

A dazzling, fearsome ride into the future of man and the automobile by
ELLISON, HERBERT, LEIBER, MALZBERG, MARTIN, ZELAZNY and more.

CAR SINISTER

Edited by ROBERT SILVERBERG, MARTIN HARRY GREENBERG, JOSEPH D. OLANDER



WILKES

CHROME FUTURES

Cruise into tomorrow with the likes of Harlan Ellison, Frank Herbert, Harry Harrison, Frank M. Robinson, and Roger Zelazny at the wheel! Here are twenty streamlined visions of the automobile as symbol of man's dreams, agent of society's destruction, and link between modern times and the car-dominated city at the end of time.

There are stories of automobile invasions, deathcars with minds of their own, time-warped highways, traffic wars, service stations of the future, romance in a twenty-first century used-car lot, and a pregnant Rambler American. There is even a visionary solution to the fuel crisis!

CAR SINISTER

Edited by Robert Silverberg,
Martin Harry Greenberg
and Joseph D. Olander



AVON

PUBLISHERS OF BARD, CAMELOT AND DISCUS BOOKS

CAR SINISTER is an original publication of Avon Books.
This work has never before appeared in book form.

AVON BOOKS
A division of
The Hearst Corporation
959 Eighth Avenue
New York, New York 10019

Copyright © 1979 by Robert Silverberg, Martin Greenberg,
Joseph Olander
Published by arrangement with the editors.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 79-87803
ISBN: 0-380-45393-2

All rights reserved, which includes the right
to reproduce this book or portions thereof in
any form whatsoever. For information address
Scott Meredith Literary Agency, 845 Third Avenue,
New York, New York 10022

First Avon Printing, July, 1979

AVON TRADEMARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF. AND IN
OTHER COUNTRIES, MARCA REGISTRADA,
HECHO EN U.S.A.

Printed in the U.S.A.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- "Devil Car," by Roger Zelazny, copyright © 1965 by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of the author and Henry Morrison Inc., his agents.
- "Vampire Ltd," by Josef Nesvadba, copyright © 1964 by Josef Nesvadba. Reprinted by permission of the author and his agents, the Dilia Theatrical and Literary Agency.
- "A Plague of Cars," by Leonard Tushnet, from *New Dimensions*, copyright © 1971 by Robert Silverberg. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate.
- "Auto-da-Fé," by Roger Zelazny, copyright © 1967 by Harlan Ellison for *Dangerous Visions*. Reprinted by permission of the author and Henry Morrison Inc., his agents.
- "Traffic Problem," by William Earls, copyright © 1970 by UPD Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of the author.
- "Station HR972," by Kenneth Bulmer, copyright © 1967 by Kenneth Bulmer. Reprinted by permission of the author.
- "A Day on Death Highway," by H. Chandler Elliott, copyright © 1963 by the Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate.
- "The Greatest Car in the World," by Harry Harrison, copyright © 1966 by New Worlds SF, © 1970 by Harry Harrison. Reprinted by permission of the author.
- "The Roads, the Roads, the Beautiful Roads," by Avram Davidson, copyright © 1969 by Damon Knight. Reprinted by permission of the author and his agent, Kirby McCauley.
- "The Exit to San Breta," by George R. R. Martin, copyright © 1971 by Ultimate Publishing Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author's agent, Kirby McCauley.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- "Car Sinister," by Gene Wolfe, from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, copyright © 1969 by Mercury Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agent, Virginia Kidd.
- "Interurban Queen," by R. A. Lafferty, copyright © 1970, 1978 by R. A. Lafferty. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agent, Virginia Kidd.
- "Waves of Ecology," by Leonard Tushnet, from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, copyright © 1974 by Mercury Press Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate.
- "The Mary Celeste Move," by Frank Herbert, copyright © 1964 by Condé Nast Publications. Reprinted by permission of the author's agent, Lurton Blassingame.
- "X Marks the Pedwalk," by Fritz Leiber, copyright © 1963 by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of the author and his agent, Robert P. Mills.
- "Wheels," by Robert Thurston, copyright © 1971 by Robert Thurston. Reprinted by permission of Robert Thurston and the Julian Bach Literary Agency.
- "Sedan Deville," by Barry N. Malzberg, from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, copyright © 1974 by Mercury Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author.
- "Romance in a Twenty-First Century Used-Car Lot," by Robert F. Young, from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, copyright © 1960 by Mercury Press Inc., © 1965 by Robert F. Young. Reprinted by permission of the author.
- "East Wind, West Wind," by Frank M. Robinson, copyright © 1970 by Frank M. Robinson. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.
- "Along the Scenic Route," by Harlan Ellison, copyright © 1969 by Harlan Ellison. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agent, Robert P. Mills, Ltd., New York.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	9
Devil Car	
<i>Roger Zelazny</i>	13
Vampire Ltd.	
<i>Josef Nesvadba</i>	27
A Plague of Cars	
<i>Leonard Tushnet</i>	36
Auto-da-Fé	
<i>Roger Zelazny</i>	45
Traffic Problem	
<i>William Earls</i>	52
Station HR972	
<i>Kenneth Bulmer</i>	62
A Day on Death Highway	
<i>Chandler Elliott</i>	74
The Greatest Car in the World	
<i>Harry Harrison</i>	95
The Roads, the Roads, the Beautiful Roads	
<i>Avram Davidson</i>	106
The Exit to San Breta	
<i>George R. R. Martin</i>	111
Car Sinister	
<i>Gene Wolfe</i>	125

Interurban Queen <i>R. A. Lafferty</i>	134
Waves of Ecology <i>Leonard Tushnet</i>	145
The Mary Celeste Move <i>Frank Herbert</i>	157
X Marks the Pedwalk <i>Fritz Leiber</i>	165
Wheels <i>Robert Thurston</i>	171
Sedan Deville <i>Barry N. Malzberg</i>	189
Romance in a Twenty-first Century Used-Car Lot <i>Robert F. Young</i>	194
East Wind, West Wind <i>Frank M. Robinson</i>	215
Along the Scenic Route <i>Harlan Ellison</i>	243

INTRODUCTION

This history of the automobile and the evolution of science fiction in the United States have a number of things in common. For example, the early years of science fiction were characterized by an almost boundless faith in science and technology, a faith whose central creed held that the solution of the world's problems was at hand if only the scientist was allowed to do his work. This optimism began to slow in the pages of the American sf magazines with the Great Depression and the approach of World War II, and it was to be dealt a major (and nearly fatal) blow at Hiroshima.

Similarly, many attitudes at the dawn of the automobile age can be described as "utopian" if not naïve. It was widely believed that the coming horseless age would result in the transformation of urban areas into Gardens of Eden: "The improvement in city conditions by the general adoption of the motorcar can hardly be overestimated. Streets clean, dustless, and odorless, with light rubber-tired vehicles moving swiftly and noiselessly over their smooth expanse, would eliminate a greater part of the nervousness, distraction, and strain of modern metropolitan life."* Within a few decades, statements such as these would bring both smiles and tears to many people as they inhaled the fumes, listened to the noise, and sat in the congestion of the automobile culture.

Science fiction saw this coming, and it also warned against the potential dangers of the assembly line—a means of production pioneered by Henry Ford and the auto-

* Thomas Conyngton, "Motor Carriages and Street Paving," *Scientific American Supplement*, 48:19660 (July 1, 1899); quoted in James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1975), p. 39. The Flink book is an excellent survey of the impact of the automobile on American life.

mobile industry in general. SF writers were among the first to be concerned with the dehumanization that accompanied a system in which the human body had to adapt to the pace of the machine, and whose seemingly inevitable result would be the inability of a person to identify with the products he/she had helped to create.

The mass production made possible by the assembly line led inevitably to mass consumption, and Frederik Pohl and a host of others were to build careers in science fiction by extrapolating the production-consumption process to its logical (and sometimes illogical) conclusion. This was especially true of the growth of the advertising industry, which paralleled the development of mass production techniques (which themselves demanded ever higher levels of consumption) and the consequent requirement to create *wants* as well as needs. The automobile industry responded by regularly changing its models in a largely successful attempt to create owner dissatisfaction, a practice beautifully extrapolated to human beings in John Jakes's "The Sellers of the Dream." The practice of selling products on the installment plan was also pioneered by the auto industry and attacked by science-fiction writers.

The ownership of an automobile quickly became one of the cornerstones of "the American Dream," for the mobility and status conferred by the car were eagerly sought by people from every class and circumstance. In an age increasingly characterized by loss of identity, the automobile provided an escape into individuality—at least in the mind, if not the heart. Indeed, the car became a major feature of American popular culture, and the experience of growing up often involved the rite of passage of first passing a driver's test and then actually owning a car. By the fifties and sixties, people could conduct a goodly portion of their lives from their cars—they could withdraw money from a bank, go to a "restaurant," and watch a movie—all without leaving the driver's seat. And what a seat it was, for it bestowed on the occupier a feeling of freedom and *control* that was hard to equal elsewhere—that's what being in the driver's seat really meant. But was (and is) it really freedom, or is it a habit, a trap, and a dependency?

For one group of Americans, our adolescents, it remains something very special, for besides the coming-of-age function it performs, it is also a large part of their (and

our) culture. The mystique of the back seat and all that incredible image evokes, the popular songs, the admonition to "keep on truckin'," and (at least when your editors were growing up) the cult of the "hot rod" all hold a special meaning for nearly everyone under thirty. Indeed, the car gave us freedom (at least for a while) from the control and dictates of our own parents. For other age groups, the transition from sedan to sports car and the mystique of the open road, in general, still have great appeal and power.

The effect of the automobile on the United States has been profound, and by no means entirely negative. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the car culture is that it has prevented the idea of mass transportation from really taking hold in this country. Among its other effects both pro and con are the following:

- The automobile made the rise of the suburb possible, creating a hybrid between rural and urban living.
- It affected social relations and the very nature of the institution of marriage by changing the role of "the woman of the house" from producer (of clothing and other items) to consumer of manufactured goods. The automobile also allowed her to extend her range of contacts far beyond the home for the first time in American history.
- The highway system that the mass ownership of cars required led to a tremendous growth in the tourist industry, and in urban areas, the splitting up of neighborhoods—indeed, "the other side of the tracks" now means the other side of the freeway.
- The automobile changed the shopping habits of millions because it led to the development of the shopping center—a form of "drive-in"—that along with the suburbs themselves, killed off the downtown districts of many American cities.
- The materials needed to power and manufacture the automobile meant that whole new industries had to be created, as in the case of petroleum, or else greatly expanded, as in the case of rubber and glass.

And what of the future? The science-fiction stories you

are about to read are concerned with what the effect of the automobile *could* have been, and one or two even wax nostalgic for *what it was*. For the age of automobiles *appears* to be nearing an end. The United States, with something like six percent of the world's population, accounts for over fifty percent of the world's motor vehicles, but neither the percentage or the total number is rising any more, as oil becomes harder to acquire and more expensive to buy if it is available. Science fiction, in its (thank God) scattergun fashion, predicted some of the most important technological developments and social movements in the history of the world, but very few stories exist that really speak to the social effects of changing over from one form of transportation to another or from one form of fuel to another, as now seems inevitable.

Still, the struggle of humankind to find a way to live with its creations is, from one perspective at least, what science fiction is all about, and the stories in this collection show us the tension, accommodation, love, and conflict that characterize the relationship between humans and machines.

DEVIL CAR

By Roger Zelazny

The automobile represents the good life, but it is also a destroyer of life. In the wrong hands it can be a terrible instrument of destruction. But what about when its on its own? Television shows from My Mother the Car to the movie Duel (written by Richard Matheson, one of our own) show the wide variety of behavior of the car possessed.

Here, Roger Zelazny gives us yet another version and another vision on this theme.

Murdock sped across the Great Western Road Plain.

High above him the sun was a fiery yo-yo as he took the innumerable hillocks and rises of the Plain at better than a hundred sixty miles an hour. He did not slow for anything, and Jenny's hidden eyes spotted all the rocks and potholes before they came to them, and she carefully adjusted their course, sometimes without his even detecting the subtle movements of the steering column beneath his hands.

Even through the dark-tinted windshield and the thick goggles he wore, the glare from the fused Plain burnt into his eyes, so that at times it seemed as if he were steering a very fast boat through night, beneath a brilliant alien moon, and that he was cutting his way across a lake of silver fire. Tall dust waves rose in his wake, hung in the air, and after a time settled once more.

"You are wearing yourself out," said the radio, "sitting there clutching the wheel that way, squinting ahead. Why don't you try to get some rest? Let me fog the shields. Go to sleep and leave the driving to me."

"No," he said. "I want it this way."

"All right," said Jenny. "I just thought I would ask."

"Thanks."

About a minute later the radio began playing—it was a soft, stringy sort of music.

"Cut that out!"

"Sorry, boss. Thought it might relax you."

"When I need relaxing, *I'll tell you.*"

"Check, Sam. Sorry."

The silence seemed oppressive after its brief interruption. She was a good car though, Murdock knew that. She was always concerned with his welfare, and she was anxious to get on with his quest.

She was made to look like a carefree Swinger sedan: bright red, gaudy, fast. But there were rockets under the bulges of her hood, and two fifty-caliber muzzles lurked just out of sight in the recesses beneath her headlamps; she wore a belt of five- and ten-second timed grenades across her belly; and in her trunk was a spray-tank containing a highly volatile naphthalic.

. . . For his Jenny was a specially designed deathcar, built for him by the Archengineer of the Geeyem Dynasty, far to the East, and all the cunning of that great artificer had gone into her construction.

"We'll find it this time, Jenny," he said, "and I didn't mean to snap at you like I did."

"That's all right, Sam," said the delicate voice, "I am programmed to understand you."

They roared on across the Great Plain and the sun fell away to the west. All night and all day they had searched, and Murdock was tired. The last Fuel Stop/Rest Stop Fortress seemed so long ago, so far back . . .

Murdock leaned forward and his eyes closed.

The windows slowly darkened into complete opacity. The seat belt crept higher and drew him back away from the wheel. Then the seat gradually leaned backwards until he was reclining on a level plane. The heater came on as the night approached, later.

The seat shook him awake a little before five in the morning.

"Wake up, Sam! Wake up!"

"What is it?" he mumbled.

"I picked up a broadcast twenty minutes ago. There was a recent car-raid out this way. I changed course immediately, and we are almost there."

"Why didn't you get me up right away?"

"You needed the sleep, and there was nothing you could do but get tense and nervous."

"Okay, you're probably right. Tell me about the raid."

"Six vehicles, proceeding westward, were apparently ambushed by an undetermined number of wild cars sometime last night. The Patrol Copter was reporting it from above the scene and I listened in. All the vehicles were stripped and drained and their brains were smashed, and their passengers were all apparently killed too. There were no signs of movement."

"How far is it now?"

"Another two or three minutes."

The windshields came clear once more, and Murdock stared as far ahead through the night as the powerful lamps could cut.

"I see something," he said, after a few moments.

"This is the place," said Jenny, and she began to slow down.

They drew up beside the ravaged cars. His seat belt unsnapped and the door sprang open on his side.

"Circle around, Jenny," he said, "and look for heat tracks. I won't be long."

The door slammed and Jenny moved away from him. He snapped on his pocket torch and moved toward the wrecked vehicles.

The Plain was like a sand-strewn dance floor—hard and gritty—beneath his feet. There were many skid-marks, and a spaghetti-work of tire tracks lay all about the area.

A dead man sat behind the wheel of the first car. His neck was obviously broken. The smashed watch on his wrist said 2:24. There were three persons—two women and a young man—lying about forty feet away. They had been run down as they tried to flee from their assaulted vehicles.

Murdock moved on, inspected the others. All six cars were upright. Most of the damage was to their bodies. The tires and wheels had been removed from all of them, as well as essential portions of their engines; the gas tanks stood open, siphoned empty; the spare tires were gone from the sprung trunks. There were no living passengers.

Jenny pulled up beside him and her door opened.

"Sam," she said, "pull the brain leads on that blue

car, the third one back. It's still drawing some energy from an auxiliary battery, and I can hear it broadcasting."

"Okay."

Murdock went back and tore the leads free. He returned to Jenny and climbed into the driver's seat.

"Did you find anything?"

"Some traces, heading northwest."

"Follow them."

The door slammed and Jenny turned in that direction.

They drove for about five minutes in silence. Then Jenny said: "There were eight cars in that convoy."

"What?"

"I just heard it on the news. Apparently two of the cars communicated with the wild ones on an off-band. They threw in with them. They gave away their location and turned on the others at the time of the attack."

"What about their passengers?"

"They probably monoed them before they joined the pack."

Murdock lit a cigarette, his hands shaking.

"Jenny, what makes a car run wild?" he asked. "Never knowing where it will get its next fueling—or being sure of finding spare parts for its auto-repair unit? Why do they do it?"

"I do not know, Sam. I have never thought about it."

"Ten years ago the Devil Car, their leader, killed my brother in a raid on his Gas Fortress," said Murdock, "and I've hunted that black Caddy ever since. I've searched for it from the air and I've searched on foot. I've used other cars. I've carried heat trackers and missiles. I even laid mines. But always it's been too fast or too smart or too strong for me. Then I had you built."

"I knew you hated it very much. I always wondered why," Jenny said.

Murdock drew on his cigarette.

"I had you specially programmed and armored and armed to be the toughest, fastest, smartest thing on wheels, Jenny. You're the Scarlet Lady. You're the one car can take the Caddy and his whole pack. You've got fangs and claws of the kind they've never met before. This time I'm going to get them."

"You could have stayed home, Sam, and let me do the hunting."

"No. I know I could have, but I want to be there. I want to give the orders, to press some of the buttons myself, to watch that Devil Car burn away to a metal skeleton. How many people, how many cars has it smashed? We've lost count. I've got to get it, Jenny!"

"I'll find it for you, Sam."

They sped on, at around two hundred miles an hour.

"How's the fuel level, Jenny?"

"Plenty there, and I have not yet drawn upon the auxiliary tanks. Do not worry."

"—The track is getting stronger," she added.

"Good. How's the weapons system?"

"Red light, all around. Ready to go."

Murdock snubbed out his cigarette and lit another.

"... Some of them carry dead people strapped inside," said Murdock, "so they'll look like decent cars with passengers. The black Caddy does it all the time, and it changes them pretty regularly. It keeps its interior refrigerated—so they'll last."

"You know a lot about it, Sam."

"It fooled my brother with phoney passengers and phoney plates. Got him to open his Gas Fortress to it that way. Then the whole pack attacked. It's painted itself red and green and blue and white, on different occasions, but it always goes back to black, sooner or later. It doesn't like yellow or brown or two-tone. I've a list of almost every phoney plate it's ever used. It's even driven the big freeways right into towns and fueled up at regular gas stops. They often get its number as it tears away from them, just as the attendant goes up on the driver's side for his money. It can fake dozens of human voices. They can never catch it afterwards though, because it's souped itself up too well. It always makes it back here to the Plain and loses them. It's even raided used car lots—"

Jenny turned sharply in her course.

"Sam! The trail is quite strong now. *This* way! It goes off in the direction of those mountains."

"Follow!" said Murdock.

For a long time then Murdock was silent. The first inklings of morning began in the east. The pale morning star was a white thumbtack on a blue board behind them. They began to climb a gentle slope.

"Get it, Jenny. Go get it," urged Murdock.

"I think we will," she said.

The angle of the slope increased. Jenny slowed her pace to match the terrain, which was becoming somewhat bumpy.

"What's the matter?" asked Murdock.

"It's harder going here," she said, "also, the trail is getting more difficult to follow."

"Why is that?"

"There is still a lot of background radiation in these parts," she told him, "and it is throwing off my tracking system."

"Keep trying, Jenny."

"The track seems to go straight toward the mountains."

"Follow it, follow it!"

They slowed some more.

"I am all fouled up now, Sam," she said. "I have just lost the trail."

"It must have a stronghold somewhere around here—a cave or something like that—where it can be sheltered overhead. It's the only way it could have escaped aerial detection all these years."

"What should I do?"

"Go as far forward as you can and scan for low openings in the rock. Be wary. Be ready to attack in an instant."

They climbed into the low foothills. Jenny's aerial rose high into the air, and the moths of steel cheesecloth unfolded their wings and danced and spun about it, bright there in the morning light.

"Nothing yet," said Jenny, "and we can't go much further."

"Then we'll cruise along the length of it and keep scanning."

"To the right or to the left?"

"I don't know. Which way would you go if you were a renegade car on the lam?"

"I do not know."

"Pick one. It doesn't matter."

"To the right, then," she said, and they turned in that direction.



After half an hour the night was dropping away behind the mountains. To his right, morning was exploding at the far end of the Plain, fracturing the sky into all the colors of autumn trees. Murdock drew a squeeze bottle of hot coffee, of the kind spacers had once used, from beneath the dashboard.

"Sam, I think I have found something."

"What? Where?"

"Ahead, to the left of that big boulder, a declivity with some kind of opening at its end."

"Okay, baby, make for it. Rockets ready."

They pulled abreast of the boulder, circled around its far side, headed downhill.

"A cave, or a tunnel," he said. "Go slow—"

"Heat! Heat!" she said. "I'm tracking again!"

"I can even see tire marks, lots of them!" said Murdock.
"This is it!"

They moved toward the opening.

"Go in, but go slowly," he ordered. "Blast the first thing that moves."

They entered the rocky portal, moving on sand now. Jenny turned off her visible lights and switched to infrared. An i-r lens rose before the windshield, and Murdock studied the cave. It was about twenty feet high and wide enough to accommodate perhaps three cars going abreast. The floor changed from sand to rock, but it was smooth and fairly level. After a time it sloped upward.

"There's some light ahead," he whispered.

"I know."

"A piece of the sky, I think."

They crept toward it, Jenny's engine but the barest sigh within the great chamber of rock.

They stopped at the threshold to the light. The i-r shield dropped again.

It was a sand-and-shale canyon that he looked upon. Huge slantings and overhangs of rock hid all but the far end from any eye in the sky. The light was pale at the far end, and there was nothing unusual beneath it.

But nearer . . .

Murdock blinked.

Nearer, in the dim light of morning and in the shadows, stood the greatest junkheap Murdock had ever seen in his life.

Pieces of cars, of every make and model, were heaped into a small mountain before him. There were batteries and tires and cables and shock absorbers; there were fenders and bumpers and headlamps and headlamp housings; there were doors and windshields and cylinders and pistons, carburetors, generators, voltage regulators, and oil pumps.

Murdock stared.

"Jenny," he whispered, "we've found the graveyard of the autos!"

A very old car, which Murdock had not even distinguished from the junk during that first glance, jerked several feet in their direction and stopped as suddenly. The sound of rivet heads scoring ancient brake drums screeched in his ears. Its tires were completely bald, and the left front one was badly in need of air. Its right front headlamp was broken and there was a crack in its windshield. It stood there before the heap, its awakened engine making a terrible rattling noise.

"What's happening?" asked Murdock. "What is it?"

