deeply rooted conviction that this wasn't accident, that it wasn't coincidence that had led to his being asked to tell the truth under guise of falsehood.

His star of destiny.

*Brightly shining?* No, the phrase from his dreams did not refer to that; it was not an adjective phrase, but a noun. *The brightly shining?* What was *the brightly shining?*

And the red and the black? He'd thought of everything Charlie had suggested, and other things, too. Checkers, for instance. But it was not that.

The red and the black.

Well, whatever the answer was, he was running full-speed toward it now, not away from it.

After a while he went to bed, but it was a long time before he went to sleep.

V:

CHARLIE DOERR came out of the inner office marked Private and put his hand out. He said, "Good luck, George. The doe's ready to talk to you now."

He shook Charlie's hand and said, "You might as well run along. I'll see you Monday, first visiting day."

"I'll wait here," Charlie said. "I took the day off work anyway, remember? Besides, maybe you won't have to go. He dropped Charlie's hand, and stared into Charlie's face. He said slowly, "What do you mean, Charlie-maybe I won't have to go."

"*Why-*" Charlie looked puzzled. "Why, maybe he'll tell you you're all right, or just suggest regular visits to see him until you're straightened out, or-" Charlie finished weakly, "-or something."

Unbelievably, he stared at Charlie. He wanted to ask, am I crazy or are you, but that sounded crazy to ask under the circumstances. But he had to be sure, sure that Charlie just hadn't let something slip from his mind; maybe he'd fallen into the role he was supposed to be playing when he talked to the doctor just now. He asked, "Charlie, don't you remember that-" And even of that question the rest seemed insane for him to be asking, with Charlie staring blankly at him. The answer was in Charlie's face; it didn't have to be brought to Charlie's lips.

Charlie said again, "I'll wait, of course. Good luck, George."

He looked into Charlie's eyes and nodded, then turned and went through the door marked Private. He closed it behind him, meanwhile studying the man who had been sitting behind the desk and who had risen as he entered. A big man, broad shouldered, iron gray hair.

"Dr. Irving?"

"Yes, Mr. Vine. Will you be seated, please?"

He slid into the comfortable, padded armchair across the desk from the doctor.

"Mr. Vine," said the doctor, "a first interview of this sort is always a bit difficult. For the patient, I mean. Until you know me better, it will be difficult for you to overcome a certain natural reticence in discussing yourself. Would you prefer to talk, to tell things your own way, or would you rather I asked questions?"

He thought that over. He'd had a story ready, but those few words with Charlie in the waiting room had changed everything.

He said, "Perhaps you'd better ask questions."

"Very well." There was a pencil in Dr. Irving's hand and paper on the desk before him. Where and when were you born?"

He took a deep breath. "To the best of my knowledge, in Corsica on August 15th, 1769. I don't actually remember being born, of course. I do remember things from my boyhood on Corsica, though. We stayed there until I was ten, and after that I was sent to school at Brienne."

Instead of writing, the doctor was tapping the paper lightly with the tip of the pencil. He asked, "What month and *year* is this?"

"August, 1947. Yes, I know that should make me a hundred and seventy-some years old. You want to know how I account for that. I don't. Nor do I account for the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte died in 1821."

He leaned back in the chair and crossed his arms, staring up at the ceiling. "I don't attempt to account for the paradoxes or the discrepancies. I recognize them as such. But according to my own memory, and aside from logic pro or con, I was Napoleon for twenty-seven years. I won't recount what happened during that time; it's all down in the history books."

"But in 1796, after the battle of Lodi, while I was in charge of the armies in Italy, I went to sleep. As far as I knew, just as anyone goes to sleep anywhere, any time. But I woke up-with no sense whatever of duration, by the way-in a hospital in town here, and I was informed that my name was George Vine, that the year was 1944, and that I was twenty-seven years old."

"The twenty-seven years old part checked, and that was all. Absolutely all. I have no recollections of any parts of George Vine's life, prior to his-my-waking up in the hospital after the accident. I know quite a bit about his early life now, but only because I've been told."