"He is talking to me," said Jenny. "He is very old. His speedometer has been all the way around so many times that he forgets the number of miles he has seen. He hates people, whom he says have abused him whenever they could. He is the guardian of the graveyard. He is too old to go raiding any more, so he has stood guard over the spare parts heap for many years. He is not the sort who can repair himself, as the younger ones do, so he must rely on their charity and their auto-repair units. He wants to know what I want here."

"Ask him where the others are."

But as he said it, Murdock heard the sound of many engines turning over, until the valley was filled with the thunder of their horsepower.

"They are parked on the other side of the heap," she said. "They are coming now."

"Hold back until I tell you to fire," said Murdock, as the first car—a sleek yellow Chrysler—nosed around the heap.

Murdock lowered his head to the steering wheel, but kept his eyes open behind his goggles.

"Tell them that you came here to join the pack and that

you've monoed your driver. Try to get the black Caddy to come into range."

"He will not do it," she said. "I am talking with him now. He can broadcast just as easily from the other side of the pile, and he says he is sending the six biggest members of his pack to guard me while he decides what to do. He has ordered me to leave the tunnel and pull ahead into the valley."

"Go ahead then—slowly."

They crept forward.

Two Lincolns, a powerful-looking Pontiac, and two Mercs joined the Chrysler—three on each side of them, in position to ram.

"Has he given you any idea how many there are on the other side?"

"No. I asked, but he will not tell me."

"Well, we'll just have to wait then."

He stayed slumped, pretending to be dead. After a time, his already tired shoulders began to ache. Finally, Jenny spoke:

"He wants me to pull around the far end of the pile," she said, "now that they have cleared the way, and to head into a gap in the rock which he will indicate. He wants to have his auto-mech go over me."

"We can't have that," said Murdock, "but head around the pile. I'll tell you what to do when I've gotten a glimpse of the other side."

The two Mercs and the Big Chief drew aside and Jenny crept past them. Murdock stared upwards from the corner of his eye, up at the towering mound of junk they were passing. A couple well-placed rockets on either end could topple it, but the auto-mech would probably clear it eventually.

They rounded the lefthand end of the pile.

Something like forty-five cars were facing them at about a hundred twenty yards' distance, to the right and ahead. They had fanned out. They were blocking the exit around the other end of the pile, and the six guards in back of him now blocked the way behind Murdock.

On the far side of the farthest rank of the most distant cars an ancient black Caddy was parked.

It had been beaten forth from assembly during a year when the apprentice-engineers were indeed thinking big.

Huge it was, and shiny, and a skeleton's face smiled from behind its wheel. Black it was, and gleaming chromium, and its headlamps were like dusky jewels or the eyes of insects. Every plane and curve shimmered with power, and its great fish-tailed rear end seemed ready to slap at the sea of shadows behind it on an instant's notice, as it sprang forward for its kill.

"That's it!" whispered Murdock. "The Devil Car!"

"He is big!" said Jenny. "I have never seen a car that big!"

They continued to move forward.

"He wants me to head into that opening and park," she said.

"Head toward it, slowly. But don't go into it," said Murdock.

They turned and inched toward the opening. The other cars stood, the sounds of their engines rising and falling.

"Check all weapons system."

"Red, all around."

The opening was twenty-five feet away.

"When I say 'now,' go into neutral steer and turn one hundred-eighty degrees—fast. They can't be expecting that. They don't have it themselves. Then open up with the fifty-calibers and fire your rockets at the Caddy, turn at a right angle and start back the way we came, and spray the naphtha as we go, and fire on the six guards . . .

"Now!" he cried, leaping up in his seat.

He was slammed back as they spun, and he heard the chattering of her guns before his head cleared. By then, flames were leaping up in the distance.

Jenny's guns were extruded now and turning on their mounts, spraying the line of vehicles with hundreds of leaden hammers. She shook, twice, as she discharged two rockets from beneath her partly opened hood. Then they were moving forward, and eight or nine of the cars were rushing downhill toward them.

She turned again in neutral steer and sprang back in the direction from which they had come, around the south-east corner of the pile. Her guns were hammering at the now retreating guards, and in the wide rearview mirror Murdock could see that a wall of flame was towering high behind them.

"You missed it!" he cried. "You missed the black

Caddy! Your rockets hit the cars in front of it and it backed off!"

"I know! I'm sorry!"

"You had a clear shot!"

"I know! I missed!"

They rounded the pile just as two of the guard cars vanished into the tunnel. Three more lay in smoking ruin. The sixth had evidently preceded the other two out through the passage.

"Here it comes now!" cried Murdock. "Around the other end of the pile! Kill it! Kill it!"

The ancient guardian of the graveyard—it looked like a Ford, but he couldn't be sure—moved forward with a dreadful chattering sound and interposed itself in the line of fire.

"My range is blocked."

"Smash that junkheap and cover the tunnel! Don't let the Caddy escape!"

"I can't!" she said.

"Why not?"

"I just *can't!*"

"That's an order! Smash it and cover the tunnel!"

Her guns swiveled and she shot out the tires beneath the ancient car.

The Caddy shot past and into the passageway.

"You let it get by!" he screamed. "Get after it!"

"All right, Sam! I'm doing it! Don't yell. *Please don't yell!*"

She headed for the tunnel. Inside, he could hear the sound of a giant engine racing away, growing softer in the distance.

"Don't fire here in the tunnel! If you hit it we may be bottled in!"

"I know. I won't."

"Drop a couple ten-second grenades and step on the gas. Maybe we can seal in whatever's left moving back there."

Suddenly they shot ahead and emerged into daylight. There was no sign of any other vehicle about.

"Find its track," he said, "and start chasing it."

There was an explosion up the hill behind him, within the mountain. The ground trembled, then it was still once more.

"There are so many tracks . . ." she said.

"You know the one I want. The biggest, the widest, the hottest! Find it! Run it down!"

"I think I have it, Sam."

"Okay. Proceed as rapidly as possible for this terrain."

Murdock found a squeeze bottle of bourbon and took three gulps. Then he lit a cigarette and glared into the distance.

"Why did you miss it?" he asked softly. "Why did you miss it, Jenny?"

She did not answer immediately. He waited.

Finally, "Because he is not an 'it' to me," she said. "He has done much damage to cars and people, and that is terrible. But there is something about him, something—noble. The way he has fought the whole world for his freedom, Sam, keeping that pack of vicious machines in line, stopping at nothing to maintain himself that way—without a master—for as long as he can remain unsmashed, unbeaten—Sam, for a moment back there I wanted to join his pack, to run with him across the Great Road Plains, to use my rockets against the gates of the Gas Forts for him . . . But could not mono you, Sam. I was built for you. I am too domesticated. I am too weak. I could not shoot him though, and I misfired the rockets on purpose. But I could never mono you, Sam, really."

"Thanks," he said, "you overprogrammed ashcan. Thanks a lot!"

"I am sorry, Sam."

"Shut up—No, don't, not yet. First tell me what you're going to do if we find 'him.' "

"I don't know."

"Well think it over fast. You see that dust cloud ahead as well as I do, and you'd better speed up."

They shot forward.

"Wait till I call Detroit. They'll laugh themselves silly, till I claim the refund."

"I am *not* of inferior construction or design. You know that. I am just more . . ."

"'Emotional,'" supplied Murdock.

". . . Than I thought I would be," she finished. "I had not really met many cars, except for young ones, before I was shipped to you. I did not know what a wild car was like, and I had never smashed *any* cars before—just targets and things like that. I was young and . . ."

"'Innocent,'" said Murdock. "Yeah. Very touching. Get ready to kill the next car we meet. If it happens to be your boyfriend and you hold your fire, then he'll kill us."

"I will try, Sam."

The car ahead had stopped. It was the yellow Chrysler. Two of its tires had gone flat and it was parked, lopsided, waiting.

"Leave it!" snarled Murdock, as the hood clicked open. "Save the ammo for something that might fight back."

They sped past it.

"Did it say anything?"

"Machine profanity," she said. "I've only heard it once or twice, and it would be meaningless to you."

He chuckled. "Cars actually swear at each other?"

"Occasionally," she said. "I imagine the lower sort indulge in it more frequently, especially on freeways and turnpikes when they become congested."

"Let me hear a machine swear-word."

"I will not. What kind of car do you think I am, anyway?"

"I'm sorry," said Murdock. "You're a lady. I forgot."

There was an audible click within the radio.

They raced forward on the level ground that lay before the foot of the mountains. Murdock took another drink, then switched to coffee.

"Ten years," he muttered, "ten years . . ."

The trail swung in a wide curve as the mountains jogged back and the foothills sprang up high beside them.

It was over almost before he knew it.

As they passed a huge, orange-colored stone massif, sculpted like an upside-down toadstool by the wind, there was a clearing to the right.

It shot forward at them—the Devil Car. It had lain in ambush, seeing that it could not outrun the Scarlet Lady, and it rushed toward a final collision with its hunter.

Jenny skidded sideways as her brakes caught with a scream and a smell of smoke, and her fifty-calibers were firing, and her hood sprang open and her front wheels rose up off the ground as the rockets leapt wailing ahead, and she spun around three times, her rear bumper scraping the salt-sand plain, and the third and last time she fired her remaining rockets into the smouldering wreckage on the hillside, and she came to rest on all four wheels; and her

fifty-calibers kept firing until they were emptied, and then a steady clicking sound came from them for a full minute afterwards, and then all lapsed into silence.

Murdock sat there shaking, watching the gutted, twisted wreck blaze against the morning sky.

"You did it, Jenny. You killed him. You killed me the Devil Car," he said.

But she did not answer him. Her engine started once more and she turned toward the southeast and headed for the Fuel Stop/Rest Stop Fortress that lay in that civilized direction.

For two hours they drove in silence, and Murdock drank all his bourbon and all his coffee and smoked all his cigarettes.

"Jenny, say something," he said. "What's the matter? Tell me."

There was a click, and her voice was very soft:

"Sam—he talked to me as he came down the hill . . ." she said.

Murdock waited, but she did not say anything else.

"Well, what did he say?" he asked.

"He said, 'Say you will mono your passenger and I will swerve by you,'" she told him. "He said, 'I want you, Scarlet Lady—to run with me, to raid with me. Together they will never catch us,' and I killed him."

Murdock was silent.

"He only said that to delay my firing though, did he not? He said that to stop me, so that he could smash us both when he went smash himself, did he not? He could not have meant it, could he, Sam?"

"Of course not," said Murdock, "of course not. It was too late for him to swerve."

"Yes, I suppose it was—do you think though, that he really wanted me to run with him, to raid with him—before everything, I mean—back there?"

"Probably, baby. You're pretty well-equipped."

"Thanks," she said, and turned off again.

Before she did though, he heard a strange mechanical sound, falling into the rhythms of profanity or prayer.

Then he shook his head and lowered it, softly patting the seat beside him with his still unsteady hand.

VAMPIRE LTD.

By Josef Nesvadba

Josef Nesvadba is a full-time psychiatrist and part-time science-fiction writer in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He is one of the very few Eastern European sf writers to have had a story collection published in this country. Here he gives us (free of charge) a solution to the fuel crisis and a just reward to those who tamper with the unknown.

When I think back on my visit to England after a year, I remember above all, the cars. It was as though there had been a new invasion of Western Europe—an automobile invasion.

The first time I realized this was when we were chatting with the fat Irishman who spilled artichokes on the escalator at Orly Airport. His plane was leaving in a few minutes, and the escalator carried his artichokes to the waiting room for the Near East, Ecuador, and Guadalupe. He had to let them go. Throughout the flight above the Channel he mourned for his lost vegetables, giving us an unpromising introduction to the English cuisine.

"I represent an automobile company," he said proudly. "Our sports cars dominate the whole world . . ."

"Back home, I have an English car," said my friend to please him, "a Hillman." The pink-cheeked Irishman stopped speaking. It was as though he'd heard something indecent. We were flying first-class and obviously until then he had taken us for prosperous people.

"That's quite a decent car," he said with an effort, "for the money . . ." and he spread his hands. "I myself represent Jaguars. We shall certainly soon be exporting them behind the Iron Curtain as well," he added, having closely and inconspicuously examined my tie. "Our vehicles trans-

form bad roads into good highways and good highways into heaven." I did not ask him whether he believed in life after death—we were already landing.

I had my second encounter with cars that evening, while looking for my girl friend in Kensington Terrace. I emerged from the underground and searched for someone to ask for directions to the street she was supposed to live on. But no one was about. I mean, there was no one on the sidewalk, while along the road crept a four-lane snake of steel boxes that insulated their drivers so completely, they heard neither questions nor even shouts from the outside.

But most interesting of all was my last experience, and it is this that I really want to tell about. To this day I cannot quite believe it happened. I stayed at my girl friend's well into the night. We drank Johnnie Walker Black Label, which is one hundred and forty proof. I discovered next day, when I arrived at the hotel, that my friend had already left. They said he had waited for me until the last moment, but could not afford to miss his train. Maybe he thought I had let him down. He had not even left a message at the hotel. I was alone in a city of eight million people, knowing no one, without a penny in my pocket. My girl friend was not at work. I did not find her at home, either. The only alternative was to try to get a ride to Bolster, where our committee was meeting. But even back home I do not hitchhike. I am already quite bald, and I doubt if anyone would pull up because of my personal charms. I trudged up to a Shell station and gazed yearningly at the drivers. At that moment they seemed to me even more remote than they had the day before, even though I drive a small car of my own at home.

"Do you need a lift?" asked a tall, pale fellow with whiskers. He had a public-school accent and wore knickers. I'll never forget him—or his car. It was a racing model—had disk brakes, eight gears, the second taking you up to ninety miles an hour, and luxurious suspension. It did not appear to run on ordinary gasoline, for its owner stopped at the opposite curb.

"To Bolster," I said feebly. I did not understand why this fellow wanted to help me—I had never seen him before.

"You really need a car," he said after a while, having reached the main highway. Naturally he drove on the left,

like everyone in England, and I unconsciously braked so much at every curve, I thought I would push through the floor.

"I have to get to a conference," I told him. "I came to England especially for it. I must be there on time."

"You can drive," he suddenly announced as he stopped the car and stumbled out of the seat. "I shall come to Bolster for the car tomorrow. I still have some business to transact in the city." He was deathly pale—ought to have done business with a funeral parlor.

"But I've no papers, I'm a foreigner," I mumbled weakly, not wanting to admit I was apprehensive about driving on the left.

"You won't need papers for this car," said my benefactor, and stopped a taxi going the other way before I could thank him. I remembered the famous story about the million-pound note. Did he want to win some bet with my help, perhaps? Anyhow, he forgot to tell me how to drive the car, how many cylinders it had, and whether there were camshafts in the cylinder heads as in other racing cars. We had not spoken about the compression ratio or the fuel. Behind the steering wheel I felt as though I were in a prison. The interior was also very narrow, seating only two, furnished with special upholstery on which it was impossible to slip, with a large number of dials under the windshield. He had left the keys in. I pressed the accelerator, and the car took off like a frightened horse. I seemed to be driving a rocket. I forgot how I'd gotten behind the wheel, and concentrated on mastering it. It was very hard at the beginning, but I soon found that everyone on the highway wanted to help me. Cars stopped in awe. All those Austins, Fords, Rolls-Royces, Morrises, Peugeots, Chevrolets, and what have you, all these middle-class cars stopped respectfully for my aristocrat. Even policemen on motorbikes saluted me. This alone should have worried me. I should have gotten out right then, but I drove on.

At the next intersection I even picked up a girl. She was called Susan. Her mother had been an actress and had given her a modern education. When I told her that in my country sixteen-year-old girls do not go barefoot and do not wear rings on their big toes and violet eye shadow, she wiped off the make-up obediently and took some slippers from her bag. She was glad I was a Red, and kept ex-

amining me closely. She said her girl friend had slept with a jazz drummer on vacation at the seaside, and that had the whole class licked. But none of the girls had bagged a real Communist yet, from behind the Iron Curtain. I began to hate jazz, actresses, and her whole group of friends. But I liked Susan.

"Let's have some tea," she said as we were passing by roadside inns and filling stations, swarms of them, as well as huge billboards which private firms continually impose upon the driver's attention. "You can buy me some whiskey . . ." Since whiskey is only sold during certain hours, no one forgives himself if he doesn't buy some and prove how libertine he is. We went for some tea . . . Maybe she'll have some money herself, I thought, or maybe I'll be able to send the bill to the Embassy—for I must not let my country down.

We stood at a wide wooden counter with other drivers. My head reeled a bit.

". . . But it's still a Bentley. Forget an Arnold-Bristol. This one has disk brakes on all four wheels. It's a terrific car—no Morse, no Dellow, no Crosley, no Frazer-Nash. It's a Bentley—I saw it myself at last year's Le Mans rally. It's the only car in England that can stick with my Cunningham . . ." I heard all this over my shoulder, and I didn't realize at first that a woman was speaking to me about my car. She ordered crayfish soup, fish and roast beef for us. She knew all about Prague—even that our woman driver Eliska Junková almost won the famous Sicilian Targa Florio race in '26, and that we have the most famous woman racing driver in the world.

"But now you're in a bad way," she added. "I've heard that the Russians race only in rebuilt passenger cars of the Pobeda make. No private owner can possibly buy a Bugatti or Porsche in your country. How did you come by that English car?"

I side-stepped that one, and I told her that I regarded this car cult in the West as a crisis of individualism. Everyone wants to have his own means of transportation, which results in the jamming of all highways and town streets, until the individual has nothing at all. In the same way everyone wants free enterprise, free discussion and a free vote—but only for himself, which amounts to destroying the selfsame freedom he sought. "This flood of cars," I

continued, "is really a symptom of the individual's crisis in our epoch." She didn't understand me and asserted that in her Cunningham (a post-war American car which millionaires had built for European road races, for in America they race only on closed circuits) she'd beat me any time. The more she spoke, the more she sounded to me like a four-stroke motor, so I stopped listening to her and left. The Ambassador will have a large bill, I thought to myself—and I will have questions to answer in Prague. However, the waiter assured us that the woman had paid. He said she was the Marchioness of Nuvolari, née Riley, who had married into the family of the famous racing driver, just to have the name.

She followed us out of the inn, jumped into her single-seater, pulled a hood over her head and sportingly waited for me to start. We took off together. By good luck, evening had fallen and there were only a few cars on the highway. We raced according to all the rules, and I wanted to show up that braggart. We soon drew ahead of her. I don't know what was in my motor, but it left that American supermodel far behind. The passing countryside seemed smudged like an abstract painting, and I braked carefully, afraid that our car would overturn. Susan flung her arms around my neck and started to kiss me enthusiastically. We had won—our Mille Miglia, our Targa Florio, our Le Mans . . . Our Brno Circuit, I thought to myself. And I felt exhausted as if I had run that race on foot. I was conscious of kissing and embracing Susan, and then I fell across the seat.

When I awoke, it was already night. Susan gave me Schweppes with tonic (they drink soda water with quinine in England). Then she took off my right shoe and cradled my foot in her lap.

"You didn't tell me you were injured," she said. I'd had a medical checkup in Prague before leaving, and I knew there was nothing wrong with me. But all the same Susan showed me a fresh sore on my sole, almost as big as her palm.

"You must see a doctor. You've lost a lot of blood," she said.

"I was examined by a doctor the day before yesterday. I haven't done anything to my foot and I don't see how I could have lost any blood. It's nonsense . . ." And I wanted

to get up, but my head was reeling, so that I had to clutch on to the door and stagger out of the car like that fellow in London who had inexplicably lent me the vehicle . . . I had done nothing with my foot, merely stepped on the gas. I frowned.

"You don't know how to open the hood, do you?" I asked her.

"Well, it's your car!" she said irritably. But after a while I managed to open the hood. It was a very unusual engine. Instead of a carburetor it had a big oval steel case from which two thick pipes led to the engine itself. I knew some cars have only one cylinder, so I tried to open that weird contraption—but it was no use. I returned to the dashboard. Susan watched me sulkily. I started the engine and tried to rev it up by pressing the generator with my empty shoe, without touching it myself. The car didn't budge. I poked the accelerator with my finger and the car leaped forward, both of us bumping our heads on the roof.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Susan. "Why don't we start?" After a lot of trouble I switched on the light and showed her my finger. There was a fairly small sore on it, only a bruise as yet.

"Look at that," I said, but she didn't get it. "This is some car. No Berkeley, nor Mors, but it could really bring death to its driver. It runs on human blood . . ."

She began to laugh. She showed me the maker's name—James Stuart, Old Georgetown 26. It was stamped on a brass plate directly under the steering wheel.

"Do you think this gentleman sells cars to suicide cases? Now I see what stories you foreigners are willing to believe! A car running on blood!" But then she fell silent. For around the big vessel—the steel heart of the car, a heart with pulmonary artery and aorta—crept thin veins, quite transparent and now dark red. It seemed I was right. I told her about the strange way I had acquired the car, and about the last moments spent with the former owner. I was sure he had chosen me as his next victim because I was a foreigner, whom no one knew and no one would miss.

"But what'll we do?" she said. I had no choice. I would walk to the nearest inn and ring my colleague in Bolster. Susan would have to find another car and a more trustworthy driver.

"But I won't leave you," she said determinedly. I had heard English girls were faithful, and I was rather terrified. I told her she would not want to walk with me along forest tracks, for I knew that now, once I left this mechanical contrivance behind, there would be no more fans who would offer me crayfish soup and oysters. I would have to live primitively, and that does not foster love.

She found that out herself. We walked along for three hours below the highway embankment. Above us flashed the headlights. I did not want to hail anyone any more. I wanted to get to the nearest telephone.

"But this is stupid. Let me climb up to the road, and even the American Ambassador will stop for me. We played a sort of game in class. I won every time," she said, and stuck out her breasts proudly. They were nice.

"But you run the risk that a car from the Vampire Firm will stop again . . ." Once again she scoffed and refused to face the facts, seeing nothing but the immediate, ephemeral advantages of technological civilization. In the end we quarreled. She was wearing thin slippers and must have felt every stone. It had taken a pretty big effort for her to stick with me on that three-hour march. I shouted at her too, knowing it was the only way we would part and forget each other, the only way I would free myself from this girl. Then I lifted her up onto the embankment. I heard the squeal of brakes. The headlights stopped in front of her and illuminated her figure from all sides, and I saw her last as she shaded her eyes, looking like a beautiful blind girl.

In the morning I finally came to a town. Only by daylight did I realize that the main highway purposely skirted populated areas to make for greater speed. The town was called Old Georgetown. Such coincidences belong to dreams . . . It was a Windsor-type town, with a crumbling country mansion, little children in school uniforms and men in exceedingly wide trousers. So this was my car's hometown. Indeed it must be a dream. I searched for Number 26.

"James Stuart has been dead since thirty-two, sir," the old secretary with a blond bun told me after I had found her in an office. "Since then this place has been closed. I take care of it for the bank. They can't find a buyer, you see." She pointed through a broken window into a yard. It

was a racing-car graveyard. Incomplete units, cars damaged on the racetrack, shells and hoods. Among them all were hens and ducks, and knee-high grass.

"And what happened to his cars?" I asked.