"I know when and where he was born, where he went to school, and when he started work at the *Blade*. I know when he enlisted in the army and when he was discharged-late in 1943-because I developed a trick knee after a leg injury. Not in combat, incidentally, and there wasn't any 'psycho-neurotic' on my-his-discharge."

The doctor quit doodling with the pencil. He asked, "You've felt this way for three years-and kept it a secret?"

"Yes. I had time to think things over after the accident, and yes, I decided then to accept what they told me about my identity. They'd have locked me up, of course. Incidentally, I've *tried* to figure out an answer. I've studied Dunne's theory of time-even Charles Fort!" He grinned suddenly. "Ever read about Casper Hauser?"

Dr. Irving nodded.

"Maybe he was playing smart the way I did. And I wonder how many other amnesiacs pretended they didn't know what happened prior to a certain date-rather than admit they had memories at obvious variance with the facts."

Dr. Irving said slowly, "Your cousin informs me that you were a bit-ah-`hipped' was his word-on the subject of Napoleon before your accident. How do you account for that?"

"I've told you I don't account for any of it. But I can verify that fact, aside from what Charlie Doerr says about it. Apparently I-the George Vine I, if I was ever George Vine-was quite interested in Napoleon, had read about him, made a hero of him, and had talked about him quite a bit. Enough so that the fellows he worked with at the *Blade* had nicknamed him 'Nappy.' "

"I notice you distinguish between yourself and George Vine. Are you or are you not he?"

"I have been for three years. Before that-I have no recollection of being George Vine. I don't think I was. I think-as nearly as I think anything-that I, three years ago, woke up in George Vine's body."

"Having done what for a hundred and seventy some years?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Incidentally, I don't doubt that this is George Vine's body, and with it I inherited his knowledge-except his personal memories. For example, I knew how to handle his job at the newspaper, although I didn't remember any of the people I worked with there. I have his knowledge of English, for instance, and his ability to write. I knew how to operate a typewriter. My handwriting is the same as his."

"If you think that you are not Vine, how do you account for that?"

He leaned forward. "I think part of me is George Vine, and part of me isn't. I think some transference has happened which is outside the run of ordinary human experience. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's supernatural-nor that I'm insane. *Does it?*"

Dr. Irving didn't answer. Instead, he asked, "You kept this secret for three years, for understandable reasons. Now, presumably for other reasons, you decide to tell. What are the other reasons? What has happened to change your attitude?"

It was the question that had been bothering him.

He said slowly, "Because I don't believe in coincidence. Because something in the situation itself has changed. Because I'm tired of pretending. Because I'm willing to risk imprisonment as a paranoid to find out the truth."

"What in the situation has changed?"

"Yesterday it was suggested-by my employer-that I feign insanity for a practical reason. And the very kind of insanity which I have, if any: Surely, I will admit the possibility that I'm insane. But I can only operate on the theory that I'm not. You know that you're Dr. Willard E. Irving; you can only operate on that theory-but how do you *know* you are? Maybe you're insane, but you can only act as though you're not."

"You think your employer is part of a plot-ah-against you? You think there is a conspiracy to get you into a sanitarium?"

"I don't know. Here's what has happened since yesterday noon." He took a deep breath. Then he plunged. He told Dr. Irving the whole story of his interview with Candler, what Candler had said about Dr. Randolph, about his talk with Charlie Doerr last night and about Charlie's bewildering about-face in the waiting room.

"When he was through he said, 'That's all.' He looked at Dr. Irving's expressionless face with more curiosity than concern, trying to read it. He added, quite casually, 'You don't believe me, of course. You think I'm insane.'"

He met Irving's eyes squarely. He said, "You have no choice-unless you would choose to believe I'm telling you an elaborate set of lies to convince you I'm insane. I mean, as a scientist and as a psychiatrist, you cannot even admit the possibility that the things I believe-*know*-are objectively true. Am I not right?"

"I fear that you are. So?"

"So go ahead and sign your commitment. I'm going to follow this thing through. Even to the detail of having Dr. Ellsworth Joyce Randolph sign the second one."

"You make no objection?"

"Would it do any good if I did?"

"On one point, yes, Mr. Vine. If a patient has a prejudice against-or a delusion concerning-one psychiatrist, it is best not to have him under that particular psychiatrist's care. If you think Dr. Randolph is concerned in a plot against you, I would suggest that another one be named."

He said softly, "Even if I choose Randolph?"

Dr. Irving waved a deprecating hand, "Of course, if both you and Mr. Doerr prefer-"  
"We prefer."

The iron gray head nodded gravely. "Of course you understand one thing; if Dr. Randolph and I decide you should go to the sanitarium, it will not be for custodial care. It will be for your recovery through treatment."

He nodded.

Dr. Irving stood. "You'll pardon me a moment? I'll phone Dr. Randolph."

He watched Dr. Irving go through a door to an inner room. He thought; there's a phone on his desk right there; but he doesn't want me to overhear the conversation.

He sat there very quietly until Irving came back and said, "Dr. Randolph is free. And I phoned for a cab to take us there. You'll pardon me again? I'd like to speak to your cousin, Mr. Doerr."

He sat there and didn't watch the doctor leave in the opposite direction for the waiting room. He could have gone to the door and tried to catch words in the low-voiced conversation, but he didn't. He just sat there until he heard the waiting room door open behind him and Charlie's voice said, "Come on, George. The cab will be waiting downstairs by now."

They went down in the elevator and the cab was there. Dr. Irving gave the address.

In the cab, about half way there, he said, "It's a beautiful day," and Charlie cleared his throat and said, "Yeah, it is." The rest of the way he didn't try it again and nobody said anything.

VI:

HE WORE gray trousers and a gray shirt, open at the collar, and with no necktie that he might decide to hang himself with. No belt, either, for the same reason, although the trousers buttoned snugly enough around the waist that there was no danger of them falling off. Just as there was no danger of his falling out any of the windows; they were barred.

He was not in a cell, however; it was a large ward on the third floor. There were seven other men in the ward. His eyes ran over them. Two were playing checkers, sitting on the floor with the board on the floor between them. One sat in a chair, staring fixedly at nothing; two leaned against the bars of one of the open windows, looking out and talking casually and sanely. One read a magazine. One sat in a corner, playing smooth arpeggios on a piano that wasn't there at all.

He stood leaning against the wall, watching the other seven. He'd been here two hours now; it seemed like two years.

The interview with Dr. Ellsworth Joyce Randolph had gone smoothly; it had been practically a duplicate of his interview with Irving. And quite obviously, Dr. Randolph had never heard of him before.

He'd expected that, of course.

He felt very calm, now. For a while, he'd decided, he wasn't going to think, wasn't going to worry, wasn't even going to feel.

He strolled over and stood watching the checker game. It was a sane checker game; the rules were being followed.

One of the men looked up and asked, "What's your name?" It was a perfectly sane question; the only thing wrong with it was that the same man had asked the same question four times now within the two hours he'd been here.

He said, "George Vine."

"Mine's Bassington, Ray Bassington. Call me Ray. Are you insane?"

"No."

"Some of us are and some of us aren't. He is." He looked at the man who was playing the imaginary piano. "Do you play checkers?"

"Not very well."

"Good. We eat pretty soon now. Anything you want to know, just ask me."

"How do you get out of here? Wait, I don't mean that for a gag, or anything. Seriously, what's the procedure?"

"You go in front of the board once a month. They ask you questions and decide if you go or stay. Sometimes they stick needles in you. What you down for?"

"Down for? What do you mean?"

"Feeble-minded, manic-depressive, dementia praecox, involuntal melancholia—"

"Oh. Paranoia, I guess."

"That's bad. Then they stick needles in you." A bell rang somewhere.