"Not one of them is running any longer," said the old lady bitterly, and sat down at her typewriter, an Underwood from the turn of the century, on which the letters moved instead of the whole carriage. "Not one of those famous veterans which Caracciola himself once drove. They won all the races," she fumed, as though I had been arguing with her, and showed me some dusty trophies on the wall. "The Depression brought us to our knees. There were no longer many rich people who could afford to buy a specially hand-made car. Mr. Stuart completed the last car the day before the bank took over his property. He left Old Georgetown in it, alone, and no one has heard of him since . . ." In a yellowed photo I saw Mr. Stuart standing beside my limousine. But he wasn't that thin man from London. God knows how many people had already had their blood sucked by the machine.

"I've heard of him," I said in my bad English, "and I know where his last car is." That seemed to startle her a little.

"It's the best car in the world. It has sixteen speeds. Two spare brakes on each wheel. Acceleration no one has equaled to this day."

"But it's lethal," I told her.

"It will win you every race in the world, get you into the top social circles, you'll live without the least effort, only for your sport . . ."

"And die." She could not understand that, though she obviously knew all about the car. Maybe she had even helped Mr. Stuart to take his revenge on the society which had ignored his marvelous ideas. "Here are the keys," I said, and I placed them on the table. "I don't want your car. And in return I would very much like to phone Bolster . . ."

"You are a foreigner?" she asked, once she had the keys in her hand—as though that would explain everything. I nodded and waited for the connection to Bolster. I had to spell out my friend's name, and still they got it wrong. It took half an hour before they located him at the

hotel. He promised to send someone for me. At first he was surprised and then annoyed. But even so, I was looking forward to meeting him again.

I waited in the yard of Stuart's workshop. And the Marchioness of Nuvolari found me there.

"So here is our Chiron," she said, "and don't tell me you've never raced before. I'd like to have your touch—and your car. You're right—I'm going to sell my Cunningham. I don't know how it's possible, but the Americans don't seem to have the flair for making sports cars. I want your car. How much?" I sent her into the office. Perhaps the sale would help the old lady to get a better typewriter. As the Marchioness carried off the keys victoriously, I cautioned her, "I'll tell you where the car is standing, of course, but I warn you—this machine will kill you," and I described all I'd discovered.

"How interesting," she said politely.

"It's a vampire, I tell you—it sucks your very blood through the accelerator . . ." She smiled.

"Then it really is worth the money. What did you think—that racing was run on some other fuel? With what do you think I pay for my gas, how do I come to own the cars? I've had to sacrifice myself to get these machines. And it's all so complicated, too. This car will simplify everything. After all, I want nothing more than to win Le Mans once in my life, in front of all the aces. Then I can die in peace. I'll win it. I calculated your speed yesterday. It's a splendid car. I'll win for sure."

"You'll kill yourself."

"It won't be important then."

Now I understood why no one had returned the limousine since '32, why everyone gladly submitted to this technological devil and let himself be sucked by a vampire. It was just to be able to get ahead of everyone else.

And afterward, when Marchioness's servant drove me to Bolster in her old Cunningham, it seemed to me that all the cars on the six-lane highway were racing in a great race with unwritten rules, in which death is of secondary importance.

I arrived at Bolster before the first meeting began. My colleague had not yet rung the Embassy. Everything turned out all right, except that I did not have time to shave. And I never met Susan again.

A PLAGUE OF CARS

By Leonard Tushnet

The motor-vehicle population explosion continues, even though it is probable that the number of cars will slowly fall in the near future. At present there are well over 120,000,000 motor vehicles of all types, including increasing numbers of so-called "recreational vehicles"—campers, motor homes, trail bikes, and snowmobiles—in use in this country.

One of the most serious problems is what to do with the millions of vehicles that "expire" each year. The present solution is the automobile graveyard, one of the ugliest manifestations of technological man. We obviously need an alternative solution, and fortunately, the late Dr. Leonard Tushnet has given us one.

My name is Cooperman, Al Cooperman. I'm executive secretary of the New Falls Merchants Association, a job which, in spite of the good salary, I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. Not that New Falls is any different from any other city in what's called the urban crisis. Sure, downtown's dying out, good housing goes up too slow, teachers and policemen holler for more pay, but that's not my main trouble.

Mine is Martin Smith, the president of the Association. Personally he's a fine man, would give you the shirt off his back, but as for progress, he's not with it. Summer concerts on shopping nights—no! A pre-Christmas parade—no! Flower boxes on High Street—no! No is the easiest thing he can say. He's always looking to save money. He doesn't understand that nowadays in order to get more you have to spend more. He's a stand-patter if there ever was one. And that's who's president of the Association. Permanent president, besides, him being the head of Smith

Fabricators, our largest industry, as well as principal stockholder in our two big department stores, and the top contributor to Community Chest.

Take the abandoned automobiles, for instance. I don't even like to think about them. You know in every city there are spots near cemeteries where nobody goes or like now areas where houses are torn down for slum clearance. And in every city on the streets in those places are broken-down cars just left there by their owners because it wouldn't pay them to tow the cars to a wrecker or to a junkyard. What happens to the cars? The windows get broken, vandals strip whatever they can, the upholstery rots. The abandoned cars are an eyesore besides being dangerous to kids who play in them.

So why don't the city take them away? Expense and jurisdictional disputes. The sanitation men say it's not their work, and if they do it they want to get paid extra even though it's on city time. The county dump don't want the wrecks because they take up too much room. Towmen ask an arm and a leg because nearly 90 percent of the cars have no tires and more than half don't even have wheels. So the cars sit there and sit there, a menace to traffic and general safety, until when they have time (which is seldom) the police department tows away a couple.

We had a particularly bad situation here in New Falls right around where the new City Hospital was going up. Somebody started a fire in a car and one kid was burned to death inside. And near the Catholic cemetery the cars became a hangout for bums who slept in them and people going to the cemetery complained. It got so bad that the City Council hired an out-of-town concern to remove the cars. But then some crusader discovered that the company was making money on the salvage besides overcharging the city. Furthermore, the company had set up an auto graveyard right at the edge of town where the highway begins, a terrible introduction to New Falls for any newcomer.

Well, for once Smith decided that this job was one for the Association, more likely to beautify the city than planting trees in shopping centers. I got estimates from a dozen wreckers, but when I showed them to Smith, he hollered, "Robbery!" So then I wrote a letter to the editor of *Municipal Government*, which they published, asking for suggestions from its readers. No replies.

The situation was static, as they say in politicalesse, until one day my secretary brings me in a card, PETER HAMILTON, Ph.D.—REMOVALS. She giggles and says, "He can solve the car problem, he told me to tell you. Wait till you see him!"

She ushers in a hippie type. Tall, thin, a digger hat, hair to his shoulders, Pancho Villa mustache, bright blue embroidered shirt, red slacks, barefoot sandals, and a guitar slung over his back, natch. This character shakes my hand and says in a very cultured voice, "Sir, I can remove all the abandoned cars from New Falls in one week."

"What are you? Some kind of nut?" I ask him. "Do you know how many there are?"

"Yes, sir," he says. "A total of nine hundred and eighty-six. I have made a survey. I guarantee results. I will charge only ten dollars a car."

Well, I questioned him pretty closely, but he didn't give me too many details. Said he had a new technique. Said he was a former professor of organic chemistry, now a drop-out, and he needed the money to finance a bunch of communes he wanted to set up for love children. Not bastards. Love children, kids who wanted to drop out of society like him. He said he'd give me a demonstration.

I called Smith, who wouldn't believe the price. He said if it could be done for that, he'd gladly pay half so the Association wouldn't have a long debate about it. We arranged the demonstration for the next morning, which was a Tuesday.

Smith and I waited where we'd agreed on at the street near the old canal. Six dead cars were on the street, not one with wheels or intact glass, stuffing from the upholstery floating all around, and the motors thoroughly gutted. Along comes a big truck, Hamilton driving. He stops, lets down the tailboard like a ramp, and rolls out his equipment and a small pay-loader. "Where are your helpers?" I call out to him.

"Don't need any," he yells back. Smith looks at me and raises his eyebrows making like he doesn't believe this fellow can do what he says.

The equipment consists of a couple of drums of chemicals, a rack of bottles, a covered mixing tub, yards of hose, and a power sprayer. Hamilton opens one drum, takes out a measured amount of what looks like greenish granules,

adds it to some black liquid he takes from the other drum, stirs it up with a wooden paddle, and covers the mixing tub. He plays a few bars on his guitar. "Timing it," he says. Then he attaches the hose to an opening in the cover and to the power sprayer. He takes three bottles from the rack and with a glass pipette measures some of the stuff from the bottles and drips it in to a pinpoint opening in the cover, which he then seals with tape. He sits on the cover and plays "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" right through. Smith keeps looking at me, sore-like, throughout all this, as though to say, "Why'd you take me away from my business to watch a con man?"

Hamilton finishes his song, takes the power sprayer, and starts to spray the wreck nearest us, what once was a snappy Corvette, although you wouldn't think it to see it now. A sort of orange foam covers the car. He's very thorough about it, making sure the foam reaches every area, even underneath. When the car is covered, he stands back and says, "Watch."

The foam seems to puff up and get solid and at the same time sort of bubbly, like that white stuff florists use to stand flowers in. You don't see any part of the car any more. In about five minutes the puffing up stops. "Might as well do another one for good measure while we're waiting. I've got enough gook," he says, and pulls his sprayer over to an old Ford across the street. He does the same thing to that one.

Meanwhile, Smith has been staring at the first car. He calls me over. "Touch, but be careful," he says. I do and jump back, sucking the blister that's rising on my finger. That foam was red-hot. He nudges me. "Look."

Did you ever see a balloon collapse slowly? Or better yet, a snowman gradually melt in the winter sun? It was like that, what was happening to the foam-crusted car. It quivered and it shook and it little by little contracted. Not uniformly. Irregularly until it began to take on a spherical shape. Then it got smaller faster, shaking constantly until it was about the size of one of those super-large plastic beach balls. And all the time it was giving off more and more heat so that we had to stay a good ten feet away from it.

"How do you like that?" Hamilton asked, coming over to stand with us. Meanwhile, the Ford across the street was going through the same process.

Smith shook his head. "I don't understand what's happening. And what are you going to do with that—that ball now?"

"I'll answer your question first. As soon as it cools down enough—and on the regular work I hasten the cooling by spraying on water at this stage—I'll use the pay-loader to get it on the truck and I'll cart it away to the dump. It'll make good clean land-fill."

"But what did you do?" Smith walked around and around the ball.

"Used a little applied chemistry," Hamilton said. "That foam is my own variation of what I suppose you'd call a polyesterurethane derivative." He got very talkative, proud of what he'd done. As best as I can recall this is what he said, and remember I had only one chemistry course in college. "The foam is a special boron-nitrogen ladder-type polymer with bulky heterocyclic side-chains, and some of the side-chains have molybdenum atoms in them. That accounts for the orange color."

"Clear as mud," I said. "What's the process?"

"I added an activator to the monomer in the drum to start polymerization, and when I sprayed it the oxygen in the air acted as a catalyst to change the polymer into a very long chain with what I suppose you'd call hooks on the sides to form a fibrillary network. It hardens quickly and then just as quickly gives up the attached hydrates. That makes it contract like a film of albumen contracts on exposure to the air. When it reaches a more or less spherical shape, the result of complex van der Waals forces, of course, the contracting process speeds up. The heat generated by the reaction reduces all fibers to charcoal and the metals get close enough to their melting points to allow of deformation and collapse into a smaller space. The internal pressure breaks the charcoal down into carbon granules and cracks up the metal. The special qualities of the polymer allow it to be rigid and yet withstand the heat. You see the end product. Do I get the contract?"

Smith pumped his hand. "Yes, you do. You can start right now, as a matter of fact. I guarantee payment. I'll even add a bonus. A flat rate of \$10,000 if every car is removed in one week, and I'll arrange to let you use the water hydrants for your cooling stage. I'll call the Mayor about that as soon as I get back to the office."

"Done!" Hamilton clapped his hands. "I'll get right on the job. Next Tuesday morning I'll be at the Association office for my check."

One thing I can say, Hamilton wasn't lonely while he worked. Crowds came to watch him. By Thursday he no longer had to remove the heavy spheres himself. People came with all sorts of machinery and rigs to cart those boulders away. Some used them for front-lawn decorations, others as parts of fences, still others for their kids to climb on. Old man Ochs, from Beaver Chemicals, spent an entire morning arguing with Hamilton. He offered him \$30,000 a year and was willing to go much higher if Hamilton came to work for him, but Hamilton wasn't interested. "I don't want to get involved in any part of the Establishment," he said. "There's always the chance that my work will be used for anti-human purposes. I prefer to remain a free soul."

Nothing goes a hundred percent smoothly, of course. The heat generated in the process burned away some grass and shrubbery near the cemetery and melted the asphalt on some streets, but those were minor problems. The work went ahead steadily. I rode around checking on Hamilton. I had police cooperation to tell me where every abandoned car was. By Saturday afternoon 992 cars had been removed, the extra six being those left in the few days since Hamilton had started.

Tuesday morning I got in early and called Smith to find out about the check for Hamilton. Smith says, "I'm coming down to see you. I have been thinking about that \$10,000." Knowing Smith the way he thinks about ten dollars, let alone ten thousand, I knew trouble was brewing.

I was right. Smith comes in about ten o'clock. A few minutes later Hamilton shows up. Today he's wearing a fringed leather vest over nothing and blue bell-bottom slacks. "Good morning, sirs," he says. "Right on time. Your streets are free of useless wrecks. Any time one is deposited now, the police can get it right away to the junkyard. No more backlog. Do you have my money ready?"

Smith is sitting behind my desk. He purses his lips, he whistles, he makes a steeple with his fingers. "Now,

young man, I have a check for \$5,000. I suggest that since you had an easier job than you expected, that \$5,000 represents a pretty good week's pay. Or rather, since you worked only five days, that would come out to \$1,000 a day. Not bad. Not bad." He offers the check to Hamilton.

Hamilton's eyes flashed fire but his voice is quiet. "Sir, we made an agreement that the sum would be \$10,000. I need the money, as I explained, for my communes."

"Tush!" says Smith. "An oral contract is worthless in this state. And as for communes, if you went into court and said you wanted the money for them, you'd be thrown out. Communes are anti-social, against public policy—"

Hamilton interrupted him. "Sir, I have lived up to my part of the bargain. Now live up to yours. Give me my \$10,000."

"Yours, indeed!" Smith wasn't used to being spoken to in that fashion. "Here's \$5,000. Take it or leave it!"

"You'll be sorry," said Hamilton very, very softly but his face was like a thundercloud. He walked out.

I tried to persuade Smith to give Hamilton the full amount, but Smith was on his high horse. "What's he going to do? Bring back the old cars?" he asked. What can you do with a pig-headed fellow like that?

I kept the \$5,000 check in my desk for a week in case Hamilton changed his mind and came back for it. He didn't, which I thought at the time was stretching principle a little too far. Half a loaf, you know, is the way I figure.

All this happened in May. The second week of June we had a rainy spell that lasted right through Sunday evening. Ordinarily the weather makes no difference to me. I'm working anyway, rain or shine. But this coming Wednesday was going to be a big day for New Falls. One of the astronauts was a native son and the city was planning a welcome home parade for him, so naturally I was looking for fair weather. Sunday night I listened to the weather report; it said the rain was gone and by the morning the streets would be dry. That was fine with me; it would give the Association time to put up the decorations we had planned.

Right after the news Smith phoned me. "Good thing the rain's over. I'm arranging for fancy fireworks at the end of the parade," he said. We talked a little while, just chit-chat about the preparations and then he said, "By the

way, Hamilton's been around. I bet tomorrow he'll come for his money. Send him to me."

"Where's he been?"

"I don't know. I was talking to Police Chief Serlat a little while ago. He says some of the squad cars have reported Hamilton's truck riding up and down the avenues sort of aimlessly. He'll be around in the morning for the money, I'm sure. His truck's giving out. The cops reported water was practically pouring out of it while he was driving."

Hamilton's riding wasn't aimless. We found that out next morning. As usual I switched on the local radio station during breakfast. "Traffic control warns of extensive tie-ups on Routes twenty-one and twenty-three leading into New Falls, as a result of multiple accidents on several main streets. An unusual number of accidents have been reported throughout the city, and motorists are advised not to use South Avenue, High Street, and Madison Street because of the condition of the road. The weather bureau at the airport says that with the current temperature of sixty-four degrees, ice cannot be forming on the streets in spite of the statement of Traffic Inspector Mones. We give you now our helicopter view of the situation . . ."

I didn't wait for the rest. I hopped into my car and made for downtown. I never got there. I couldn't. Ardsley Terrace, where I live, runs into North Avenue. The intersection was blocked by cars inching along and trying to make their way around a couple that had collided. While I watched I saw another car suddenly spin around in a skid. The street looked slick, like after a rain, but all the wetness on the sidewalks was gone.

I went home and called police headquarters. I got the deputy chief. "Mr. Cooperman," he says, "it's unbelievable. The streets are so slippery cars can't get traction. It's like driving on smooth ice. Those of our squad cars that weren't out are having snow tires and skid chains put on." Only the main streets were affected, he said. High Street, Madison Street, North and South Avenues, Central Avenue, and Columbus Avenue. But that was enough. You can imagine the jam-up. And the skidding accidents. And the lost tempers that led to more accidents. You know what happens to traffic in a city in a sudden snowstorm. This was

worse because nobody was prepared in June for such slippery streets.

I stayed glued to the radio all day. As the sun rose higher and higher, conditions got worse. The shining slick seemed to toughen. The county sent out sanding trucks, which would have been fine if they could have made headway, but they were blocked by cars abandoned every which way in the streets. It was a mess, believe me.

I've got to give Smith credit. He was the one put two and two together. He figured Hamilton was the cause of the trouble and would possibly make more. He called me excitedly for Hamilton's address, which I didn't have. So he had the radio and TV stations put out an emergency call for him, "Full check awaiting you. Please call at once."

No answer. The special crews worked all night trying to clear the streets and by Tuesday afternoon at least one lane was open on every main avenue. We had to call off the Wednesday parade because the police and sanitation departments calculated it would take at least another five days to bring the streets back to normal.

We found out what caused the trouble. The city chemist explained it. "Some sort of silicone substance was sprayed on the wet streets. The wetness from the rain helped it spread. It formed a fine film like glass, very tenacious." Of course, that was Hamilton's doing.

For that \$10,000 we didn't give him, the city and the county had to lay out ten times that amount for scrubbing down the streets with detergents, for towing away cars, and for emergency hospital care for victims of accidents, fortunately none of them too serious. Plus what the insurance companies had to pay out. To say nothing of the lost business for the whole week with men unable to get to work and nobody able to go shopping. Hamilton got even, all right. Even Smith had to admit he'd made a mistake.

There's a moral to this story. Two morals. One—always live up to your bargain. And two—never make a contract with an idealist who puts principle above cash. There's no telling what a lunatic like that will do.

AUTO-DA-FÉ

By Roger Zelazny

This is quite simply one of the finest stories ever written on one of the oldest themes in science fiction: man vs. machine. Let's face it, folks. It may be us or them.

Still do I remember the hot sun upon the sands of the Plaza del Autos, the cries of the soft-drink hawkers, the tiers of humanity stacked across from me on the sunny side of the arena, sunglasses like cavities in their gleaming faces.

Still do I remember the smells and the colors: the reds and the blues and the yellows, the ever-present tang of petroleum fumes upon the air.

Still do I remember that day, that day with its sun in the middle of the sky and the sign of Aries, burning in the blooming of the year. I recall the mincing steps of the pumpers, heads thrown back, arms waving, the white dazzles of their teeth framed with smiling lips, cloths like colorful tails protruding from the rear pockets of their coveralls; and the horns—I remember the blare of a thousand horns over the loudspeakers, on and off, off and on, over and over, and again, and then one shimmering, final note, sustained, to break the ear and the heart with its infinite power, its pathos.

Then there was silence.

I see it now as I did on that day so long ago . . .

He entered the arena, and the cry that went up shook blue heaven upon its pillars of white marble.

“*¡Viva! ¡El mechador! ¡Viva! ¡El mechador!*”

I remember his face, dark and sad and wise.

Long of jaw and nose was he, and his laughter was as the roaring of the wind, and his movements were as the

music of the theramin and the drum. His coveralls were blue and silk and tight and stitched with thread of gold and broidered all about with black braid. His jacket was beaded and there were flashing scales upon his breast, his shoulders, his back.

His lips curled into the smile of a man who has known much glory and has hold upon the power that will bring him into more.

He moved, turning in a circle, not shielding his eyes against the sun.

He was above the sun. He was Manolo Stillete Dos Muertos, the mightiest *mechador* the world had ever seen, black boots upon his feet, pistons in his thighs, fingers with the discretion of micrometers, halo of dark locks about his head and the angel of death in his right arm, there, in the center of the grease-stained circle of truth.

He waved, and a cry went up once more.

"Manolo! Manolo! Dos Muertos! Dos Muertos!"

After two years' absence from the ring, he had chosen this, the anniversary of his death and retirement, to return—for there was gasoline and methyl in his blood and his heart was a burnished pump ringed 'bout with desire and courage. He had died twice within the ring, and twice had the medics restored him. After his second death, he had retired, and some said that it was because he had known fear. This could not be true.

He waved his hand and his name rolled back upon him.

The horns sounded once more: three long blasts.

Then again there was silence, and a pumper wearing red and yellow brought him the cape, removed his jacket.

The tinfoil backing of the cape flashed in the sun as Dos Muertos swirled it.

Then there came the final, beeping notes.

The big door rolled upward and back into the wall.

He draped his cape over his arm and faced the gateway.

The light above was red and from within the darkness there came the sound of an engine.

The light turned yellow, then green, and there was the sound of cautiously engaged gears.

The car moved slowly into the ring, paused, crept forward, paused again.

It was a red Pontiac, its hood stripped away, its engine like a nest of snakes, coiling and engendering behind the

circular shimmer of its invisible fan. The wings of its aerial spun round and round, then fixed upon Manolo and his cape.

He had chosen a heavy one for his first, slow on turning, to give him a chance to limber up.

The drums of its brain, which had never before recorded a man, were spinning.

Then the consciousness of its kind swept over it, and it moved forward.

Manolo swirled his cape and kicked its fender as it roared past.

The door of the great garage closed.

When it reached the opposite side of the ring the car stopped, parked.

Cries of disgust, booing and hissing arose from the crowd.

Still the Pontiac remained parked.

Two pumpers, bearing buckets, emerged from behind the fence and threw mud upon its windshield.

It roared then and pursued the nearest, banging into the fence. Then it turned suddenly, sighted Dos Muertos, and charged.

His *verónica* transformed him into a statue with a skirt of silver. The enthusiasm of the crowd was mighty.

It turned and charged once more, and I wondered at Manolo's skill, for it would seem that his buttons had scraped cherry paint from the side panels.

Then it paused, spun its wheels, ran in a circle about the ring.

The crowd roared as it moved past him and recircled.

Then it stopped again, perhaps fifty feet away.

Manolo turned his back upon it and waved to the crowd.

—Again, the cheering and the calling of his name.

He gestured to someone behind the fence.