"That's dinner," said the other checker player. "Ever try to commit suicide? Or kill anyone?"

"No."

"They'll let you eat at an A table then, with knife and fork."

The door of the ward was being opened. It opened outward and a guard stood outside and said, "All right." They filed out, all except the man who was sitting in the chair staring into space.

"Know about him?" he asked Ray Bassington.

"He'll miss a meal tonight. Manic-depressive, just going into the depressive stage. They let you miss one meal; if you're not able to go to the next they take you and feed you. You a manic-depressive?"

"No."

"You're lucky. It's hell when you're on the downswing. Here, through this door."

It was a big room. Tables and benches were crowded with men in *gray* shirts and gray trousers, like his. A guard grabbed his arm as he went through the doorway and said, "There. That seat."

It was right beside the door. There was a tin plate, messy with food, and a spoon beside it. He asked, "Don't I get a knife and fork? I was told—"

The guard gave him a shove toward the seat. "Observation period, seven days. Nobody gets silverware till their observation period's over. Sidddown."

He sat down. No one at his table had silverware. All the others were eating, several of them noisily and messily. He kept his eyes on his own plate, unappetizing as that was. He toyed with his spoon and managed to eat a few pieces of potato out of the stew and one or two of the chunks of meat that were mostly lean.

The coffee was in a tin cup and he wondered why until he realized how breakable an ordinary cup would be and how lethal could be one of the heavy mugs cheap restaurants use.

The coffee was weak and cool; he couldn't drink it. He sat back and closed his eyes. When he opened them again there was an empty plate and an empty cup in front of him and the man at his left was eating very rapidly. It was the man who'd been playing the non-existent piano.

He thought, if I'm here long enough, I'll get hungry enough to eat that stuff. He didn't like the thought of being there that long.

After a while a bell rang and they got up, one table at a time on signals he didn't catch, and filed out. His group had come in last; it went out first.

Ray Bassington was behind him on the stairs. He said, "You'll get used to it. What'd you say your name is?"

"George Vine."

Bassington laughed. The door shut on them from the outside.

He saw it was dark outside. He went over to one of the windows and stared out through the bars. There was a single bright star that showed just above the top of the elm tree in the yard. *His* star? Well, he'd followed it here. A cloud drifted across it.

Someone was standing beside him. He turned his head and saw it was the man who'd been playing piano. He had a dark, foreign-looking face with intense black eyes; just then he was smiling, as though at a secret joke.

"You're new here, aren't you? Or just get put in this ward, which?"

"New. George Vine's the name."

"Baroni. Musician. Used to be, anyway. Now—let it go. Anything you want to know about the place?"

"Sure. How to get out of it."

Baroni laughed, without particular amusement but not bitterly either. "First, convince them you're all right again. Mind telling what's wrong with you—or don't you want to talk about it? Some of us mind,

others don't."

He looked at Baroni, wondering which way he felt. Finally he said, "I guess I don't mind. I think I'm Napoleon."

"Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"*Are* you Napoleon? If you aren't, that's one thing. Then maybe you'll get out of here in six months or so. If you really are—that's bad. You'll probably die here."

"Why? I mean, if I *am*, then I'm sane and—"

"Not the point. Point's whether they think you're sane or not. Way they figure, if you think you're Napoleon you're not sane. Q. E. D. You stay here."

"Even if I tell them I'm convinced I'm George Vine?"

"They've worked with paranoia before. And that's what they've got you down for, count on it. And any time a paranoiac gets tired of a place, he'll try to lie his way out of it. They weren't born yesterday. They know that."

"In general, yes, but how—"

A sudden cold chill went down his spine. He didn't have to finish the question. *They stick needles in you*—It hadn't meant anything when Ray Bassington had said it.

The dark man nodded. "Truth serum," he said. "When a paranoiac reaches the stage where he's cured *if* he's telling the truth, they make sure he's telling it before they let him go."

He thought what a beautiful trap it had been that he'd walked into. He'd probably die here, now.