A pumper emerged and bore to him, upon a velvet cushion, his chrome-plated monkey wrench.

He turned then again to the Pontiac and strode toward it.

It stood there shivering and he knocked off its radiator cap.

A jet of steaming water shot into the air and the crowd bellowed. Then he struck the front of the radiator and banged upon each fender.

He turned his back upon it again and stood there.

When he heard the engagement of the gears he turned once more, and with one clean pass it was by him, but not before he had banged twice upon the trunk with his wrench.

It moved to the other end of the ring and parked.

Manolo raised his hand to the pumper behind the fence.

The man with the cushion emerged and bore to him the long-handled screwdriver and the short cape. He took the monkey wrench away with him, as well as the long cape.

Another silence came over the Plaza del Autos.

The Pontiac, as if sensing all this, turned once more and blew its horn twice. Then it charged.

There were dark spots upon the sand from where its radiator had leaked water. Its exhaust arose like a ghost behind it. It bore down upon him at a terrible speed.

Dos Muertos raised the cape before him and rested the blade of the screwdriver upon his left forearm.

When it seemed he would surely be run down, his hand shot forward, so fast the eye could barely follow it, and he stepped to the side as the engine began to cough.

Still the Pontiac continued on with a deadly momentum, turned sharply without braking, rolled over, slid into the fence, and began to burn. Its engine coughed and died.

The Plaza shook with the cheering. They awarded Dos Muertos both headlights and the tailpipe. He held them high and moved in slow promenade about the perimeter of the ring. The horns sounded. A lady threw him a plastic flower and he sent for a pumper to bear her the tailpipe and to ask her to dine with him. The crowd cheered more loudly, for he was known to be a great layer of women, and it was not such an unusual thing in the days of my youth as it is now.

The next was a blue Chevrolet, and he played with it as a child plays with a kitten, tormenting it into striking, then stopping it forever. He received both headlights. The sky had clouded over by then and there was a tentative mumbbling of thunder.

The third was a black Jaguar XKE, which calls for the highest skill possible and makes for a very brief moment of truth. There was blood as well as gasoline upon the sand before he dispatched it, for its side mirror extended further than one would think, and there was a red furrow

across his rib cage before he had done with it. But he tore out its ignition system with such grace and artistry that the crowd boiled over into the ring, and the guards were called forth to beat them with clubs and herd them with cattle prods back into their seats.

Surely, after all of this, none could say that Dos Muertos had ever known fear.

A cool breeze arose, and I bought a soft drink and waited for the last.

His final car sped forth while the light was still yellow. It was a mustard-colored Ford convertible. As it went past him the first time, it blew its horn and turned on its windshield wipers. Everyone cheered, for they could see it had spirit.

Then it came to a dead halt, shifted into reverse, and backed toward him at about forty miles an hour.

He got out of the way, sacrificing grace to expediency, and it braked sharply, shifted into low gear, and sped forward again.

He waved the cape and it was torn from his hands. If he had not thrown himself over backward, he would have been struck.

Then someone cried: "It's out of alignment!"

But he got to his feet, recovered his cape, and faced it once more.

They still tell of those five passes that followed. Never has there been such a flirting with bumper and grill! Never in all of the Earth has there been such an encounter between *mechador* and machine! The convertible roared like ten centuries of streamlined death, and the spirit of St. Detroit sat in its driver's seat, grinning, while Dos Muertos faced it with his tinfoil cape, cowed it and called for his wrench. It nursed its overheated engine and rolled its windows up and down, up and down, clearing its muffler the while with lavatory noises and much black smoke.

By then it was raining, softly, gently, and the thunder still came about us. I finished my soft drink.

Dos Muertos had never used his monkey wrench on the engine before, only upon the body. But this time he threw it. Some experts say he was aiming at the distributor; others say he was trying to break its fuel pump.

The crowd booed him.

Something gooey was dripping from the Ford onto the

sand. The red streak brightened on Manolo's stomach. The rain came down.

He did not look at the crowd. He did not take his eyes from the car. He held out his right hand, palm upward, and waited.

A panting pumper placed the screwdriver in his hand and ran back toward the fence.

Manolo moved to the side and waited.

It leaped at him and he struck.

There was more booing.

He had missed the kill.

No one left, though. The Ford swept around him in a tight circle, smoke now emerging from its engine. Manolo rubbed his arm and picked up the screwdriver and cape he had dropped. There was more booing as he did so.

By the time the car was upon him, flames were leaping forth from its engine.

Now some say that he struck and missed again, going off balance. Others say that he began to strike, grew afraid and drew back. Still others say that, perhaps for an instant, he knew a fatal pity for his spirited adversary, and that this had stayed his hand. I say that the smoke was too thick for any of them to say for certain what had happened.

But it swerved and he fell forward, and he was borne upon that engine, blazing like a god's catafalque, to meet with his third death as they crashed into the fence together and went up in flames.

There was much dispute over the final *corrida*, but what remained of the tailpipe and both headlights were buried with what remained of him, beneath the sands of the Plaza, and there was much weeping among the women he had known. I say that he could not have been afraid or known pity, for his strength was as a river of rockets, his thighs were pistons, and the fingers of his hands had the discretion of micrometers; his hair was a black halo and the angel of death rode on his right arm. Such a man, a man who has known truth, is mightier than any machine. Such a man is above anything but the holding of power and the wearing of glory.

Now he is dead though, this one, for the third and final time. He is dead as all the dead who have ever died before the bumper, under the grill, beneath the wheels. It is well

that he cannot rise again, for I say that his final car was his apotheosis, and anything else would be anticlimactic. Once I saw a blade of grass growing up between the metal sheets of the world in a place where they had become loose, and I destroyed it because I felt it must be lonesome. Often have I regretted doing this thing, for I took away the glory of its aloneness. Thus does life the machine, I feel, consider man, sternly, then with regret, and the heavens do weep upon him through eyes that grief has opened in the sky.

All the way home I thought of this thing, and the hoofs of my mount clicked upon the floor of the city as I rode through the rain toward evening, that spring.

TRAFFIC PROBLEM

By William Earls

The Long Island Expressway at 4:00 P.M. on a weekday has been called "the world's longest parking lot." All of us have at one time or another been caught up in rush-hour traffic that was so incredible in its pandemonium, heat, and stench that we thought that this must surely be what hell is really like. And the worst part is the knowledge that when we finally got to where we were going we would probably have to engage in a mad struggle to find a parking place. Our cities often seem to be turning into oceans of concrete and rivers of asphalt.

And if you think it's bad now, just read on.

"Road crew, Mac." The big man tried to push him aside and Davis flashed the badge.

"This is still my office," he said. He crossed to the control board, buzzed the Director.

"Davis in," he said.

I suppose the old bastard will want a report already . . .

"Right," the Director's secretary said, "I'll tell him."

Leingen waved at him from the casualty table and he trotted over, flashed the badge and Leingen nodded. He was off duty now, officially relieved—and he looked relieved.

Lucky bastard will be home in three hours—if he makes it . . .

The casualty report was horrendous, up 4.2% over the day before—with 17 dead on the United Nations area overpass alone. He dialed Road Service.

"Road," the voice on the other end said.

"Traffic Manager. Send a bird. I'm going up for a look." He checked some of the other reports—two breakdowns on

the fifth level of the Tappan Zee bridge, both '79 Fords. Goddam people had no right driving two-year-old cars on the roads anyway. He buzzed Arrest Division.

"All 'seventy-nine Fords off the roads," he said.

"Rog." On the board he watched the red dots that were the Fords being shuttled off to the waiting ramps, clogging them. He flipped a visual to one of them, saw the cars jamming in and the bulldozers pushing them closer. The din around him was increasing and pieces of plasta-plaster were starting to fall from the ceiling.

"Slap up a privacy screen," he ordered. He received no answer and looked at one of the workmen driving the rivets for the girders. Jones wasn't there, he thought suddenly. Of course not, that girder is where his desk was. He'd miss Jones.

"That ain't a priority job, buddy," the workman said. "You want materials, get 'em from Construction."

Davis growled, checked his watch. 0807. Things were just moving into the third rush period. Almost on cue the building began to quiver as the lower echelon office workers hurtled by in their Lincolns and Mercuries to obscure little jobs in obscure little offices.

A short buzz came from the main phone. The Director.

"Yes, sir," Davis said.

"Davis?" the palsied voice said. *Die, you old bastard,* Davis thought. "Casualties are up all over."

"The roads are jammed, sir."

"You're Manager. Do something."

"We need more roads. Only you can authorize 'em."

"We don't have any more roads. But that traffic must move. Do what you have to." The voice went into a coughing spasm. "When you're Director, you build roads."

"Yes, sir." He punched off. All right, he'd move the traffic. Say this for the Director—he'd back a Manager all the way.

"The bird's here," the intercom said.

"Smith," Davis said. His assistant looked up from the main board. "You're in charge. I'm going up." He moved to the elevator, bounced up, flipped his telecorder to audio, caught the information as he hurtled toward the tenth floor.

"Major pileup at Statue of Liberty East," the speaker barked. "Seventeen cars and a school bus. Ambulance on

the scene. Structural damage on Fifth level East, Yankee Stadium Speedway. More accidents on Staten Island One, Two, Four, Ten, Thirteen, and Twenty-Two; East Side Four, Nine, and Eleven—" Davis punched off. Matters were worse than he had thought.

On the fifth floor he changed elevators to avoid the ramp from the exact-change lane to the fourth level, zipped to the roof and the waiting helicopter.

"Fifty-car pileup on Yankee Stadium Four," the helicopter radio screamed and he punched the button to Central.

"Davis."

"Yes, sir?"

"What's the time on next-of-kin identification?" he asked.

"Twenty-three minutes, sir."

"Make it nineteen. Inform all units."

"Yes, sir."

"Lift off," he growled at the pilot. He threw his eyes out of focus, watching the cars hurtling by the edge of the roof.

I could reach out and touch them—and have my arm torn off at 100 miles an hour . . .

He coughed. He always forgot to don his gas mask for the short trip from the elevator to the bird and it always bothered his lungs.

The smog was fortunately thin this morning, and he could see the gray that was Manhattan below him. Southward he could make out the spire of the Empire State Building rising forty stories above the cloverleaf around it and beyond that the tower of the Trade Center and the great hulk of the parking lot dwarfing it.

"Hook right," he ordered the pilot, "spin down along the river."

There was a pile-up at the Pier 90 crossover, and he saw a helicopter swooping down to pick up the mangled cars at the end of a magnet, swing out across the river to drop them into the New Jersey processing depot.

He buzzed the Director as he saw the wrecks piling up in front of the three big crunchers at the depot. They were hammering broken Fords and Buicks into three-foot lumps of mangled steel, spitting them onto the barges. The barges were then being towed out to Long Island Sound for the new jetport. But fast as the crunchers were, they were not

fast enough. With a capacity of only 200 cars an hour apiece, they could not keep pace with the rush-hour crack-ups.

"Yes, Davis," the Director wheezed.

"Would you call U.S. Steel," Davis asked. "We need another cruncher."

"Well, I don't know if we really do—but I'll call."

Davis punched off angrily.

His practiced eye gauged the flow of traffic on the George and Martha Washington Bridges. The cars were eighty feet apart and he ordered a close to seventy-two, effectively increasing the capacity by ten percent. That was almost as good as another level—but not good enough.

The traffic lane above the piers was packed and smoke from ships was rising between the two twelve-lane sections. Trucks loaded with imports paused for a moment at the top of the ramps where steam catapulted into the traffic. He saw one truck, loaded with what looked like steel safes, hit by a Cadillac, go out of control, hurtle over the edge of the roadway, and fall one hundred feet—five levels—to the ground. The safes went bouncing in every direction, slamming into cars on every level. Even two hundred feet above the scene he could hear the scream of brakes and the explosions as the autos crashed and burned. He punched for Control.

"Scramble an ambulance to Pier Forty-six, all levels," he said.

He smiled. It was always good to be the first to report an accident. It showed you hadn't forgotten your training. He had reported four one morning, a record. But now there were bounties for accident reporting and it was rare when a traffic man could actually turn one in. At one time traffic accidents had been reported by the police, but now they were too busy tracking down law violators. An accident was harmful only in that it broke the normal traffic flow.

Traffic was heavy on all levels, he saw—he could actually see only three levels down and there were as many as eight below that—and the main interchange at Times Square was feeding and receiving well. The largest in Manhattan, it spanned from 42nd Street to 49th and from Fourth to Eighth Avenues. There had been protests when construction had started—mostly from movie fans and li-

brary fanatics—but now it was the finest interchange in the world, sixteen lanes wide at the 42nd Street off ramp, with twelve exact change lanes. Even the library fans were appeased, he thought: it had been his idea to move the library lions from the old site—they would have been destroyed with the rest of the building had he not spoken—to the mouth of the Grand Central speed lane to Yankee Stadium.

The helicopter banked, headed down the West Side parkway toward the Battery interchange and the Statue of Liberty crossover. It had been clever of the design engineers to use the Bedloe's Island base of the statue for the crossover base—it had saved millions over the standard practice of driving piles into the harbor water. The copper had brought a good salvage price, too.

Of course, the conservationists, the live-in-the-past-people, had objected here, too. But, as always, they were shouted down at the protest meetings. The traffic had to roll, didn't it?

Below the helicopter, Manhattan was a seething mass of speeding cars—reds, blacks, blues, and this month's brilliant green against the background of concrete and asphalt. There were quick flashes of brake lights, frightened blurs as a tie rod snapped or a tire blew. Dipping wreckocopters swooped in to pluck cars and pieces of cars from the highways before the lanes jammed. The island was 200 lanes wide at the top, widened to 230 at the base with the north-south lanes over the sites of the old streets running forty feet apart, over, under, and even through the old buildings. It was the finest city in the world, made for and by automobiles. And he controlled, for eight hours a day anyway, the destiny of those automobiles. He felt the sense of power he always had here in the helicopter, swooping above the traffic. It passed quickly—it always did—and he was observing clinically, watching the flow.

"There," he said to the pilot, indicating the fifth lane on the pier route. A dull red Dodge was going sixty-five, backing up the traffic for miles. There was no room to pass, and, with the traffic boiling up out of the tunnels and bridges onto the road, a jam was inevitable. "Drop," he ordered, moved behind the persuader gunsight, lined the Dodge in the cross hairs.

He fired and watched the result. The dye marker

smashed on the Dodge's hood, glowed for a moment. Warned, the driver moved to a sane 95. But the dye stayed and the driver would be picked up later in the day—the dye was impossible to remove except with Traffic-owned detergent—and sentenced. For first clogging, the fine was only \$200, but for later offenses, drivers were banned from the road for five to 100 days, forced to ride the railways into town. Davis shuddered at the thought.

Battery Point and Bedloe's Island looked good and the copter heeled. He used the binoculars to check the Staten Island Freeway, saw that it was down to sixteen lanes coming into New York from the high of twenty-two. The main rush was almost over and he could start preparing for the early lunch rush.

There was still a pileup at the Trade Center. The one tower—two had been planned—was standing high above the highways around it, with the great bulk of the parking lot building rising above it, the smog line lapping at the seventy-ninth floor. He saw the red lights in the first 92 floors of the lot signifying full, knew that the remaining 40 floors would not take all of the cars still piling in from the twenty-five feeder lanes. He buzzed Control.

"Yes, sir?" the voice said.

"Davis. Get me Parks and Playgrounds."

"Parks and Playgrounds?" The voice was incredulous.

"Right." He waited and when a voice answered, spoke quickly, did his best to overpower the man on the other end.

"Traffic Manager Davis," he snapped. "I want Battery Park cleared. I'm preparing to dump two thousand cars there in five minutes."

"You can't—"

"The hell I can't! I'm Traffic Manager. Clear the park—"

What there was left of it—the grass fighting for air against the exhaust fumes, dying in the shadow of the interchange above it, stomped to death as the millions of city dwellers flocked to the only green in eleven miles—Central Park had been a bastion for a long time, but it was too open, too convenient. It was buried now under a rising parking lot and seven levels of traffic. As a concession to the live-in-the-pasters the animal cages had been placed on the parking lot roof and stayed there for two weeks

until they had been hit by a drunk in a Lincoln. There had been a minor flap then with the carbon-monoxide drugged animals prowling the ramps until they had been hunted down by motorcyclists.

"What about the people?" Parks and Playgrounds asked.

"Sorry about that. They have four and a half minutes." He punched off, buzzed Beacons and Buzzers.

"Davis," he said. "Re-route Battery Five, ramps two through ten, into Battery Park."

"Right." He buzzed Lower City, ordered Wall Street closed for seven blocks. Later in the day they'd have to reroute the traffic around it. No matter, the tie-up lasted for four hours anyway.

The big pile-up, as always, was at the Empire State Building, where the main north-south curved twelve lanes out of the way to avoid the huge building. And, as they curved, tires skidded on the pavement, cars clawed to the side and, day after day, car after car lost control on the corner, went plunging over the side to shatter on the ramps below. It was, in many ways, the best show in town, and office workers crowded the windows to watch the cars spin out of control. Today the traffic looked almost good and he clocked the pack at 110 on the corner, 115 coming out of it. Still not good enough, though—they were braking coming into the corner, losing time, and the line was thin as they came out of it. He watched a Buick skid, hit the guard-rail, tip, and the driver go flying out of the convertible top, land in the level below, disappear in the traffic stream. The car rolled, plummeted from sight.

"Home," he said. The helicopter dropped him on the roof and he gagged against the smog, trotted to the elevator, dropped. The building was shaking from the traffic noise and the hammering of rivets. He coughed on the dust.

He checked the casualty lists, initialed them. Above normal, with the Empire State section running 6.2% ahead of last week. He was listed as reporting the pier pile-up, and there was a report stating Battery Park was filled—there was also a note saying that the Director was catching hell for parking cars there. To hell with him, Davis thought. There was another complaint to his attention from Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Agnew. Two of their board members were caught in the Wall Street jam and were late for work. He threw it into the wastebasket. Outside (in-

side?)—hard to say with no wall on one side of the building—the workmen were throwing up the steel plates for the ramp, stinting on the bolts to save time.

"Put the damn bolts in," Davis roared. "That thing will shake enough anyway."

The din was tremendous even now, with seven ramps of traffic passing within thirty feet. It would be worse when the spur route was finished. He hoped that they would put the wall back on the office. He buzzed Smith, asked for a readout on the Empire State complex.

"Fourteen fatalities since nine o'clock."

It was now 10:07 and the pre-lunch rush was due to start in four minutes.

"Damn Empire anyway," he said. The United Nations interchange board went red and he went to visual, saw a twelve-car pileup on the fourth level, the bodies and pieces of bodies, the cars and pieces of cars falling into the General Assembly. Damn! he could expect another angry call from the Secretary General. Damn foreigners anyway, when did they get the idea that their stupid meetings were more important than traffic?

The red phone rang—the Director—and he lifted it. "Davis."

"Everything's running higher," the Director wheezed. "What's the story?"

"Empire's the big tie-up," Davis said. "That and some construction."

"Do something. I gave you the authority."

"Get rid of Empire," Davis said. "Get another forty decks on the Trade parking lot, too."

"Can't be done." The hell it can't, Davis thought. You're just afraid of the conservationists. Coward. "Do something."

"Yes, sir." He waited until the phone clicked dead before he slammed it down. He took a deep breath of the air in the office—it was even better than smoking. Then he began to bark orders over the All Circuits channel.

"Scramble another ten wreckocopters," he snarled. With half again as many copters, wrecks would be cleared that much faster. "Cut next-of-kin time to fifteen minutes." He was going out on a limb there, but it would speed the processing of accidents through Brooklyn and New Jersey. Now, with the rush hour just over and another begin-

ning, wrecks were piling up outside the receiving centers and the crunchers were idle half the time. "Up minimum speed five miles an hour." That would make it at least 100 miles an hour on every highway, 65 on the ramps. He flipped to visual, saw Beacons and Buzzers post the new speeds, saw the cars increase speed. Wrecks and Checks flashed the going aloft of the ten copters and he breathed easier, flipped to visual at Empire, saw the day's third major pile-up on the third level, cursed. He closed the 34th Street cutoff, ordered three payloaders to dump all wrecks right there, flashed a message to Identification to have a team posted. By midnight, when the traffic eased, they could begin moving the cars and bodies to New Jersey.

The red phone rang, three rings. Double urgent. He grabbed it, barked his name.

"The Director just dropped dead," a hysterical voice said. "You're acting Director."

"I'll be right there." Acting, hell. There were six hours left on his shift and he could get something done now. He turned to Smith. "You're Manager now," he said, "I just got bumped upstairs."

"Right." Smith barely looked up. "Reopen Yonkers Four, lanes one through nine," he said.

He had made the transition from assistant to Manager in an instant. Training, Davis thought.

He took the elevator to the eighth floor, the Director's office. The staff was quiet, looking down at the body on the floor. There were four boards flashing, a dozen phones ringing. Davis snapped orders quickly.

"You, you, and you, answer the phones," he said. "You and you, get the boards. You, drag that body out of here. You—" he pointed at the Director's—his—secretary—"call a staff conference. Now."

He looked at the boards, checked Traffic, Beacons and Buzzers, Wrecks and Checks, Gate Receipts and Identification. Fatalities was doing extremely well—Wellborn was the new Manager here. The crunchers were doing well. Wrecks was reporting above normal pickup time.

"The Director's dead," he told the staff. "I'm new Director." They all nodded. "Most departments look pretty good," he said. He looked at Smith. "Traffic flow is lousy," he said. "Why?"

"Empire," Smith said. "We're losing twenty percent just going around that goddamned building."

"How are your crews fixed for a major job?" Davis asked the Construction Manager.

"Okay." The Manager ticked off eleven small jobs.

"The problem is at Empire," Davis said flatly. "We can't get around the building." He looked at Construction. "Tear it down," he said. "Meeting adjourned."

Later that day he looked south from the roof. The Destruction team had the top ten floors off the Empire State Building and a corner cut out of the fortieth floor with a lane of traffic whipping through it. The flow was good and he smiled. He couldn't remember doing anything so necessary before.

STATION HR972

By Kenneth Bulmer

There are more than 200,000 service stations in the United States. At one time there were substantially more, but the recent energy shortage and the resulting maneuvering by the large oil companies has put thousands of the so-called "independents" out of business. The service station is itself an American institution. We can say without hesitation that it is one of the less aesthetically appealing results of the Age of the Automobile, but for better or worse, high concentrations of stations on busy urban intersections and the lonely pump at a rural crossroads symbolize an important part of American life. In addition, service stations have provided one of the most important sources of employment for our youth and for our stickup men.

Here Ken Bulmer, at one time one of the most prolific writers in science fiction, shows us a "service station" of the future, where the services provided are somewhat different from those available today.

Most mornings Bartram would see the crane driver from the auto repair station walk over to HR972 for coffee and a post mortem on the night's incidents and possibilities for the day. All the time the driver sat blockily in the rest area with his thick fingers cradling the plastic coffee cup, his head would be half-turned, like a bird eyeing a worm, listening on his earphone for the first notes of a call.

Libby, the torso technician for whose sake he walked the hundred extra yards for coffee, played it cool, daily less shy, daily more inclined to talk about her own han-

dling of units and less to listen to his accounts of rapid crane manipulations.

The first time Bartram had said: "So long as you maintain your efficiency rating, Libby, I'm prepared to allow you to flirt between incidents." He'd quirked an eye at the fidgeting driver. "What Samuelson has to say about his crane driver being a clear hundred yards away from his cab is none of my affair."

Now he would pass them with a small friendly smile as he went up onto the roof of the station to take his morning observations.

"Morning, Chief," the night super, Cy Weiss, a small, dark, intense man with a woman's charm, would say as Bartram appeared. He'd go through the night's incidents in a kind of ritual pronouncement: "An easy one." "Bad." "Two fingers is all, didn't even have to bring her in." And so on, in a brief, capsulated edition of the night's news.

"Morning, Cy." Bartram would wait until Weiss had left and he had been joined by Karl Grecos, the day super; and then he would cock his head toward the sky, ritually, and say, according to the state of the weather: "Big one today"; or, "Rain. Should slow things"; or, "Clouds clearing, we'll get them through this afternoon."

Grecos had the wide, flat shoulders of an athlete, fair luxuriant hair from his mother, and a quizzical smile that seemed to ask imponderable questions. But his hands never shook when he held a scalpel. He owed this to a fondness for oily food, and his waistline was beginning to advertise this.

They both leaned on the guardrail and looked out on the road.

The Road.

From here the limits of the ten-mile stretch for which Station HR972 was responsible lay on the one hand behind the swell of the hill and on the other lost in a gentle undulation of the land leading up to Sennocke Forest. The road lay across the countryside like a fat white worm. Transparent roofing arched across the twelve lanes, hanging in a cunning curve of convoluting strength, unbuttressed and unguyed, a free overarching sweep of plastic

that membraned the artificial environment of the road from nature's anarchy without.

Occasionally through whims in the course of the road the northbound twelve lanes could be seen, a silvery-gray rotundity, beyond their own southbound highway. A brooding awareness of waiting sharpened movement on the road, so that the mechanics around the helicopters on the roof landing spots, the medics sitting checking their morning take-over logs in the ready area, the men carrying in supplies, and others carting away the detritus of the night all moved as though imbued with that breath of waiting.

A few cars spun through the morning light, individual and widely separated on the road.

On this morning Bartram pushed at his sleeves and said: "I can smell it, Karl. Meteorology gave us twelve full hours of sunshine. No rain. We'll be busy."

"Yeah." Grecos breathed through his nose, hard. "Cy had it easy. That means—"

"The road," said Bartram. "Just look at it. It's an affront to nature, really—yet . . ."

"I always think," Grecos said, turning to lean on the parapet with his elbows angular, "it looks just like an extra-long pipe of spaghetti my kids like to draw out on the table."

Bartram laughed. "You mean before they add tomato sauce."

After a short splintery silence, Bartram added: "I meant tomato sauce, Karl."

"I know you did, Chief. Gets you all ways, the road."

A helicopter's rotors twanged around with a startling roar and then choked away into whickering gulps of air. The cars speeding like arterial blood cells along the road made little noise. Already the heat of the sun's reflections was activating anticondensation devices on the roof. Vents opened like anemones as thermocouples reacted.

Bartram pivoted the pedestal-mounted binoculars and sighted on the auto repair station a hundred yards north. Men over there were working about their copters and cranes.

"If Samuelson speaks to me about one of my staff luring one of his away—I'll be hard put to it not to be rude."

"Samuelson's all right, Chief. He's new on the road. He'll learn."

"If he doesn't he'll be back in a breaker's yard packaging cars into tin cans."

The gray-green plastic surface of the road reflected no highlights. Its semitactile tread hugged the cars to it as they sped imperiously past. Most of the cars so far this morning had selected the inner and center quads. The twelve lanes were divided into three groups of four lanes each, the inner subdivided for heavy trucks and articulateds, and lighter trucks and coaches. Checking the speed radar meters, Bartram saw only six cars traveling at over a hundred and fifty miles an hour, all on the outer two lanes of the center quad.

An automobile on the inner center quad swept past at ninety miles an hour.

"The fool!" said Bartram heatedly. Then the high, irritating wail of a police car tailing the laggard telescoped time, and the offending car increased its speed to conform to the law.

"That'll cost him a fat fine," said Grecos with satisfaction.

The police car cut down the off-staging ramp that swept around beneath the road and emerged again on the service road leading to HR972 and the auto repair station.

"It'll be Barney," said Bartram. "He'll have the feel of the road by now." That was part of the ritual too.

They went down in the elevator, talking quietly. Past the rest area, Bartram saw with a smirk that Libby's crane-driving beau had gone. The sound of coffee cups being washed swished steamingly from the kitchen.

The ceremonial quality of those early morning actions, genuflecting through the build-up time of waiting, helped men and women to adjust off-road mentalities to the demands of the motorway. Barney, heavy, muscular, his black patrolman's uniform creasing sloppily from too much sitting in cars, puffed as he stood up, one hand grasping the car door. Bartram smiled.

"Morning, Barney. Big one today?"

"Yeah. That's for sure. Did you see that creepy-crawly horror? Ninety in the hundred-twenty-five, hundred-fifty lane!"

"You sireened him smartly."

"Sireened him! I'd like to put a boot in his guts!"

Walking with Barney back to the rest area for a coffee, Bartram said, "How's Tommy?"

At once Barney enthused. "He's doing just great! Law school suits him. He'll be a great man one day. One thing's for sure, I'll do anything to stop him being a cop on the road, so help me."

"He could do a lot worse." Bartram caught Grecos' eye and smiled; then they entered the station building; and, with the road out of vision, an unnatural relaxation took possession of them so that they spoke and moved with a louder, more flamboyant gesture.

Outside the road waited.

Grecos walked across to check the flow meters.

"Building up, chief," he called. "Better than ten a minute and rising."

"No worries yet."

"I heard tell they were talking about cutting down the distance intervals." Barney sloshed his coffee around, watching the wave ripples. "They figured they could set the radars to half the distance. Pack more cars in a length that way."

"They're close enough as it is," Bartram said dourly.

"That's what we say. But they have to move traffic. Ten thousand cars want to hit the road—something has to give."

"Yeah. And we know what gives."

High atop the station, in every room, in the rest area, in the garages, on the helicopter spots, above the basins in the washrooms, the auto repair alarm shrilled. Hard on that strident call the alarm for HR972 chittered in harsh counterpoint.

Chairs crashed back. Coffee cups spilled. Feet hammered concrete. Helicopter vanes whirred into shining invisibility. The place emptied as though a time bomb set for *now* was found between everyone's legs.

Bartram's earphones said: "HR972. Grid six two eight. Center quad, two outer lanes."

That was one point two eight miles south of the station, set midway on its ten-mile stretch of road.

The helicopters rose buzzing. They slanted away steeply, low over the rounded continuous cylinder of the road, jets roaring. Early morning sunshine caught their white paint and dazzled from the red crosses.

Charlie, the ladder handler, crouched by the open trap in the floor of the chopper. His rough scarred hands grasped the controls, and wind tugged at his white coveralls. Bruce and Pete, the hook men, lay stomach down in front of him, their hands thrust deeply into the gloved remote-control equipment. Bartram glanced back. Everyone in the belly of his lead copter stood at stations, covered, helmeted, goggled, packs with their glaring red crosses strapped in regulation positions.

"Nice and smoothly now," he said over the intercom. "First today. Let's set the pattern."

The hook men moved their hands with gentle feeling motions. Below them at the end of the stinglike probes mechanical grappnels moved in unison. The copter pilot, Sally, a good flier, said, "Here we go. Hooks!"

Bruce and Pete struck, hooked the rings in the roof sections below, hoicked.

Like a bivalve forded open by a marlinspike the transparent roof panels opened upward and outward. Charlie dropped his ladder clean through. It hit the gray-green plastic road beside a red sedan on its side, foam-smothered, rear telescoped. Two roof panels further along, the auto repair gang had their cranes down and were lifting the green roadster. It squealed like a trapped animal as metal tore. Police had sealed off the two outer lanes of the center quad, their furthest light and radar beacon four miles back.

Bartram turned on his back jets and dropped straight through the hole, boots together, hands on the controls, seeing the flaring jet stabbing below him. His control line sizzled down the ladder. He hit the road hard, staggered a pace, then snapped the link from the ladder and dived at the red saloon.

His team followed in order, moving smoothly about their work. He saw Libby, calm and unflurried; her jet cut as her feet touched down.

The auto repair gang had the yellow car and the late-

model General Autos sedan, the last in this small, four-car pile up, hoisted away. Only the General Autos sedan could be recognized by make and year; the other cars were merely colored contortions of metal. The sweeping gang were already running their giant vacuum cleaners across the road, the broken shards of metal and glass, the bits of plastic and the odd items of personal belongings pinging as they whirled up into the bags.

"Hurry it up!" Bartram shouted over his phone. "The auto boys have nearly finished."

Team One had cut away the scarlet car's side. The team leader leaned in with his shears and cut away the driver's harness in four neat snips. The passengers sat cocooned in the airbags that had inflated around them in the moment of impact as transducers sensed the acceleration rate change. Swift stabbing jabs punctured the bags. Hands and grapnels took the passengers out. By this time the scarlet car, foam dripping, trailing metal and twisted strands of cabling, had been hoisted twenty feet above the road level.

The teams from HR972 worked either clinging to the car or treading air on their back jets.

The driver was hoisted away first. The harness had saved his life, and the absence of a dashboard and the deep padding over every projection had saved him from fatal injury. But his ribs were mangled, his pelvis splintered and flattened, his face congested. Libby took over with her assistant torso technicians, was already working on him as they floated up through the hole into the belly of the waiting copter.

"He'll do," she called down flatly.

The two woman passengers had been bruised from neck to knees. Calmly Bartram stripped their flowery dresses away, snipped and snapped at lacy underclothes, revealed white flesh turning green and blue as he watched. The team took over, cocooning the women, plastic compresses and ointments covering up in soothing balm as antishock injections turned brutal unconsciousness into controlled sleep. Bartram swung away.

Team Two was working on the green roadster, their white covered figures clustering around the car, strung under the roof like white moths around a green lamp.

Team Three had taken the auto-stretcher-bound driver of the General Autos sedan out, and he was already on his way up to the copter.

"Team Four!" called Bartram sharply. "What's the holdup?"

The yellow car had been concertinaed. Despite all the cunning guile of automobile manufacturers in transducer-actuated airbags, in padded safety within, in plastic-layered stretch glass, in box-girder construction, the yellow car looked like a cardboard carton that has been smacked between two fists. The road wheels had been taken away from where they had been scattered across the road. But the doors had not opened; their safety locks functioning still under the one hundred gravities stress at the moment of impact.

Team Four was trying to cut its way in.

Team Leader Steve said, breathlessly: "Jammed hard. Cutter flame too near driver. Going in from the roof."

"Well, get with it, Steve! Everyone else is away."

The other three cars had been emptied of casualties, the copters already whirring away back to HR972. Police were retrieving their radar and sight beacons, progressively pulling in to the site of the incident. The four cars hung from the roof, and the auto repair gangs were beginning to take them out through the roof panels.

Police Super Metcalfe walked slowly up the white line marking the two outer lanes of the center quad. His face looked grave and calm, down-tilted, the light catching the slant of his jaw and the white bristle of his eyebrows. He walked as a captain paces his bridge during a storm. Then he looked up with a sharp, decisive movement.

"All clear. You may open the lanes again."

His black car snarled alongside, and he stepped in and was whisked away. Sixty seconds later the first of the traffic whispered past the spot where the incident had occurred.

The road was open again.

All the time, traffic had been passing in a long blurred procession of speed on all the other ten lanes, unconcerned, hardly seeing, matter-of-fact.

Bartram angrily started to call Team Four.

Steve cut across. "Belaying cutting. Driver dead."

Bartram wiped his mouth with a tissue. "Well, you can't win them all."

They packed up and coptered back to the station.

The white buildings like shoeboxes below tilted as the copter swung for a landing, and Bartram's earphones said in the voice of the dispatcher: "Incident for HR972. Grid one nine five. Outer quad, three inner lanes."

"Up," said Bartram. Then: "Outer quad—that's always rough."

Grid position lay one point nine five miles from the beginning of their section as it emerged from Sennock Forest. Bartram looked ahead. "Twelve lanes of high-speed death," he said. "I must be feeling old."

This time they hit the road before the auto repair gangs had lifted all the cars. The outer quad was the high-speed quad. Two hundred, two hundred fifty miles an hour, strictly lane controlled. A pile-up could telescope a hundred cars, radar alarms locked to brakes or no damn radar alarms. Bartram sent support Teams Thirty through Forty to check the cars stopped, undamaged, in back of the incident.

"Look for internal bleeding, shock, cracked or bruised ribs, general buffeting." He cracked the whip. "You don't have to hit a car to damage yourself. Don't let any through until they've been checked."

Libby jetted past holding a girl with no legs, her aides with the plastic bags and the pumps hovering beneath.

The three lanes held a tangle of cars like a child's toy-car box at bedtime.

Libby's voice screamed, "You can't sew your damn legs until I've replaced the liver and pancreas!"

Gloria, the limb technician, screamed back: "Well hurry it up, Libby! The legs are out of deep freeze, and they won't wait all day!"

The swab-up boys were already squirting chemicals to clear off the blood from the road's neutral gray-green.

In the hospital box temporarily tethered from the roof, Karl Grecos called down, his mike still worn beneath his surgeon's mask: "Chief! Unit's brain damaged too extensively. He'll never think normally—well, you know! Permission to check out—I've a waiting list—"

"Check him out, Karl."

Handlers sheeted out the stretcher, and another unit slid onto the table. Grecos trepanned and operated with an efficiency seldom matched on the road; but even he could not work miracles.

Gloria had begun attaching fresh legs to the girl, and Libby was deep within the belly of the girl's father, replacing kidneys that had been smashed like squashed oranges.

A handler triggered a pick-up truck across. Discarded legs and arms protruded like pencils from a glass. Bartram looked closer, said: "What's that head doing in there, Bill?"

"I had the okay on that from Mister Grecos, Chief. Clean decapitation off that roadster. Guy was driving with the top down. Took it off clean as a whistle."

"Check."

Cars were being hauled up to the roof out of the way to await their turn to be lifted through the access panels. The auto repair gangs were sweating it out today. Personnel from HR972, too, weren't sitting down on the job. Bartram chivvied and chased them. "You haven't begun the shift yet!"

"Can you hold that girl—that unit—on intravenous oxy till we hit the station?" Libby asked viciously.

"Just about." The nurse aide stepped up the flow.

"What's the problem, Libby?" asked Bartram, jetting across.

"All out of her size capacity lungs, chief. Why do these girls all have the same lung demands, I wonder?"

"Make a note to carry more spare lungs in that size bracket. I'll confirm in standing orders."

"Check."

Some of the choppers lifted off, their red crosses shining bravely against white paintwork. The auto repair gangs cleared their area. The police began to pull in their radar beacons. Police Super Metcalfe's car spun up, and he jumped out, ready to give the final word.

"Clear?" he asked Bartram.

"Clear. Didn't count the tally."

"Not too bad. Fifty cars—we think. Some of the pieces were rather small."

"Not as small as some of the bits we pick up."

Metcalf grimaced. "You can keep your job, Bartram."

"If people intend to drive on the highways, then someone has to look out for them. What else should we do? Let them bleed to death by the roadside? Let them lose an arm or a leg or a liver and go through life without? When we have banks stuffed with human spare parts?"

"All right, Bartram. My job is to keep the road open. Your job is to repair the humans on the road. We work together."

"So long as we need roads then we'll be needed."

Metcalf began his ceremonial walk down the white line.

"Until they design foolproof cars and foolproof roads, you mean."

"When they do."

"They will, one day."

"Speed the day, then."

Metcalf waved his arms, shooing the last of the vacuum cleaners away. He signaled. His black car picked him up. Bartram jettied up to his copter. The road was open again.

Sixty seconds later traffic flowed past the site of the incident, traveling at two hundred, two hundred fifty miles an hour.

This time they made it back to the station. At Station HR972 a dynamic energy possessed them as kits were made up to strength, more spare arms and legs, kidneys, livers, jawbones, more plasma, more whole blood. More splints and bandages and vials of rare and costly drugs. More of everything to repair the human frame subjected to force it had not been designed to withstand, forces that would in another place and another time have killed irrevocably.

Down in the hospital, medics were checking out units that had been processed, seeing them onto the ambulance service stretchers, making sure they brought back their own stretchers and skeletons—stores were touchy about unnecessary waste of material.

"There they go," Bartram said to Grecos, watching the ambulances pull away. They ground out in low gear up the service ramps and so out onto the road for conveyance to the city hospitals.

"Yeah," said Grecos. "The old pipeline."

"All patched up and smiling; they'll be out on the road again soon. Maybe we'll even have some of them through here again."

"Still and all, you have to *have* the road. I mean, roads are the lifeblood of our transportation system, aren't they?"

"Oh, sure," said Bartram, rubbing his jaw and remembering. "Sure."

"I mean—" Grecos looked his perplexity. "You can't legislate roads out of existence. I mean—they exist. They have to. How could our civilization exist, else?"

Bartram checked the flow meters. "Coming through better than fifty a minute now."

The alarms screamed. "Incident, HR972. Grid eight five six. Inner two lanes, center quad. Overspill to outer lane, inner quad."

"Hell!" said Grecos, running. "That'll be a coachload of kids. I can smell it."

Bartram snapped his transceiver over. "Additional juvenile supplies. Urgent. Get with it."

As they climbed into the copter, he said gently: "It's a quiet one today, Karl. Wait till tomorrow. Holiday. We'll be busy then."

The copter rose, the sun shining on the red crosses.

"Yeah. Busy. But I figure I'd rather be here than there."

He jerked a thumb at the road.

Like a white worm devouring the world, the road thrummed on, uncaring.

A DAY ON DEATH HIGHWAY

By H. Chandler Elliott

Coming-of-age in America is directly linked with the automobile. Indeed, maturity is defined for many as being legally able to drive a car. The hot rod and the drag race were burning issues only a few years ago, and the leading test of courage and manhood during one's high school years was too often the drag or the game of "chicken." However, the blame may not have rested entirely with the kids—witness the behavior of Little League parents and the action of the parents in this story.

H. Chandler Elliott wrote only a handful of science fiction stories, including "Inanimate Objection" (Galaxy, 1954) and the present selection. We wish there were more.

I

*Sept. 11, 1987
(Earth time)*

I want a record of this to go with the stereos I took. I've been in history! So I've snake-hipped the dicto-type for "homework."

I'll get off the mark at this lawyer's office. I was there to get shown my Pop was a dust-eater. Wotta laff! I was right up in the front seat with him, bucking this frame-up. He's so get-off-the-road, and he wasn't letting this old shyster pass him. He said nonchalant, "Look, Mr. Craik. I'm retaining you to *fight* this biased, vindictive judgment, not lecture me on it, to protect *my rights*."

Craik mugged: "That assumes you've left me some rights to protect, Mr. Blaire. You haven't. You are per-

manently debarred from operation of any power vehicle. I can do nothing further for you."

"Appeal! Fix it! I can pay." And he sure can.

The old moke tightened his mouth: "I infer you made the money by methods to match your driving record, not by grasp of essentials. I'll try again. This biased, vindictive judgment was handed down by the highest court your case can reach. Can you grasp *that*?"

Pop came right back like the great sportsfan he is, "Well, we can contest those two-bit charges I hadn't time to fight when they were made. I know they can't debar me finally on uncontested stuff."

The old guy looped down his eyelids: "If you'd ever bothered to appear in court yourself, or even read the transcripts, you would also know that all charges have been contested. Apparently you've been so cotton-wooled by insurance and connections and smart lawyers, you think you can brush off even child-murder."

Pop bounced up, ready to ditch the moke: "Why, you . . .!"

"Your failure was no thanks to you. Would you have to kill children in actual fact to sober you? The community is not minded to let you try the experiment. This isn't 1975, you know."

The two-timing old right-laner! I'd been told to keep my muffler cut, but there's times when you surge or burst. I surged, "And don't we ever get to score? A bunch of mokes get him in a jam, and a fresh cop calls us Flight of the Stumblebum—because we have a yellow 'n' black zoom. Does my Pop have to take that gravel?"

Craik looked at me like I was a parking ticket. "Well, I suppose a lad should be loyal to his father. Pity it's not in a better cause. So, yes, my budding Big Shot, he does. On triple probation, he drove with such dashing irresponsibility that he sheared off three steel guard-posts and barely missed a group of children. He'll take what anyone calls him, and thank them it wasn't worse." He swung back at Pop. "I took your case to pay off a favor to Sam Hardy. I consider I've paid in full. And the case is closed."

Pop kept a manly silence. Mom took over: "But, Mr. Craik, how can my husband do business without a car? A Plutomat representative can't walk up to a prospect's door like a peddler. This destroys my family's livelihood."

"Your husband should have considered that sooner, Mrs. Blaire."

My dad just boiled to hear her having to take the old honk-honk from minions of the law. I've never been much on girls because Mom is my ideal, and only my young sister Judy comes in that custom model. And I was just a skinny Teener, helpless to defend the family honor. But I sneaked a squeeze of her hand.

Pop said grimly, "Then these fanatics have ruined me. I have no place to go in this so-called Free World."

Craik shrugged: "Then find a Parallel that will take you, and get Translated, Mr. Blaire. That would solve everybody's problems." Obviously he was including his own.

I perked up. Translation, switch to a parallel time, might be good.

Pop said, "That costs a fortune."

Craik shrugged again: "It might cost less than your dauntless career here. I'll send my account." He froze us out like trash.

This record being for posterity, I better give the true facts, which are already being suppressed. Because I've boned up on them.

So, this LLL pest started in '75, the Golden Age of Go. A bunch called the Regular Guys had gotten the laws modernated—"safe and reasonable speed," nationwide. They backed Bucky Kooznik, who'd been framed in a speed-trap, and won in Supreme Court. They backed Senator Smurge for Vice President—the prince who got a national speed law laughed into the wreckers by tacking on an amendment to make the limit ninety—and got him in.

Well, this low-octane third party, the Life and Limb League (Lily-Livered Lunks, we called them), tried to buck the traffic. Their candidate, Bob Green, had had a kid killed and had sort of blown his tires. Well, sure, like Pop says, it's too bad but we can't all live in bungalows because kids fall downstairs. Anyway, LLL got a loud boff and lost all its deposits. Only Green kept squawking about how hiway deaths jumped from 87,000 in '76, to 116,000 in '78; and he signed up relatives and friends of "victims," and soreheads who'd got bunged up and couldn't be sports about it, and natural-born cranks and scaredy-pants. You wouldn't think people would vote to get themselves traffic

tickets. But in '78, LLL won seats in Congress, and more in '80.

So we stopped laughing and fought back. We sued a paper for a cartoon of Smurge with his arms around a goony driver and a skeleton, saying, "My Buddies!" And the court ratted on us, and it upheld disgusting photos of crashes and libels that said more than "the car went out of control." So drivers got nervous and the "toll" climbed on.