He leaned his head against the cool iron bars and closed his eyes. He heard footsteps walking away from him and knew he was alone.

He opened his eyes and looked out into blackness; now the clouds had drifted across the moon, too. *Clare*, he thought; *Clare*.

A trap.

But—if there was a trap, there must be a trapper. He was sane or he was insane. If he was sane, he'd walked into a trap, and *if there was a trap, there must be a trapper, or trappers*.

If he was insane

God, let it be that he *was* insane. That way everything made such sweetly simple sense, and someday he might be out of here, he might go back to working for the *Blade*, possibly even with a memory of all the years he'd worked there. Or that George Vine had worked there. That was the catch. *He* wasn't George Vine. And there was another catch. He *wasn't* insane. The cool iron of the bars against his forehead.

After a while he heard the door open and looked around. Two guards had come in. A wild hope, reasonless, surged up inside him. It didn't last.

"Bedtime, you guys," said one of the guards. He looked at the manic-depressive sitting motionless on the chair and said, "Nuts. Hey, Bassington, help me get this guy in."

The other guard, a heavy-set man with hair close-cropped like a wrestler's, came over to the window. "You. You're the new one in here. Vine, ain't it?" He nodded.

"Want trouble, or going to be good?" Fingers of the guard's right hand clenched, the fist went back. "Don't want trouble. Got enough."

The guard relaxed a little. "Okay, stick to that and you'll get along. Vacant bunk's in there." He pointed. "One on the right. Make it up yourself in the morning. Stay in the bunk and mind your own business. If there's any noise or trouble here in the ward, we come in and take care of it. Our own way. You wouldn't like it."

He didn't trust himself to speak, so he just nodded. He turned and went through the door of the cubicle to which the guard had pointed. There were two bunks in there; the manic-depressive who'd been on the chair was lying flat on his back on the other, staring blindly up at the ceiling through wide-open eyes. They'd pulled his slippers off, leaving him otherwise dressed.

He turned to his own bunk, knowing there was nothing on earth he could do for the other man, no

way he could reach him through the impenetrable shell of blank misery which is the manic-depressive's intermittent companion.

He turned down a gray sheet-blanket on his own bunk and found under it another gray sheet-blanket atop a hard but smooth pad. He slipped off his shirt and trousers and hung them on a hook on the wall at the foot of his bed. He looked around for a switch to turn off the light overhead and couldn't find one. But, even as he looked, the light went out.

A single light still burned somewhere in the ward room outside, and by it he could see to take his shoes and socks off and get into the bunk.

He lay very quiet for a while, hearing only two sounds, both faint and seeming far away. Somewhere in another cubicle off the ward someone was singing quietly to himself, a wordless monody; somewhere else someone else was sobbing. In his own cubicle, he couldn't hear even the sound of breathing from his room mate.

Then there was a shuffle of bare feet and someone in the open doorway said, "George Vine."

He said, "Yes?"

"Shhh, not so loud. This is Bassington. Want to tell you about that guard; I should have warned you before. Don't ever tangle with him."

"I didn't."

"I heard; you were smart. He'll slug you to pieces if you give him half a chance. He's a sadist. A lot of guards are; that's why they're bughousers; that's what they call themselves, bughousers. If they get fired one place for being too brutal they get on at another one. He'll be in again-in the morning; I thought I'd warn you."

The shadow in the doorway was gone.

He lay there in the dimness, the almost-darkness, feeling rather than thinking. Wondering. Did mad people ever know that they were mad? Could they tell? Was every one of them sure, as he was sure-?

That quiet, still thing lying in the bunk near his, inarticulately suffering, withdrawn from human reach into a profound misery beyond the understanding of the sane—

"Napoleon Bonaparte!"

A clear voice, but had it been within his mind, or from without? He sat up on the bunk. His eyes pierced the dimness, could discern no form, no shadow, in the doorway.

He said, "Yes?"