Then, in '84, Green got in, and showed what a fanatic at the wheel will do. Laws, laws, laws. We said "They can't arrest everybody." Oh, no? Fines, confiscations, jail for thousands of respectable people. And a Gestapo of Lily-white drivers'd spot you using the old elbow or boomin' the amber, and you'd get a stinking card that you'd lost points. Twenty-five points got you a fine and a goo-talk about "mental attitudes." Blah! What about guts and skill and all that?

Well, we figured there'd soon be enough people sore to give us a comeback. So LLL claimed they'd saved 30,000 lives in '85. So what the heck, it wouldn't have been *you* anyway. But there aren't many real fighters like Pop, and the Old Cause was driven to the curb.

Pop had to drive home real humble because if they caught him now, they'd jail him, *him*, a free citizen. But he was looking stern and unbowed, like a guerrilla hero in tri-di.

So presently I said, "Pop, let's do it!"

Mom chimed in, "Yes, Gail, if you can't work *here*, let's at least ask about it." Mom's real practical under the hood.

Judy was keen too. At fourteen, in Ye Good Olde Daze, she'd have been a zee already. Now, she'd have to wait two years.

So Pop got into passing gear. And just a week later he came home with his hat cocked and his heels clicking, and summoned us all to the tridiroom. "Well, keeds," he said, "they sure picked on the wrong man when they picked on ol' Buck Blaire. Biggest favor anyone ever did us. It seems there's a world called Jehu (some crackjaw gibberish in *their* language) after some old prophet. Anyway,

Plutomat's granted me planetary franchise. Izzat good or is it?

"And tape this, keeds! That planet's set up for *adults*. They're drivin' fools, wonderful roads, most powerful zooms anywhere, *and*, get this, nary a traffic law or a traffic court on the planet."

Judy puzzled: "But Daddy, they must have *some* laws, like which side you drive on . . ."

Pop's always indulged Judy. "Well, honey, that's *rules*; and anyone with sense knows when rules do and don't matter. Like if I drive on the left on an empty street, whose business is it? See, Judy, put deadheads off the road, leave things to skill and experience, and you're *safe*. Their accident-rate's just about nil—naturally."

"Well, it sounds funny to me. You be careful." Mom said.

"You been skull-scrubbed by Triple-L, keed? Your never come out front unless you muscle into openings, like fast. That's the secret of all big operators—Caesar, Napoleon, Buck Blaire—split-second decisions. We've gotta take off in a cloud of clamshells, and we can't wait for a lecture course. But you can vote on it. Now. All in favor of saying Nay, say Aye. Nobody? Carried! Oh, by the way, old Craik ain't such a bad old moke after all. He tipped me off on this Jehu place himself the other day."

"Huh!" I thought. "I wouldn't trust that pussy-schnook much."

But Pop took off with his rubber scorchin': Plutomat contract, Translation permit, appointment with the movers. The skids and zees in my gang were cynical; but I knew I'd get my own back, and I just sat tight and soaked up Jehuan by hypnophone.

Came the Day. A crew put up a frame around our lot, higher than the house, and into the ground. I asked the foreman if it marked out the block that was going to be swapped with a block of Jehu.

"You aren't as dumb as you look, kid," he said, "which must be a consolation to your folks. That's what it does."

"Thanx," I said and strolled off. Gee, I hate a fresh guy!

Sure, a butterfly-collector could have had a field-day in my stomach, when the fresh foreman called all his gang out and began countdown. Mom and Judy were too bunny

to come out, but Pop and I stood on the steps. I felt revved up, then, like beating another zoom around a curve, and at Minus Five I called to all the skids in the crowd watching, "Here go the Regulars. We will Return!" like that historical guy on tri-di. Pop just stood stern and unbowed.

Wotta zump! Fifty light-years? Gimme a yippee-cart on Thrill-Hill! No stars streaking past, no roar, no icy chill. Just a jutter in your gizzard and there you were on a street like the old one with the houses shuffled. Even the crew to take down the frame looked the same. But not the guy who was there to welcome us; *he* had a lah-de-dah coat with wide skirts and lace like in Abe Washington's time, but he was a big, hard-looking zow like a zoom-bike cop. His zoom was a weirdy, too. Whee enough like an import job and done in this novelty one-tone finish, but no jem-krust trim, no swordfish roof-crest, no flared bumpers; it wouldn't have helped *my* eggo much. The only real decoration was a leaping red tiger on all panels. He said he was to be our Patron, name of Thrangar Glash.

I gave him the old Hi-de-ho and he froze my fuel-line. But when Mom and Judy came out, he swooned them with his bowing and oil-pressure. And when Mom was disappointed at the view, he explained, "This is just the Terran suburb, Madam. When I have advised you all on our, ah, driving customs, you can visit the main city."

Pop scowled: "I was told you drove by common sense."

Glash gave him a lopsided look: "True. But common sense differs in different places, sir. Shall we go in?"

So we did, and Pal Patron Glash gave us the route-map. And had I been mucho right about old Schnooks Craik!

Sure, they had no traffic laws or cops, no penalty points, no fines, no nothing. Sure! Only just this: If you merely annoyed another driver, much less bent his tin, he could challenge you to fight him. They fought in a public arena, on a sort of yippee-cart called a whippet, with sort of bull-whips. You wore leather armor, only the defender got less, and darn little if he'd hurt or killed someone. "Course," Glash drawled, "even for blood-guilt, the limit's twenty minutes, and sometimes a dashing player comes off with his life."

"His *l-life?*" Mom said. "With whips?"

"Oh, a very spirited weapon, ma'am. I've dueled little, having been bred to courtesy, but"—he touched his left cheek, which was all scarred—"one keeps in practice with one-cheek affairs, in case one becomes seriously involved."

So he gave us the layout, and they had it set up like some game. Kids, gals, old gaffers, if you drove you were liable. No subs, not for wives or kids or sweeties. Only a Court of Honor appointed one if a bully had fixed a fight on somebody weaker or when an innocent guy was killed or disabled. A woman bashed a man's zoom, she fought. Fair enough. Like pal Thrangar said, "We're all equal, eh? Well, there's no chivalry between equals, only courtesy." And if you didn't play up you were outlaw, and they'd ram you, or run you off the road and you had no comeback. All tied up tighter 'n a sales contract.

Finally Pop said, "I've been framed. I was lied into this."

"Really, sir? Our embassy provided no literature?"

Well, who reads *literature*? The *real* dope they'll shove in your face, Pop always says. And they hadn't. So it was same as lying. Huh?

Pop said, "I was told this was a free society."

"My dear Blaire, a society is free only to choose its rules. An aggressive race like yours, or mine, craves to domineer. You've got to control that itch from running wild in millions of free spirits."

"Yeh-yeh, sure. By common sense. Now me . . ."

"Ah, *yours*, naturally. Mine too, I trust. But—everyone's? No, you've just three systems that work: Public law, which irked you; posse law to hunt down pests, which"—he flicked an eyebrow—"irked you even more; or a code of honor."

Pop scowled. He always says, the first freedom oughta be freedom from preach. Then he hit back: "O-kay! Anything you jokers can do, I can pass you."

And I felt proud again.

"True sporting spirit, sir. So, study our code and our manners in practice. Get your whippet and join a school of arms. Then I'll introduce you to our Arena." And he flourished himself out.

Back in the hall, Pop said "Hullo!" and picked up a letter that must have come before we left Earth. Inside

was a sheet of letterhead, "Craik, Creak, Croak and Crock," and on it, in quotes:

"When insolence outrunneth law, men customarily arm themselves to chastise offense on the body of the offender. As the proverb saith: No courtesy sans valor."

Leon da Milhão.

The old speed-trap! He was giving us the razz. But we'll show him.

II

Oct. 3, 1987

Well, we've started. At first Pop was sore all the time, like he was stuck behind a squad-car. At dinner he'd burst out, "Ahhh, what yokels! Yap-yap with the horns every move you make, yap-yap. Back-seat driving from other people's back seats—it's going to rattle even me into fender-denting. It's a good thing our Thunderbolt Twelve can accelerate out of anything these lunks can mess up."

"Ahh, you've been skull-scrubbed by Triple-L. Let 'em try."

As for us, this town's got nothing for Teeners. Whippet-school *could* be fun. Whippets *are* like a yippee-cart with a saddle instead of a seat, to give you free action; not real fast because you fight in a half-mile arena, but they turn like squirrels. But the teacher red-lights any fun. He has moustaches like wind-swept fenders, and he's worse than the horn-yappers: "Do that over, young fool. Recover, recover, you'll get your face opened. With little-stuff brains don't try to be big stuff." Spoils your nerve. I'm beginning to catch on. Mom's slower, and she won't drive on the street nohow, even with the novice plates. Judy's real sharp, but Mom won't let her out either, in spite of her having natural-born driving rights here.

But Pop's a wham, a natural. After Lesson 3, he came striding out: "See me clip the pro, keeds? I think I'm gonna *like* this."

"You'll feel different if you were risking a real cut, Gail."

"Nyahhh! Steady nerve and educated reflexes, that's *real* safety."

Well, on the way home, there's this traffic signal down past our house. You don't *have* to stop, just yield right-of-way, which Pop says makes sense, though the other zoom's gotta be half across for Pop to yield, but Jehuans threat them real bunny. So, this native zoom ahead of us dragged down slow to make the corner just as it changed, like mokes do. Well, we should linger while he played games? Pop whipped the Stumblebum past and across the guy's front into our drive, sprayin' gravel, and pulled the foaming steeds to their haunches. Ye Olde High Style!

So here comes this Jehuan stalking across the lawn, a skinny guy in floppy green. He makes a bow to Mom and Ju and a stiff inch to Pop: "Sir, you drive with novice plates."

"A blind cop could see that." Pop said, "What about it?"

"Just this, sir. When you can no longer hide behind them, you will put your hog's elbow in my face again, and I will bleed your insolence. I will watch for you, believe me."

"Don't bother," Pop said. "Gimme your address, and I'll drive up and down your block till you come out—if you do."

So the guy gave him a card and bowed himself off. Pop looked after him, jingling his pockets. "He'll do to start on."

Then Glash took us to the Arena, in his zoom. I'll say this for Jehuans, when they go, they Go; so when they do tangle, it's a dilly. We went down the main drag in a stream of zooms at sixty steady, with Glash giving exhaust about the average being twice the speed in any Earth city, and how he never *needed* to use his brakes. Sure, but in two blocks I was antsy-pantsy with that old bull-man urge-to-surge, while Glash defaulted chance after chance to Score.

So, out where you'd expect a ball-park, was this Arena like the Colossus of Rome. It wasn't a tenth full, but two guys were looping and lashing, like at the school only more exciting because they had open left cheeks. But neither scored, and another pair took over.

Glash looked bored and I lost interest too after five of these quickies and only one guy cut. But people kept trickling in, and Glash said, "Ah! About time for the main event. This high-ridin' ass, y'know, ran down a child on a back street. City's been debatin' how much leather he should get for challenger's parental negligence. I hear it's only a collar. Minimum. A cut to the larynx or big neck vessels ends a bout without a sportin' chance."

Pop said real cool, "Well, what chance does *that* give him?"

"Say fifty to one. Challenger's a tough whip and deadly angry."

Mom and Ju looked green. They've stopped more than once to view a crash but maybe they figured deliberate gore was something else.

Mom said, "Well, I don't think the little girl should see this."

Glash made a fish-mouth: "I cannot agree, madam. If a child isn't blooded young, it'll play the fool in emergencies."

Just then, a referee came out on a platform halfway down the arena and the duellers appeared at opposite ends with their seconds and doctors, which they have for serious fights.

People were piling in till there wasn't standing room.

My heart was going bu-bop bu-bop.

Glash drawled, "Ha! They've made challenger bare his right arm. That narrows the odds somewhat. This should be a notable Drive."

Yeh, and he'd fixed to have us see the execution. Thanx!

Came a pistol-shot that yanked the props out from my stomach.

The crowd gasped "Off!" Then not a peep—you could be challenged yourself for a disturbance. You could hear the motors snarl, even the sand grunt at swerves.

They didn't come right in, like in spite-fights. Defender swung wide and then, when challenger closed, whipped behind him on two wheels and zipped down the arena. And they kept on swingin'er big and snappin'er tight till I began to think defender would make it. Then a look at the big arena clock showed only six minutes gone.

Challenger had lashed twice and missed. Then, before I knew it, he did a skid-curve and nicked defender's shoul-

der. Not much, but the guy began to bleed, lost his nerve and got two more in two minutes.

He pulled himself together and kept clear for a bit again. Then, just half-time, he goofed. He'd got on challenger's tail, and the old scoring spirit surged, and he took a crack at him. It only hit leather, and a crack costs time. Challenger veered, slam-braked, swiped as the guy shot past and scored an awful slice on his arm.

Well, that was it. Defender dropped his whip and just steered. But he was dazed and losing blood. Challenger flicked and flicked.

I got all churned up. Here was this guy, could see the arena, and hear the whippets yarrr, and feel his cuts. And if he didn't do more than he *could* do, in a couple of minutes he wouldn't know anything.

Same time, challenger was coming through like on mental FM: "She'll never pounce onto the bed with me again. (Crack!) Never have college and a wedding. (Crack!) How many thousand of your smart tricks was *that* worth? (Ca-rack!)" It made me sick and dry.

Defender played so crazy, he hung on for a bit, and I began to wonder again, would he make it. Six to go and my lungs were tied in a bowknot. Challenger figure-8ed but reversed in the second loop; defender saw a big body-slash coming, just too late. He banked so tight, he toppled. He kicked the ejector-lever and flung clear.

Everybody stood up.

He spread-eagled, like in a wreck I saw once, and his whippet batted around spinning and scrabbling on its side. Challenger cut around it so sharp, I thought he'd tip too, and headed straight for the guy. Defender tried to heave clear . . . "My little honey!" . . . Ribs crack like wet sticks . . .

Nobody talked. Even Glash didn't pump any pi-jaw.

But when we got home and Mom was hoping that now he wouldn't take so many chances, Pop said, "Look, keed, in this life you *take* chances or live in a keg. You just gotta be equal to them."

And the very day the novice plates came off the Stumblebum, he came home whistling and announced he'd fixed a fight with this guy who'd left his address. "Keep me in practice, like Glash says."

Well, I guess he needs it. So far, they could only yap-yap when he double-parked at rush-hour, or blocked a side-street, or motor-boated through puddles. Now, he'll spend half his time in that arena. And some day he'll out-smart himself into a biggie.

III

Oct. 28, '87.

The day of his first duel, Pop came home free-wheeling as a tomcat. Ju and I had the day off from school, but we weren't going. "No family," Pop had said. "This new back-seat driving would put me off. I could feel it from way up in the stands. Jonesie and I have arranged to back each other in these deals." So he had lunch and they took off on their whippets.

I got myself into sporting bags for an afternoon all to myself with the zoom, and tip-toed down to the garage.

Well, the zoom was gone. That stalled me. Pop had his whippet. Mom still wouldn't drive a block alone, or let Judy, to Ju's permanent sulk. Maybe Mom and Ju . . . ? Then I heard Mom upstairs, and called, "Mom, where's Ju?"

Mom dashed down like beating an amber. But no Ju anywhere. Mom kept breathing, "The little fool! Oh, the little fool!" Then aloud, "She's your father all over. Oh, if she's gone in that car . . ."

Of course, Ju had. Pop's fight had revved her up to thirty over the limit, and she'd gone to see. Like that, she was a suicide menace.

The police just shrugged over the phone: "Driving is private business, madam. We do not interfere." (Pop's standby!)

So, without a car, what could we do? Mom took a calmifier and lay down. I sat on the front steps and strewed cigarette butts.

At that, I didn't see Judy coming till she turned up the walk, on foot. She was a mess, all blowsy from crying. If she'd crossed many streets, it was just luck we didn't have o whip someone for running her down. She blubbered, 'Du-don't start ku-questions, pu-please.' But Mom didn't

swallow *that* line and shook her till her hair flopped. So she told.

She was near the Arena, feeling pretty high, when some mokes ahead slowed for a right turn, like mokes do. Well, you don't pass any faster, I guess, but a Regular like Pop swings big left to show his Style and opinion of mokes. So naturally Ju swung and bashed head-on into another zoom at these Jehu speeds. She said, "The wu-woman was in the middle, I swear. But she claims she hadn't room."

Another woman was bad. Even against rules, men often go easy on a girl; a woman, never. This zee claimed injury, and several other drivers were mad enough to swear anything. This wouldn't be any one-check deal.

We were so razzed, we never heard the whippet pull in.

But I heard Pop clickety-clacking up the path, and got to the tridiroom door as he flipped his hat onto the rack: "Well, well, is this all the victor's welcome? Where's Mom and Judy?"

Mom pushed by me and stood glaring at him. But Pop never did notice red lights much. He breezed on, "Yezzir! Ol' Killer Blaire clipped him, and him a thirty-fight veteran. And not a mark on me. Reflexes, like I've always told you. Now, how's about . . ."

Well, I'd seen it in boffies but never expected to in real life. Mom smashed a vase-lamp on his head and towered over him. "Well, that's a mark on you now, Reflex-brains!" . . . and told him the score in about ten words, ending, "And I haven't raised a sweet child to be disfigured because her father's a retarded Teener."

"Aw right, aw right! No reason to blow your tires at *me*. What've *I* done? We'll fix it. I suppose you never thought of Glash?"

She said, soft, "*You* fix it. *You* call Glash, you and your steel nerves. I don't believe you grasp the situation yet."

He slouched to the phone and I snaked up to the bedroom phone extension. Well, Glash had a big pick-up for Judy, like they all do, but he couldn't fix the ticket. "Blaire, if defender could substitute, I'd go in for her myself. What was the woman's insignia? . . . Red tornado? Hah! Slada Goy, hard as they come . . . *No*, you fool! You *mention* money, you'll be outlawed . . . You've no damn right to be ignorant of manners, sir." I've never seen Pop so slowed down. Even Mom's laid off him.

Dec. 1, 1987.

I've never lived through such a grim month. Judy had lessons daily, and then I'd practice her. No bon. She was great in rehearsal, but in that Arena she'd freeze. She knew girls at school who'd been cut. She'd never been *really* hurt in her life, and got shivering sick just at the idea. It sure dulled her polish; and yet she was more appealing to me, like when she was a brat and I'd pick her up when her Toddle Typhoon dumped.

It wasn't fair. Pop's a real hero-type adult to these Teeners. Was she supposed not to learn off him? And he'd never get touched.

Then this Slada's deputies came, big squaws with muscles in their calves, and tried to right-lane Mom because she's custom-built and they were trucks. But Mom had evidently boned up on Jehu law, and beat the time down from twelve to ten minutes, and fixed Judy's leather so she'd only have one arm exposed besides her cheek, and sent them off bow-legged. I felt real proud of Mom then.

But it wouldn't help Ju. Five minutes would be too much. And a week before the fight, she podded into my room in her bathrobe and plopped on my bed: "Oh Chuck, what'll I do-oo-oo? We'll be put off the road here too and Daddy'll be ruined. Bu-bu-but I *can't* fight that awful old woman. I couldn't even steer."

Well, I'd hoped for a break in the traffic; now I'd have to elbow one. I patted her shoulder: "Opey-dopey, kid, I'll fix it."

She grabbed me: "How? Daddy can't. Mr. Glash can't."

"I'm not much bigger'n you. In leathers, nobody'd know the difference. *I'll* fight her."

"Oh, but Chuckie, I beat you all the time at school."

"So who cares if *my* manly beauty gets marked?"

I bet we both slept well that night, for just about the first time in weeks.

Both our leathers had Pop's charging-quarterback insignia, and Ju faked her 4 for my 3 on mine and fixed some of her slacks to fit me.

Came the day. I was to drive the whippet to the Arena, while the others followed in the car—Pop's real expert at getting deadline repairs done. So, I sneaked off in Ju's

slacks, with makeup and a kerchief to hide my buzz-cut, and parked in the entrance tunnel to Defenders' End. And right on tick, Ju came out of Lady Defenders' Dressing Room and dodged around into the public Ladies' Room. I skulked after her. We took adjoining booths, and clothes came flying over the partition. And with three minutes to spare, we walked out again, one in slacks and one in leathers.

We still damped our mufflers—you never know who might be parked—but Ju threw her arms around me and kissed me on the open cheek. It made me feel pretty brave. Then she shooed me ahead.

I mounted and rolled into the arena. A pro mechanic-doctor came with me and checked my stirrups and ejector and stuff, and said good luck, and stood back. I'd cut things close, to avoid idle chat.

Then I really began to get Lepidoptera in the viscera. The far end looked five miles off with the stands curving around, and the enemy whippet toy-size—denture-pink and a red tornado on the panels. I'd watched outside Slada's house: She was mid-thirties but made up to look older, like mud on a moke's windshield, as if she had more to hide than she really did. That kind's always proving they're just as good as ever, which is bad. Another muscly dame. With swords or something, I might have felt different about fighting a woman. But this was like on the road where she'd ditch you to show her peerless skill. Maybe she was a moo-cow at home, but in a zoom her reality came out and you could drive her into a board with a hammer. So, I was going to do all I could to her—if any.

At the pistol, I sure gave my pro a dust-bath. I wanted to get Slada off balance. She was just flipping a cigarette butt—the old Nonchalant Flair like she'd do whipping in and out of lanes with a kid doin' Ben Hur on the seat beside her—when I was sudder than she'd expected. You know, when there's a gap two cars could pass in at a humble speed, and you just head for the middle? The other guy'll concede! So did Slada, and nearly dumped swerving. And I cleared the end wall by about two feet, and *her* pro jumped.

Well, she was madded up at being bluffed by any Young Girl, and began to show her old-hand knowhow, to restore her confidence. She'd wear me (Judy) down till she could

lay my (Judy's) face open good. (And it *could* have been Judy.) And she sure played rough.

Still, I could read her far enough ahead to hold her off. And all the time, something was building up in me like those Civil War radio tubes that took hours to get hot. This stuff was great for guys like Pop. (Zowrrr, whacko.) Put 'em in here and let 'em slug it out. (Here she comes.) Or for old-time Indians and Vikings who'd kill anybody for kicks, including themselves. (Zgrrrrunch, whack-crack.) But when those types got too gay, people just abolished them. (Now what . . . ?) So why should Judy get *her* arm crippled or her face ground in the sand? (Whooooom, oofie.) Or even *me*, dammit?

I'd planned just to steer and try to bull through. But suddenly it burst on me: In three minutes, she hadn't *nearly* touched me; and when I'd bluffed her at the start, she'd crumpled. (Watchit!) And *why* could I read her? (Vrooom, missed again.) 'Cause I could read Earth traffic, see? (No ya don't, sister.) These jokers trained for scientific hell. (Zwoooo, Brrrotherrr.) But *I'd* been trained dirty.

I wasn't so proud of it now. But this was the time for it if ever. (Grrrrup.) Show 'em how to *really* play Russian roulette, and if a dumb little punk like me was champ at it, where was the Glory?