VII:

ONLY then, sitting up on the bunk and having answered "Yes," did he realize the name by which the voice had called him.

"Get up. Dress."

He swung his legs out over the edge of the bunk, stood up. He reached for his shirt and was slipping his arms into it before he stopped and asked, "Why?"

"To learn the truth."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Do not speak aloud. I can hear you. I am within you and without. I have no name."

"Then *what* are you?" He said it aloud, without thinking.

"An instrument of The Brightly Shining."

He dropped the trousers he'd been holding. He sat down carefully on the edge of the bunk, leaned over and groped around for them.

His mind groped, too. Groped for he knew not what. Finally he found a question—the question. He didn't ask it aloud this time; he thought it, concentrated on it as he straightened out his trousers and thrust his legs in them.

"*Am I mad?*"

The answer—No—came clear and sharp as a spoken word, but had it been spoken? Or was it a sound that was only in his mind?

He found his shoes and pulled them on his feet. As he fumbled the laces into some sort of knots, he thought, "Who-what-is The Brightly Shining?"

"The Brightly Shining is *that which is Earth*. It is the intelligence of our planet. It is one of three intelligences in the solar system, one of many in the universe. Earth is one; it is called The Brightly Shining."

"I do not understand," he thought.

"You will. Are you ready?"

He finished the second knot. He stood up. The voice said, "Come. Walk silently."

It was as though he was being led through the almost-darkness, although he felt no physical touch upon him; he saw no physical presence beside him. But he walked confidently, although quietly on tiptoe, knowing he would not walk into anything nor stumble. Through the big room that was the ward, and then his outstretched hand touched the knob of a door.

He turned it gently and the door opened inward. Light blinded him. The voice said, "Wait," and he stood immobile. He could hear sound—the rustle of paper, the turn of a page—outside the door, in the lighted corridor.

Then from across the hall came the sound of a shrill scream. A chair scraped and feet hit the floor of the corridor, walking away toward the sound of the scream. A door opened and closed.

The voice said, "Come," and he pulled the door open the rest of the way and went outside, past the desk and the empty chair that had been just outside the door of the ward.

Another door, another corridor. The voice said, "Wait," the voice said, "Come"; this time a guard slept. He tip-toed past. Down steps.

He thought the question, "Where am I going?"

"Mad," said the voice.

"But you said I wasn't—" He'd spoken aloud and the sound startled him almost more than had the answer to his last question. And in the silence that followed the words he'd spoken there came—from the bottom of the stairs and around the corner—the sound of a buzzing switchboard, and someone said, "Yes? . . . Okay, Doctor, I'll be right up." Footsteps and the closing of an elevator door.

He went down the remaining stairs and around the corner and he was in the front main hall. There was an empty desk with a switchboard beside it. He walked past it and to the front door. It was bolted and he threw the heavy bolt.

He went outside, into the night.

He walked quietly across cement, across gravel; then his shoes were on grass and he didn't have to tiptoe any more. It was as dark now as the inside of an elephant; he felt the presence of trees nearby and leaves brushed his face occasionally, but he walked rapidly, confidently and his hand went forward just in time to touch a brick wall.

He reached up and he could touch the top of it; he pulled himself up and over it. There was broken glass on the flat top of the wall; he cut his clothes and his flesh badly, but he felt no pain, only the wetness of blood and the stickiness of blood.

He walked along a lighted road, he walked along dark and empty streets, he walked down a darker alley. He opened the back gate of a yard and walked to the back door of a house. He opened the door and went in. There was a lighted room at the front of the house; he could see the rectangle of light at the end of a corridor. He went along the corridor and into the lighted room.

Someone who had been seated at a desk stood up. Someone, a man, whose face he knew but whom he could not—

"Yes," said the man, smiling, "you know me, but you do not know me. Your mind is under partial control and your ability to recognize me is blocked out. Other than that and your analgesia—you are covered with blood from the glass on the wall, but you don't feel any pain—your mind is normal and you are sane."

"What's it all about?" he asked. "Why was I brought here?,"

"Because you are sane. I'm sorry about that, because you can't be. It is not so much that you retained memory of your previous life, after you'd been moved. That happens. It is that you somehow know

something of what you shouldn't-something of The Brightly Shining, and of the Game between the red and the black. For that reason-

"For that reason, what?" he asked.

The man he knew and did not know smiled gently. "For that reason you must know the rest, so that you will know nothing at all. For everything will add to nothing. The truth will drive you mad."

"That I do not believe."

"Of course you don't. If the truth were conceivable to you, it would not drive you mad. But you cannot remotely conceive the truth."

A powerful anger surged up within him. He stared at the familiar face that he knew and did not know, and he stared down at himself; at the torn and bloody gray uniform, at his torn and bloody hands. The hands hooked like claws with the desire to kill-someone, the someone, whoever it was, who stood before him.

He asked, "What are you?"

"I am an instrument of The Brightly Shining."

"The same which led me here, or another?"

"One is all, all is one. Within the whole and its parts, there is no difference. One instrument is another and the red is the black and the black is the white and there is no difference. The Brightly Shining is the soul of Earth. I use *soul* as the nearest word in your vocabulary."

Hatred was almost a bright light. It was almost something that he could lean into, lean his weight against.

He asked, "What is The Brightly Shining?" He made the words a curse in his mouth.

"Knowing will make you mad. You want to know?"

"Yes." He made a curse out of that simple, sibilant syllable.

The lights were dimming. Or was it his eyes? The room was becoming dimmer, and at the same time receding. It was becoming a tiny cube of dim light, seen from afar and outside, from somewhere in the distant dark, ever receding, turning into a pinpoint of light, and within that point of light ever the hated. Thing, the man-or was it a man?-standing beside the desk.

Into darkness, into space, up and apart from the earth -a dim sphere in the night, a receding sphere outlined against the spangled blackness of eternal space, occulting the stars, a disk of black.

It stopped receding, and time stopped. It was as though the clock of the universe stood still. Beside him, out of the void, spoke the voice of the instrument of The Shining One.

"Behold," it said. "The Being of Earth."

He beheld. Not as though an outward change was occurring, but an inward one, as though his senses were being changed to enable him to perceive something hitherto unseeable.

The ball that was Earth began to glow. Brightly to shine.

"You see the intelligence that rules Earth," said the voice. "The sum of the black and the white and the red, that are one, divided only as the lobes of a brain are divided, the trinity that is one."

The glowing ball and the stars behind it faded, and the darkness became deeper darkness and then there was dim light, growing brighter, and he was back in the room with the man standing at the desk.

"You saw," said the man whom he hated. "But you do not understand. You ask, *what* you have seen, *what* is The Brightly Shining? It is a group intelligence, the true intelligence of Earth, one intelligence among three in the Solar system, one among many in the universe.

"What, then, is man? Men are pawns, in games of-to you-unbelievable complexity, between the red and the black, the white and the black, for amusement. Played by one part of an organism against another part, to while away an instant of eternity. There are vaster games, played between galaxies. Not with man.

"Man is a parasite peculiar to Earth, which tolerates his presence for a little while. He exists nowhere else in the cosmos, and he does not exist here for long. A little while, a few chessboard wars, which he thinks he fights himself-You begin to understand."

The man at the desk smiled.

"You want to know of yourself. Nothing is less important. A move was made, before Lodi. The

opportunity was there for a move of the red; a stronger, more ruthless personality was needed; it was a turning point in history-which means in the game. Do you understand now? A pinch-hitter was put in to become Emperor."

He managed two words. "And then?"

"The Brightly Shining does not kill. You had to be put somewhere, some time. Long later a man named George Vine was killed in an accident; his body was still usable. George Vine had not been insane, but he had had a Napoleonic complex. The transference was amusing."

"No doubt." Again it was impossible to reach the man at the desk. The hatred itself was a wall between them. "Then George Vine is dead?"