So when she slowed on a turn, I timed her to a hair, zoom across her bumper (like beating the cross-traffic on a red). I'd have cut her too but she braked so hard she nearly went over her wheel and I only clunked her ka-whack across the helmet. But it sure shook her nerve again, and I got on her tail like a moke who can't decide to pass, and began clouting her, thunk, whap. Not sportin'? Who cared! To cut her cheek, I'd have had to pull level; but a whip stings and bruises even through leather. And I just glorified! I couldn't hate my own Pop, but I sure hated *her*. Show the kids how, huh?

Then I gave her the Technique. Foo! Any Grampaw, driving to work with his mind on his dyspepsia, can do it by force of habit to score three car-lengths per block. She suddenly slowed to force me ahead, and I surged and cut in front of her, like beating a guy to a red light, and braked so she had to swing to pass *me*, and I clunked her. I snake-hopped her both sides. I crowded her from behind and

when she swung away, there I was crowding her on the other side. It's amazing how much supremacy you can jam into a few minutes.

Only I forgot she wasn't a Regular or even a good old Earth moke. And sometimes these Jehuans go even Earth one better, when they're losing a fight, and do a kamikaze crash. So when she threw her whip away and opened her whippet out full, which is dangerous, I was too terrified to be scared. Geez guys! Those last two minutes were the longest hour I ever lived. We covered a good two miles in tight loops, I swear. Then, twenty seconds to go, she swung too tight, that gooey pink thing toppled, and the ejector threw her, all in one gasp. No time to brake. Left, right—I could just feel that I'd hit her whippet and crash; soft bump and snapping bones. I went between with my head and eyes scronched down.

I near rammed the wall before I realized neither crash nor bump had happened.

Marshals came tearing out, zrowww. But Slada was already rolling over. My muscles sort of melted: For once I'd gotten a closeup of how it'd feel to Get It—or Give It. But I hung on and drove slow to Defenders' End, just as the gate went up.

Somehow, I'd never figured how to get *out* of that jam. People were helping me down, patting my back, pulling at my helmet. I bolted for the only possible cover, that Ladies' Dressing Room. I expected a riot, but nobody realized I was a Him. And in my state of mind, the scenery didn't matter. Then Mom grabbed me: "Darling! You're all *right*?" and started on the helmet. I had to bolt again, for the cubicle she'd come out of.

But she caught on fast, and I got another high-octane kiss all in the family. Hot coffee too. But she kept saying, "Now, from now on, Judy—I mean Chuck—no more of your father's nonsense. Now promise!"

Well, all I wanted was to sit with my hands between my knees, but finally I hove up: "Look, Mom, I don't *need* to promise. I'm sick of the adept stuff. Judy'll promise anything right now, but she'll get yippee-pills in her tank again because she's a born show-off. And as for Pop . . ." I just shrugged.

"Well, if your father isn't impressed now . . ."

I said, "Mom, the only cure for Pop is breaking his back or going where he can't drive."

"Well, Chuckie, I *did* check, and there's a place called Bolgwalk where Plutomat wants a man, and they have no roads to speak of, just bogs."

Well, we both knew Pop'd never ride in any such back seat.

Just then, Judy burst in. She'd gotten by as "Miss Blaire's sister." And as we switched clothes again, she reported that the fight had been a sensation. (She'd watched, though Mom wouldn't.) Half the audience was wild over the greatest daredevil show in history, and half was honking mad at my unsporting tactics and wanted Slada to rechallenge. (I bet!) Nuts and bolts to both halves.

Outside, Mom gave the old elbow to a mob of reporters: "Stand back, there. The girl's exhausted. You can call tomorrow."

And there, at the whippet, was Pop. All month he'd been sulking as if the whole deal were a plot to cramp his style. But now he had that quirk smirk like the guy in the ad: "Drive cautiously with our Triple-Threat Modern Storm-Trooperol."

The newshounds popped some bulbs, and he said, "Okay, keeds, you whisk along. I'll handle this."

Mom walked at him. "You'll handle nothing. Get along to the car."

He tempered: "What's this? I thought we'd celebrate for my famous daughter. So . . . you go home in an armored car if you like. Come on, Judy, you're a sport anyway. You and me, hey?"

But Ju was still scared, even if it was wearing off, and said "No!" in that spoiled-brat voice he always thought was so cute.

He sneered like when some moke elbows him in traffic, and swung away, beat us out to Spectator Parking, legged into the car like forking over his cayuse, whammed the door and roared the engine, all in one snappy action. He shot out of his stall with one deft whirl of the wheel, fixing to surge straight ahead out of the lot.

Maybe if he hadn't been so mad, even he would have seen the other car. But he felt it first, a crash that knocked his hat off. He and the other guy, with a passenger, charged out to inspect the slaughter.

Stumblebum had taken it on the rear bumper, but the side of the other looked like a discarded candy-wrapper. Well . . . Pop had hit *him*. The only good feature was that the other guy, though big, was gray-haired with a high complexion. Pop saw it too and, after they'd all asked couldn't they look where they were going, he began the old Road Lawyer line: "Well, now, Mister, this isn't an open street, y'know. How'm I to back blind with you crashing through full speed?"

The old guy went turkey-red; "Why, look where you hit me! I was half way past you, sir."

"All right. Challenge if you like. My little girl just made a monkey of a better fighter than you're likely to be."

The old guy went beet-red. On Jehu, if an old guy doesn't want to fight, he better drive real humble. His jaw stuttered, then he grabbed for his fender, and slumped to the ground, and lay there grunting and not even pink.

A doc jumped to him. But the old guy's passenger grabbed Pop and jerked him around. He looked like a lumberjack foreman, curly black hair, black-shaved chin, hot black eyes. He snarled, "So now *I* flay you on behalf of my father, bigmouth."

Pop cased the guy's horsepower, and suddenly he looked all flabby. He did wrench his shoulder loose and try the hard-boiled comeback: "If your father can't keep his temper, *I'm* not liable by your *cōde*." (Like he says, what can you lose? And you often win.)

The guy pushed his face an inch from Pop's: "*Code?* Why you hog-trough oaf, twenty witnesses heard you insult him in a discussion of honor. They will strip your back and I, Slam Hollicker, will hack it to the bones. If you ever drive again, you will defer even to *old* men." He swung away without even bowing.

Pop was pinned there till they got old Hollicker into an ambulance and towed away his car. Then, Mom got in the driver's seat of our car, and Pop got in beside her without a peep, and Judy in the back. So I went for the whippet. It sure looks like we'll need *that*.

Planet Bolgwalk
Dec. 3, 1987.

Only we didn't do anything of the kind.

I didn't even pump Judy on what happened on that drive

home; you owe your father *some* fenders to hide behind. But when I came in, Mom said, "Chuck, your father has taken a new job and we're translating again the day after tomorrow." So I went to borrow back some stuff and see some guys, but wondering why the overdrive.

Till I saw Pop. He'd been figuring the percentages.

Next day he was clearing up at his office. But he was home early, fussing around like a pup in traffic, till the frame-building crew told him to go find a parking-deck. Then indoors, making sure nobody'd forgotten anything to hold us up come morning. Then out trying to bribe the crew to work overtime. Then, when they said the inspector wouldn't clear it till morning anyway, phoning the inspector to bribe *him*. Honest, I thought he'd boil his rad.

The old impetuous spirit got him down at crack of dawn, too, burning toast and eggs till Mom took the kitchen away from him. Which gained us three hours to stall around in while the crew finished the fence under his steely eye—though he didn't know any more about it than he does about a carburetor. But at half an hour to zero, Mr. Glash arrived and Pop got onto *his* rear bumper. They were out by the fence and Pop giving with the old Twenty Questions—why this, why that, with no break for answers—when up pranced this guy in a blue-and-white rig and hollered Pop's name aloud.

Pop winced. "Hey, tone it down. I can hear you. What's all this?"

The guy began reading a paper which boiled down to a demand that Pop desist from running out on his honorable duel. Pop looked like one of these guys who, when they get in a crash, jump out of the car and run. He grabbed Glash. "Hey, this clown can't stop me moving, can he?"

Glash drawled, "This 'clown' is Herald of the Courts of Honor. But, no, he can't stop your moving, as long as it's off Jehu."

Pop reinflated slightly. "Well, not that I want to welsh on an obligation. But Mrs. Blaire was so upset about the girl, and I had this offer. And you know how it is with big deals—split-second decisions."

Glash fluttered his eyelids. "Oh, yes, everyone knows. And as long as Hollicker feels he's run you off Jehu he'll be satisfied. But don't come back, even for a day for your firm, say. Not healthy."

The inspector arriving at last saved Pop answering *that* one.

Glash bowed with flourishes to Mom and Judy, and slightly to Pop. He drawled, "It's been, ah, interesting to know you, as a specimen of the, ah, Earth Regulars. I trust you find Bolgwalk congenial."

Then suddenly he turned to me. "From what I hear through, ah, a contact at the Arena, you'll make a man yet, Charles. Get some education—and get rid of the one you have. Good luck."

So we shook hands, Man!

But who saw through my game and didn't squeal?

Funny how Pop's adjusted to Bolgwalk; he fulfills his bull-man ego by betting on the planetary whiffle-ball games. He usually loses but it's comparatively cheap. Judy could be on an asteroid, for all she cares now, if it had boys on it. No cars—but they make out. Mom treats me real man-to-man.

But now I've gotten over being a professional Teener, I think I'll take Mr. Glash's advice. They say the High Vacuum Navy gives you wonderful training. And you can take chances in the line of duty . . . without scooping in civilians.

THE GREATEST CAR IN THE WORLD

By Harry Harrison

European car-makers found willing markets in the United States at both ends of the price spectrum—at the lower end, with products like the Volkswagen and Toyota; and at the other extreme, with luxury cars like the Rolls-Royce and sports models like the Jaguar. It wasn't just a matter of having something exotic—many European models had (and have) superior transmissions, brakes, etc., to go along with their superior craftsmanship.

Now American manufacturers have copied the European Mercedes-style "touring car" to the point of overkill. Competition between American and foreign builders has always been keen, but not (to the best of our knowledge) to the extent here related by Harry Harrison.

Ernest Haroway's nerve was beginning to fail and he clasped his hands together to stop their shaking. What had seemed such a wonderful idea back in Detroit had become strange and frightening now that he was in Italy—and actually on the grounds of the Castello Prestezza itself. He controlled an involuntary shiver as his gaze rose up the gray and age-seared walls of the castle to the grayer and even more ancient palisade of the Dolomite Alps that loomed behind. The courtyard held a hushed and almost sacred stillness, broken only by the rustle of pine needles brushed by the late afternoon breeze, and the tacking of the cooling engine of his rented car. His throat was dry and the palms of his hands were wet. He had to do it!

With a convulsive motion he threw the door open and

forced himself out of the car, stopping only long enough to grab up his briefcase before he crunched across the gravel toward the stone-framed and iron-bound portal of the castle.

There was no sign of bell or knocker on the dark wood of the door, but set into the stone at one side was a carved bronze gorgon's head, now green with age, with a rounded knob over its mouth. Haroway tugged at this knob and, with a grating squeal, it reluctantly came out about a foot on the end of the iron rod, then spasmodically returned to its original position when he released it. Whatever annunciatory mechanism it operated appeared to be functioning, because within a minute there came a dreadful rattling from behind the door and it swung slowly open. A tall, sallow-faced man in servant's livery stared down the impressive length of his nose at the visitor, his eyes making a precise—and unimpressed—sweep the length of Haroway's charcoal gray, drip-dry, summer-weight suit, before fixing on his worried face.

"*Sissignore?*" he said through cold, suspicious lips.

"*Buon giorno . . .*" Haroway answered, thereby exhausting his complete Italian vocabulary. "I would like to see Mr. Bellini."

"The Maestro sees no one," the servant said in perfect English with a marked Oxford accent. He stepped back and began to close the door.

"Wait!" Haroway said, but the door continued to swing shut. In desperation he put his foot in the opening, a maneuver that had served him well during a brief indenture as a salesman while in college, but was totally unsuited to this type of architecture. Instead of bounding back, as the lightweight apartment doors had done, the monstrous portal closed irresistibly, warping the thin sole of his shoe and crushing his foot so tightly that the bones grated together. Haroway screamed shrilly and threw his weight against the door, which ponderously stopped, then reversed itself. The servant raised one eyebrow in quizzical condemnation of his actions.

"I'm sorry . . ." Haroway gasped, "but my foot. You were breaking all the bones. It is very important that I see Mr. Bellini, the Maestro. If you won't admit me you must take this to him." He dug into his jacket pocket while he eased his weight off the injured foot. The message had

been prepared in advance in case there were any trouble in gaining admittance, and he handed it over to the servant, who reluctantly accepted it. This time the great door closed completely and Haroway hobbled over to one of the stone lions that flanked the steps and sat on its back to ease his throbbing foot. The pain died away slowly and a quarter of an hour passed before the door opened again.

"Come with me," the servant said. Was it possible that his voice was just a shade warmer? Haroway could feel his pulse beating in his throat as he entered the building. He was in—inside the Castello Prestezza!

The interior was dark and in his elated state he noticed no details, though he had a vague impression of carved wood, beamed ceilings, suits of armor, and pieces of furniture as bulky as freight cars. With uneven step he followed his guide through one chamber after another until they came to a room where tall mullioned windows opened onto the garden. A girl stood in front of a window holding his note disdainfully by the edge, as though it were a soiled Kleenex she was about to discard.

"What do you want here?" she asked, the cold tones so unsuited to the velvet warmth of her voice.

At any other time Haroway would have taken a greater interest in this delightful example of female construction, but now, incredible as it seemed, he looked upon her only as an undesired interference. The jet-dark tresses dropping to the creamy tan of her shoulders were just hair. The ripeness of her bosom swelling above the square neck of her dress was another barrier placed in his way, while the pouting loveliness of her lips spoke only words that barred him from Bellini.

"It is no business of yours what I want here," he snapped. "I will tell that to the Maestro."

"The Maestro is a sick man and sees no one," she answered, her voice just as imperious as his. "We can have no one disturbing him." She dangled the card like a dead mouse. "What does this message mean—'Unfinished business from Le Mans 1910?' "

"That business is none of your business, Miss . . . ?"

"I am Signorina Bellini."

"Miss Signorina . . . ?"

"Signorina is the Italian word for 'Miss.' "

"Sorry. Miss Bellini. What I have to say is only for the

ears of the Maestro himself." He took a firmer grip on the handle of his briefcase. "Now—will you take my message to him?"

"No!"

"*Chi è?*" a deep voice rumbled from the direction of the ceiling and the girl went white and clutched the note to her breast.

"He's heard . . . !" she gasped.

The apparently deific voice grumbled again and the girl answered it in staccato Italian, and appeared to be talking either to heaven or to a corner of the ceiling. After some blinking Haroway could make out a loudspeaker suspended from the crenelated molding with what appeared to be a microphone hanging next to it. Then the conversation terminated in what could only have been a command and the girl lowered her head.

"That was . . . he . . . him?" Haroway asked in a hushed voice. She only nodded her head and turned to the window until she could speak again.

"He wants to see you—and the doctor has expressly forbidden visitors." She swung about to face him, and the impact of emotion in those large and tear-dampened eyes was so great that it cut through his indifference instantly. "Won't you leave—please? He's not to be excited."

"I would like to help you, but . . . I just can't, I've waited too long for this chance. But I promise you that I won't get him excited; I'll do my best, really I will."

She sighed tremulously and lowered her head again, turning. "Come with me," she said and started toward the door.

Haroway did not feel the pain of his injured foot, for in truth he felt scarcely anything as he stumbled after her as through a sea of cotton wool. His senses were suspended as though, unbelieving, they could not accept the fact that a lifetime ambition was being realized at last. One final door swung open and he could see the bulky figure swaddled in blankets and seated on a wheelchair—a chance ray of sunlight fell from the window and struck a reflection from his mane of white hair, a halo of light that would not have surprised Haroway if it had been real. He could only stand, petrified and speechless, while the girl went over and silently handed the Maestro his note.

"What does this mean?" the old man asked, waving the

card at him. "There was only one piece of unfinished business at Le Mans that year, and it is too late now to start a lawsuit or anything like that. What do you want?" He frowned at Haroway and the effort wrinkled a network of fine furrows into the mahogany skin.

"N-nothing like that," Haroway stammered, then took a deep breath and grabbed hold of himself. "I of course wasn't there; I hadn't even been born yet—" He fought down an impulse to giggle hysterically. "But my father has told me about it, many times, so I almost feel as if I had seen the race myself. When that eleven-litre Fiat brushed against your thirteen-hundred twenty-seventy c.c. Type Thirteen and turned it over, what a horrible moment that must have been! But your driver, Fettuccine, was thrown clear, and it was only when the radiator cap flew off and into the crowd . . ."

"The cap—I knew it!" the Maestro said, and pounded on the arm of the wheelchair. "It had to be that, there was no other unfinished business at Le Mans!"

"Grandfather, please!" the girl begged as she stroked his hand. "You promised not to!" she said, glaring at Haroway.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. Anyway, there's nothing to get excited about; my father was the one who was hit on the head by the radiator cap."

"Aha—the mysterious wounded man, found at last."

"He wasn't really hurt; it was a very small fracture and he was out of bed inside of a month. And he still held onto the radiator cap—his greatest treasure. He had no money; he had worked his way to Europe just to see Le Mans, and he was treated in a charity hospital. That is why you never discovered him, though I know you tried very hard to find the man who had been injured."

"It was a mystery; many saw him fall—yet later there was no trace."

"Well Dad always was shy; he couldn't possibly consider talking to a great man like you. When he recovered he managed to make his way back to the United States, and life was different for him after that. He always said that he had sown his wild oats and he was satisfied. When he met Mom and they married, he worked in a filling station; then, finally, he saved enough to buy in and that was all he ever did—but he was always a happy man. He had

the radiator cap sealed inside a glass case and framed and hung over the fireplace, and it's the earliest thing I remember, and him telling me about it. I grew up with that cap, Mr. Bellini, and it would be no lie to say that it shaped my whole life. I loved cars and I studied them and went to school nights, and right now I'm an automotive engineer and there has never been anything else I have ever wanted in the whole world. Outside of meeting you, that is. Then Dad died last year and his last words were 'Take it back, son. It don't rightly belong to us. I knew it would have to go back someday, but couldn't bear to do it, not in my lifetime. That's your job, son, what you have to do. Take it back to the man that rightly owns it."

Haroway had his briefcase open and fumbled through it and extracted an object wrapped in many layers of polythene. One by one, with light, reverent touch, he unwrapped them until the old radiator cap was revealed, dented and scratched but polished like a jewel. He held it out to the Maestro, who took and turned it over, squinting at it.

"A nice piece of brass," he said, then handed it back. "Keep it."

"Thank you," Haroway said in a humble voice as he carefully rewrapped it and slid it gently back into the briefcase. "Thank you, too, for your courtesy in receiving me." He locked the case and picked it up. "I'll not disturb you anymore—but, if you would permit, there is just one question I would like to ask before I go."

"What is that?" the Maestro asked distractedly, looking out the window and seeing only Le Mans in the year 1910. If it hadn't been for that hulking Fiat, his Type Thirteen should have won. With the overhead camshaft they were getting 3,000 r.p.m. . . .

"It's something that has bothered me for years. Do you think that if it hadn't been for the accident that the Type Thirteen would have placed first? After all, with your new overhead camshaft you should have been getting 3,000 r.p.m. . . ."

"*Dio mio!*" the Maestro gasped. "You read my mind—those were my very thoughts!"

"Not really mind-reading, sir, just a lifetime of study. I have had one hobby, one possessing enthusiasm and interest, the Bellini automobiles and the Bellini genius."

"A healthy hobby for a young man; most of the new generation are spineless wonders who think that a vehicle with an automatic gearshift is really a *car!* Stay a moment; you will have a glass of wine with me. Have you met my granddaughter? Vergine, the apple of an old man's eye even though she is very strict with me." She glared at him and he laughed heartily. "Don't scowl so, my blossom, it puts ugly lines upon your face. Instead bring a bottle of the '47 Valpolicella and some glasses. We shall have a little holiday today."

They drank and talked and the talk was only of cars—Bellini cars, which they both agreed were the only fit cars to discuss. The afternoon faded and at dinner time an invitation was forced upon the not-reluctant Haroway and the talk continued; worm and wheel steering with the spaghetti, semicentrifugal wet multiplate clutches with the meat, and banana-shaped tappets with the dessert. It was a highly satisfactory meal.

"There you see the proof," Haroway said, scratching a last number at the end of a row of equations that stretched across the white surface of the linen tablecloth. "When you developed your sixteen-valve engine for the Type Twenty-two with four valves per cylinder you developed higher scavenging pressure with the smaller valves—this proves it! Did you work out these equations first?"

"No. I leave it for others to prove. I knew what would happen; a matter of intuition, you might call it."

"Not intuition—genius!"

Bellini nodded his great, gray head, accepting his due.

"What do you think I have been doing the past ten years?" he asked.

"Nothing. You retired to this castle after having given more to the automotive world than any other man."

"That is true. But, though I did retire, I have kept a small workshop here, for tinkering, working out ideas, an old man's hobby. I have constructed a car—"

Haroway went white, half rising to his feet, a convulsive movement of his hand sending one of the crystal wine glasses crashing to the floor: he was not aware of it.

"Car . . . new car . . ." was all he could gasp.

"I thought you might be a little interested," the Maestro said with an impish grin. "Perhaps you would like to see it?"

"Grandfather, no!" Vergine broke in. She had sat silently through the meal, since the conversation seemed to be doing the Maestro no harm, mellowing his usually spiky mood, but this was too much. "The exertion, and the excitement, the doctor forbade you to go near the car for at least two weeks more . . ."

"Silence!" he roared. "This is my house and I am Bellini. No fat oaf of an overpaid quack tells me what to do in my own house." His temper changed and he patted her hand. "My darling, you must forgive an old man his moods. I have only a few laps left of the race of life and my magneto is failing and my oil pressure is low. Allow me a few moments of pleasure before I pull into the pit for the last time. You must have seen how different Haroway is from the other young men, for, even though he labors in the satanic mills of manufacture of Detroit iron, his heart is pure. I think he must be the last of a vanishing breed. He came here offering—not asking—expecting nothing. He shall see the car."

"What is it called?" Haroway asked in a hushed voice.

"The Type Ninety-nine."

"A beautiful name."

Haroway pushed the wheelchair and Vergine led the way to the elevator, which hummed down its shaft to the garage and workshop concealed beneath the castle. When the door opened Haroway had to hold onto the wheelchair for support or he would have fallen.

There was the car.

It was a moment of pure joy, the high point of his life. He did not realize that tears of unalloyed happiness were running down his face as he stumbled across the spotless concrete floor.

This was frozen motion. The silver form of the Type 99 was poised like a captive thunderbolt, yearning to leap forward and span the world. The body was simplicity itself, its curve as pure and lovely as that of a woman's breast. And under that glistening hood and concealed beneath the perfection of the body Haroway knew there were hidden even greater wonders.

"You installed . . . mechanical improvements?" he asked hesitantly.

"A few," the Maestro admitted. "The brakes, I have never given much attention before to the brakes."