"Yes. And you, because you knew a little too much, must go mad so that you will know nothing. Knowing the truth will drive you mad."

"No!"

The instrument smiled.

VIII:

THE ROOM, the cube of light, dimmed; it seemed to tilt. Still standing, he was going over backward, his position becoming horizontal instead of vertical.

His weight was on his back and under him was the soft-hard smoothness of his bunk, the roughness of a gray sheet blanket. And he could move; he sat up.

He had been dreaming? Had he really been outside the asylum? He held up his hands, touched one to the other, and they were wet with something sticky. So was the front of his shirt and the thighs and knees of his trousers.

And his shoes were on.

The blood was there from climbing the wall. And now the analgesia was leaving, and pain was beginning to come into his hands, his chest, his stomach and his legs. Sharp biting pain.

He said aloud. "*I am not mad. I am not mad.*" Was he screaming it?

A voice said, "No. Not yet." Was it the voice that had been here in the room before? Or was it the voice of the man who had stood in the lighted room? Or had both been the same voice?

It said, "Ask, 'What is man?'"

Mechanically, he asked it.

"Man is a blind alley in evolution, who came too late too compete, who has always been controlled and played with by The Brightly Shining, which was old and wise before man walked erect.

"Man is a parasite upon a planet populated before he came, populated by a Being that is one and many, a billion cells but a single mind, a single intelligence, a single will-as is true of every other populated planet in the universe.

"Man is a joke, a clown, a parasite. He is nothing; he will be less."

"*Come and go mad.*"

He was getting out of bed again; he was walking. Through the doorway of the cubicle, along the ward. To the door that led to the corridor; a thin crack of light showed under it. But this time his hand did not reach out for the knob. Instead he stood there facing the closed door, and it began to glow; slowly it became light and visible.

As though from somewhere an invisible spotlight played upon it, the door became a visible rectangle in the surrounding blackness; as brightly visible as the crack under it.

The voice said, "You see before you a cell of your ruler, a cell unintelligent in itself, yet a tiny part of a unit which is intelligent, one of a million units which make up *the* intelligence which rules the earth-and you. And which earth-wide intelligence is one of a million intelligences which rule the universe."

"The *door*? I don't-"

The voice spoke no more; it had withdrawn, but somehow inside his mind was the echo of silent laughter.

He leaned closer and saw what he was meant to see. An ant was crawling up the door.

His eyes followed it, and numbing horror crawled apace, up his spine. A hundred things that had been told and shown him suddenly fitted into a pattern, a pattern of sheer horror. The black, the white, the red; the black ants, the white ants, the red ants; the players with men, separate lobes of a single group brain, the intelligence that was one. Man an accident, a parasite, a pawn; a million planets in the universe inhabited each by an insect race that was a single intelligence for the planet-and all the intelligences together were the single cosmic intelligence that was-*God!*

The one-syllable word wouldn't come.

He went mad, instead.

He beat upon the now-dark door with his bloody hands, with his knees, his face, with himself, although already he had forgotten why, had forgotten what he wanted to crush.

He was raving mad-dementia praecox, not paranoia-when they released his body by putting it into a strait jacket, released it from frenzy to quietude.

He was quietly mad-paranoia, not dementia praecox-when they released him as sane eleven months later.

Paranoia, you see, is a peculiar affliction; it has no physical symptoms, it is merely the presence of a fixed delusion. A series of metrazol shocks had cleared up the dementia praecox and left only the fixed delusion that he was George Vine, a reporter.

The asylum authorities thought he was, too, so the delusion was not recognized as such and they released him and gave him a certificate to prove he was sane.

He married Clare; he still works at the *Blade*-for a man named Candler. He still plays chess with his cousin, Charlie Doerr. He still sees-for periodic checkups-both Dr. Irving and Dr. Randolph.

Which of them smiles inwardly? What good would it do you to know? Yes it was, is, one of those four.

It doesn't matter. Don't you understand? Nothing matters!