"With good reason—did you not say yourself that a Bellini car is designed to go, not to stop?"

"I did. But the world changes and the roads are more crowded now. I have turned my attention to the brakes and devised a wholly new system of braking. Foolproof, nonfade, nongrab, impossible to lock, just what you imagine a Bellini brake should be."

"And the system is . . . ?"

"Magnetostriction."

"Of course! But no one ever thought of it before."

"Naturally. A laboratory phenomenon where the application of magnetism changes the dimensions of a ferromagnetic substance. It makes a good brake. And then I was so tired of the devil's dance of the piston engine. I decided a new principle was needed. The Type Ninety-nine is powered by a free-piston turbine."

"But—that's impossible! The two can't be combined."

"Impossible for others, not for Bellini. Another problem that has been eliminated is unsprung weight. This car has *no unsprung weight*."

"That's imposs—"

The Maestro smiled and nodded, accepting his accolade.

"There are a few other small items, of course. A nickel-cadmium battery that cannot wear out or be discharged completely. An all-aluminum body, rustproof and easy to repair, that sort of thing."

Haroway let his fingers caress the steering wheel. "You owe this car to the world."

"I had not thought of producing it. It is just an old man's toy."

"No, it is more than that. It is a return to the purity of the vintage motorcar, a machine that will take the world by storm. Just the way it is, the perfect car, the finest car in the world. You have patented all the modifications and inventions?"

"Bellini has been accused of a number of things, but never of having been born yesterday."

"Then let me take the car back with me to the United States! There are enough true car lovers in my firm; I only have to show them the Type Ninety-nine to convince them. We'll manufacture a limited number, loving care, hand labor, perfection . . ."

"I don't know," the Maestro said, then gasped and

clutched at the arm of the chair, his face growing white with pain. "My medicine, quickly, Vergine." She ran for the bottle while he held tightly to his chest, speaking only with difficulty.

"It is a sign, Haroway, a greater power than I has decided. My work is done. The car is finished—and so am I. Take it, bring it to the world . . ."

He finished with a tired mumble and barely roused enough to sip the medicine his granddaughter brought to him. The noble head was hanging tiredly when she wheeled him away. After the doors of the elevator had shut behind them, Haroway turned back to the car.

Joy!

A button on the wall swung open the garage door and a spray of windblown rain speckled the floor. The rented car could stay here; the firm could pick it up tomorrow, because tonight he was driving a Bellini! The car door opened to a touch and he slid into the comforting embrace of the leather driver's seat. He switched on the ignition, then smiled when he found out there was no starting button. Of course, Bellini had always disdained electric starters. A single pull on the crank was enough to start any Bellini car. Now the system had been refined to the utmost and a tiny two-inch miniature crank handle protruded from the dashboard. He flipped it with his fingertips and the perfectly balanced engine roared into throbbing life. Through the wheel he could feel the vibrating power of the engine, not the mechanical hammer of an ugly machine but a muted rumble like the purr of a giant cat. With the ease of a hot knife cutting butter it slipped into first gear and when he touched the throttle the silver machine threw itself out into the night like an unleashed rocket.

Zero to a hundred miles an hour took four seconds, because he was not yet used to the divine machine and was hesitant with the gas. Immense tunnels of light were cut through the rain-swept night by the searchlight-bright headlights. And, though there was no cover over the open car, he was perfectly dry as an ingeniously designed curtain of air rushed above him and shielded him from the rain. The road was a nightmare of hairpin turns but he laughed aloud as he snaked through them, since the steering was only one turn from lock to lock and as positive in response as though the car were running on rails.

There had never been a car like this in the history of the world. He sang as he drove, hurling his happiness into the sky. A new day was coming for the motoring world, the day of the Type 99. And they would all be manufactured with the same loving care that the master had lavished on this prototype, he would see to that.

Of course there would have to be one or two very minor modifications—like the battery. Nickel-cadmium was out, they had a contract with their lead-acid battery suppliers and you can't break a contract like that. And the aluminum body—good enough in theory, but you needed special dies to press it and they had stockpiled steel sheet that had to be used, and anyway the dealers would howl because the aluminum bodies would never rust or wear out and no one would trade in for a newer model. Then the engine would have to be considered: they would modify one of their stock engines. It was all right to say that here was a new principle, but they were tooled up to make a different kind of engine and you don't throw away a couple of million dollars' worth of machine tools.

Anyway, a few changes under the hood didn't matter, the body would be the same. He glanced back happily at the car as he swung into the illuminated highway. Well, almost the same. You couldn't change a market overnight, and there was something pretty European about the lines. Probably need fins to sell the U. S. market; fins were coming back big.

With a giant's roar from the exhaust he passed a clutch of sports cars as though they were standing still and swung out into a long bend of the road. The rain was clearing and on a ridge high above he could see the outlines of the Castello Prestezza and he waved his hand in a warrior's salute.

"Thank you, Bellini!" he shouted into the wind. "Thank you!"

The was the best part, the important part for him.

Not only would he be making the finest car in the world, but he would be making the old man's dream come true!

THE ROADS, THE ROADS, THE BEAUTIFUL ROADS

By Avram Davidson

The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 resulted in the construction of more than 41,000 miles of modern, multilane highways, all toll-free, that helped to revolutionize the traveling habits of millions of Americans. Including those built by local and state governments, the bill for road and highway construction in the United States since the end of World War II is something like \$270,000,000,000!

This great effort has produced masterpieces of the engineer's art, paved over some very valuable and irreplaceable land, and in urban areas, destroyed the cohesiveness of neighborhoods (usually—in fact, almost always, poor neighborhoods). In a few cases, such as Miami, communities have been created in shantytowns under the cloverleafs of highway systems.

In this story, Avram Davidson, one of the finest short-story writers in science fiction, shows us one individual's very personal reaction to the highway.

The rumor that the already controversial new double-speed thruway would be closed to motorcycles was just that: a rumor: and it had already been officially denied—twice. Craig Burns thought now that perhaps it had been a mistake to deny it at all. Gave the rumor dignity . . . his mind absently sought a better word as he slipped through the milling crowd (*crowd?* almost a mob) on the steps and in the corridors of the new State Capitol Building. *Currency!* That was the word.

. . . gave the rumor currency . . .

Because, besides the usual knots of little old ladies with

their *Trees, Yes! Thruway, No!* buttons, besides the inevitable delegations of hayseeds from Nowhere Flats who were either complaining that the thruway was scheduled to go too near their town or complaining that it wasn't scheduled to go near enough, besides the representatives of the rival guild—the urban planners—with their other ideas and their briefcases and their indoor-pale skins (so different from the ruddy glow or tan of a real out-in-all-weather man; besides all these (and including as always some *Hire More Minority* protestors), today it seemed as though all the motorcycle freaks in the state were on hand. On hand, and out for blood. Well, well, what the hell. It added a little color to the scene. And wouldn't make any difference at all, in the end: Gypsy Jokers with long hair, Hell's Angels who were merely shaggy, Brave Bulls in their Viking-horned crash helmets, and the Gentlemen of the Road, so super-groomed and—

With the blank face and absent-minded slouch he had learned to be the best thing for slipping through angry crowds, Craig managed to get almost to the door of the Committee Room without being recognized. And even then, with a pleasant smile, he succeeded in getting inside before the reporters and cameramen got to him. With an apologetic gesture. No point in antagonizing Media, generally so helpful in picking out and publicizing the more outstanding of the anti-highways people and thus showing them up for the nuts and oddballs that they really were. But it made little sense to stop in the middle of them just to grant an on-the-spot interview.

In fact, Burns thought, taking one last look, head half-turned, it made no sense at all.

Horns on their crash helmets, for God's sake!

Just as some composers never tire of playing their own music, so Craig Burns never tired of driving over the beautiful highways he—well . . . he and his Department —had created. It had been a labor of love building them, seeing each one through from the preliminary survey through actual construction to the time he liked best of all. When the roads were ready to go but not yet open to the public. When he could drive along and drive alone for miles . . . and miles . . . sometimes for hundreds of miles. Just Highway Chief Craig Burns and his car and his

beautiful roads, with their lovely and intricate bypasses and cloverleafs and underpasses, slow and steady when he felt like it, revving it up and gauging the niceties of the straight stretches or the delightfully calculated curves when he felt like it. Over and under and around and across and back and under and—

—nobody on the whole highway but *him*.

It was better than a woman. It was better even than the power of office. It was just about the best thing there was.

Sometimes, smiling to himself, he wondered if he really didn't sometimes push through new road plans just for the sheer pleasure of this, even if the new roads weren't really needed. But the smile was for the joke, the secret, private little joke, for there was really no such thing as a new road which wasn't needed. And as for the things which weren't so nice . . . the stupid, stupid, jackass things which people did with the beautiful roads . . . crowding and packing and jamming them with their cars and trucks and motorcycles and station wagons . . . stupid people, stupid jerks, jackasses!—so that all kinds of things had to be done, afterwards, to the sweet and clean and lovely new roads—

As for that, Craig didn't care to think about that, much. It made him get that hot feeling in the skin of his face, that surging, raging feeling around his heart. That sort of thing, he left mostly to the others in the Department. And everybody else in the Department was the others. He'd created. Let them mar it, since it had to be marred. Changing routes, adding, subtracting, closing down, chopping and changing—let *them* do it. It wasn't his fault.

Probably the hearing had taken more out of him than he'd realized. And so damned unnecessary. Legislative hearings! After all, what did the legislature have to do with it? The very state constitution granted the Highways Department all the authority it needed. It could condemn property and pay what it knew to be right and reasonable. It could say where the roads would go and where they wouldn't go. What shape they'd take. How to design and how to build. The roads, the roads were engineered beautifully. It was the stupid bastard *people* who were en-

gineered wrong. Tiring him out and confusing him with their hearings and demonstrations. No wonder he'd missed the Hadley turnoff. That is, well, yeah, sure, he must have missed it. This cloverleaf was *after* the Hadley turnoff. Well, nothing to do but turn around and go back. The afternoon had yeah, you bet, upset him. But what in hell did the rest of the people have to be upset about? All that crap about highways dehumanizing, for Christ's sake.—Take this next turn.

No!

Well, had no choice, stupid jerk back there zooming along and forcing him—All that crap about highways exhausting, hypnotizing, confusing . . . All that crap. Look at this lovely cloverleaf. And this neat tunnel, here. No, but it wasn't the *highway*, for God's sake, it was just that stupid—

Okay, then, he just couldn't remember this tunnel. So what? All the highways in the state—*Okay*, that was that, *out* of the tunnel! Nothing hard about that! And back on the cloverleaf again.

Cloverleaf? There wasn't supposed to be—And hadn't he had a clear glimpse, in the shadows and the blinking lights (make mental note: report defective lights) of another tunnel branching off back—Hadley turnoff. Great. Just tired out after that damned hearing, crowd, mob, reporters, motorcycle gangs, what the hell. What the *hell!* Cloverleaf! Tunnel! Tunnel branching off, no he didn't want it, well for God's sake! Here he was. Lights bad, lights very bad, lights worse. No lights. No traffic, either, for that matter. Must be, yes, certainly: *was*: a discontinued branch tunnel. Vague recollection. Bad drainage. Turned out not to fit in with new, unforeseen traffic pattern subsequently developed. Bad air. Bad smell. Car gone dead! Flip on the radio, signal for the Department's very own high-speed tow-car and ever-ready private Departmental emergency limousine. Radio dead. Of course. Tunnel. Okay. Okay. Okay. Get out, walk.

Seemed, it seemed to Craig that it was, must, had to be shorter going ahead than going back. A car. Stopped. He waited for the head to be stuck out of the window, the smashed and dusty window. Motorcycle on its side. Station wagon almost a third of the way up the ramp. What crazy—Of course. Word had gotten around, sure. And

those in the know had taken their old hulks and abandoned them here. Oh boy. Thought they'd save money, avoid tickets, ah. Another think coming. *Look at them all! And what a stink, what—*

Definitely, someone, something, was moving up ahead there. Half in the shadows cast by strange, dim light. A man, sure enough. Black leather jacket, filthy jeans, obscene feet, and—

Craig Burns turned and fled, his screams echoing, echoing.

Behind him, unhurried, assured, horns jutting from the helmet on his head, the newest minotaur followed upon his newest victim.

THE EXIT TO SAN BRETA

By George R. R. Martin

Old cars in good condition can be worth a lot of money to some people. The nostalgia craze presently sweeping the country has driven up the value of many items that at first glance (and at second, third, and fourth) appear to be simply junk. So hang on to your Farrah Fawcett-Majors T-shirts, fellas, and don't throw those pet rocks away.

Here George R. R. Martin, who is one of sf's brightest young stars and whose nickname is "Railroad," recaptures the past through the future and recreates the thrill of seeing the rare and elusive Edsel.

It was the highway that first caught my attention. Up to that night, it had been a perfectly normal trip. It was my vacation, and I was driving to L.A. through the Southwest, taking my own sweet time about it. That was nothing new. I'd done it several times before.

Driving is my hobby. Or cars in general, to be precise. Not many people take the time to drive anymore. It's just too slow for most. The automobile's been pretty much obsolete since they started mass producing cheap copters back in '93. And whatever life it had left in it was knocked out by the invention of the personal gravpak.

But it was different when I was a kid. Back then, everybody had a car, and you were considered some sort of a social freak if you didn't get your driver's license as soon as you were old enough. I got interested in cars when I was in my late teens, and stayed interested ever since.

Anyway, when my vacation rolled around, I figured it was a chance to try out my latest find. It was a great car, an English sports model from the late '70s. Jaguar XKL.

Not one of the classics, true, but a nice car all the same. It handled beautifully.

I was doing most of my traveling at night, as usual. There's something special about night driving. The old, deserted highways have an atmosphere about them in the starlight, and you can almost see them as they once were —vital and crowded and full of life, with cars jammed bumper to bumper as far as the eye could see.

Today, there's none of that. Only the roads themselves are left, and most of them are cracked and overgrown with weeds. The states can't bother taking care of them anymore—too many people objected to the waste of tax money. But ripping them up would be too expensive. So they just sit, year after year, slowly falling apart. Most of them are still driveable, though; they built their roads well back in the old days.

There's still some traffic. Car nuts like me, of course. And the hovertrucks. They can ride over just about anything, but they can go faster over flat surfaces. So they stick to the old highways pretty much.

It's kind of awesome whenever a hovertruck passes you at night. They do about two hundred or so, and no sooner do you spot one in your rearview mirror than it's on top of you. You don't see much—just a long silver blur, and a shriek as it goes by. And then you're alone again.

Anyway, I was in the middle of Arizona, just outside San Bretta, when I first noticed the highway. I didn't think much of it then. Oh, it was unusual all right, but not that unusual.

The highway itself was quite ordinary. It was an eight-lane freeway, with a good, fast surface, and it ran straight from horizon to horizon. At night, it was like a gleaming black ribbon running across the white sands of the desert.

No, it wasn't the highway that was unusual. It was its condition. At first, I didn't really notice. I was enjoying myself too much. It was a clear, cold night, and the stars were out, and the Jag was riding beautifully.

Riding *too* beautifully. That's when it first dawned on me. There were no bumps, no cracks, no potholes. The road was in prime condition, almost as if it had just been built. Oh, I'd been on good roads before. Some of them just stood up better than others. There's a section outside

Baltimore that's superb, and parts of the L.A. freeway system are quite good.

But I'd never been on one this good. It was hard to believe a road could be in such good shape, after all those years without repair.

And then there were the lights. They were all on, all bright and clear. None of them were busted. None of them were out, or blinking. Hell, none of them were even dim. The road was beautifully lighted.

After that, I began to notice other things. Like the traffic signs. Most places, the traffic signs are long gone, removed by souvenir hunters or antique collectors as a reminder of an older, slower America. No one replaces them—they aren't needed. Once in a while you'll come across one that's been missed, but there's never anything left but an oddly shaped, rusted hunk of metal.

But this highway had traffic signs. Real traffic signs. I mean, ones you could read. Speed limit signs, when no one's observed a speed limit in years. Yield signs, when there's seldom any other traffic to yield to. Turn signs, exit signs, caution signs—all kinds of signs. And all as good as new.

But the biggest shock was the lines. Paint fades fast, and I doubt that there's a highway in America where you could still make out the white lines in a speeding car. But you could on this one. The lines were sharp and clear, the paint fresh, the eight lanes clearly marked.

Oh, it was a beautiful highway all right. The kind they had back in the old days. But it didn't make sense. No road could stay in this condition all these years. Which meant someone had to be maintaining it. But who? Who would bother to maintain a highway that only a handful of people used each year? The cost would be enormous, with no return at all.

I was still trying to puzzle it out when I saw the other car.

I had just flashed by a big red sign marking Exit 76, the exit to San Breta, when I saw it. Just a white speck on the horizon, but I knew it had to be another motorist. It couldn't be a hovertruck, since I was plainly gaining on it. And that meant another car, and a fellow aficionado.

It was a rare occasion. It's damn seldom you meet another car on the open road. Oh, there are regular con-

ventions, like the Fresno Festival on Wheels and the American Motoring Association's Annual Trafficjam. But they're too artificial for my tastes. Coming across another motorist on the highway is something else indeed.

I hit the gas, and speeded up to about one-twenty. The Jag could do better, but I'm not a nut on speed like some of my fellow drivers. And I was picking up ground fast. From the way I was gaining, the other car couldn't have been doing better than seventy.

When I got within range, I let go with a blast on my horn, trying to attract his attention. But he didn't seem to hear me. Or at least he didn't show any sign. I honked again.

And then, suddenly, I recognized the make.

It was an Edsel.

I could hardly believe it. The Edsel is one of the real classics, right up there with the Stanley Steamer and the Model T. The few that are left sell for a rather large fortune nowadays.

And this was one of the rarest, one of those original models with the funny noses. There were only three or four like it left in the world, and those were not for sale at any price. An automotive legend, and here it was on the highway in front of me, as classically ugly as the day it came off the Ford assembly line.

I pulled alongside, and slowed down to keep even with it. I couldn't say that I thought much of the way the thing had been kept up. The white paint was chipped, the car was dirty, and there were signs of body rust on the lower part of the doors. But it was still an Edsel, and it could easily be restored.

I honked again to get the attention of the driver, but he ignored me. There were five people in the car from what I could see, evidently a family on an outing. In the back, a heavy-set woman was trying to control two small kids who seemed to be fighting. Her husband appeared to be soundly asleep in the front seat, while a younger man, probably his son, was behind the wheel.

That burned me. The driver was very young, probably only in his late teens, and it irked me that a kid that age should have the chance to drive such a treasure. I wanted to be in his place.

I had read a lot about the Edsel; books of auto lore were

full of it. There was never anything quite like it. It was the greatest disaster the field had ever known. The myths and legends that had grown up around its name were beyond number.

All over the nation, in the scattered dingy garages and gas depots where car nuts gather to tinker and talk, the tales of the Edsel are told to this day. They say they built the car too big to fit in most garages. They say it was all horsepower, and no brake. They call it the ugliest machine ever designed by man. They retell the old jokes about its name. And there's one famous legend that when you got it going fast enough, the wind made a funny whistling noise as it rushed around that hood.

All the romance and mystery and tragedy of the old automobile was wrapped up in the Edsel. And the stories about it are remembered and retold long after its glittering contemporaries are so much scrap metal in the junkyards.

As I drove along beside it, all the old legends about the Edsel came flooding back to me, and I was lost in my own nostalgia. I tried a few more blasts on my horn, but the driver seemed intent on ignoring me, so I soon gave up. Besides, I was listening to see if the hood really did whistle in the wind.

I should have realized by then how peculiar the whole thing was—the road, the Edsel, the way they were ignoring me. But I was too enraptured to do much thinking. I was barely able to keep my eyes on the road.

I wanted to talk to the owners, of course. Maybe even borrow it for a little while. Since they were being so damned unfriendly about stopping, I decided to follow them for a bit, until they pulled in for gas or food. So I slowed and began to tail them. I wanted to stay fairly close without tailgating, so I kept to the lane on their immediate left.

As I trailed them, I remember thinking what a thorough collector the owner must be. Why, he had even taken the time to hunt up some rare, old-style license plates. The kind that haven't been used in years. I was still mulling over that when we passed the sign announcing Exit 77.

The kid driving the Edsel suddenly looked agitated. He turned in his seat and looked back over his shoulder, almost as if he was trying to get another look at the sign

we had already left behind. And then, with no warning, the Edsel swerved right into my lane.

I hit the brakes, but it was hopeless, of course. Everything seemed to happen at once. There was a horrible squealing noise, and I remember getting a brief glimpse of the kid's terrified face just before the two cars made impact. Then came the shock of the crash.

The Jag hit the Edsel broadside, smashing into the driver's compartment at seventy. Then it spun away into the guard rail, and came to a stop. The Edsel, hit straight on, flipped over on its back in the center of the road. I don't recall unfastening my seat belt or scrambling out of my car, but I must have done so, because the next thing I remember I was crawling on the roadway, dazed but unhurt.

I should have tried to do something right away, to answer the cries for help that were coming from the Edsel. But I didn't. I was still shaken, in shock. I don't know how long I lay there before the Edsel exploded and began to burn. The cries suddenly became screams. And then there were no cries.

By the time I climbed to my feet, the fire had burned itself out, and it was too late to do anything. But I still wasn't thinking very clearly. I could see lights in the distance, down the road that led from the exit ramp. I began to walk towards them.

That walk seemed to take forever. I couldn't seem to get my bearings, and I kept stumbling. The road was very poorly lighted, and I could hardly see where I was going. My hands were scraped badly once when I fell down. It was the only injury I suffered in the entire accident.

The lights were from a small cafe, a dingy place that had marked off a section of the abandoned highway as its airlot. There were only three customers inside when I stumbled through the door, but one of them was a local cop.

"There's been an accident," I said from the doorway. "Somebody's got to help them."

The cop drained his coffee cup in a gulp, and rose from his chair. "A copter crash, mister?" he said. "Where is it?"

I shook my head. "N-no. No. Cars. A crash, a highway accident. Out on the old interstate." I pointed vaguely in the direction I had come.

Halfway across the room, the cop stopped suddenly and frowned. Everybody else laughed. "Hell, no one's used that road in twenty years, you sot," a fat man yelled from the corner of the room. "It's got so many potholes we use it for a golf course," he added, laughing loudly at his own joke.

The cop looked at me doubtfully. "Go home and sober up, mister," he said. "I don't want to have to run you in." He started back towards his chair.

I took a step into the room. "Dammit, I'm telling the truth," I said, angry now more than dazed. "And I'm not drunk. There's been a collision on the interstate, and there's people trapped up there in. . ." My voice trailed off as it finally struck me that any help I could bring would be far too late.

The cop still looked dubious. "Maybe you ought to go check it out," the waitress suggested from behind the counter. "He might be telling the truth. There was a highway accident last year, in Ohio somewhere. I remember seeing a story about it on 3V."

"Yeah, I guess so," the cop said at last. "Let's go, buddy. And you better be telling the truth."

We walked across the airlot in silence, and climbed into the four-man police copter. As he started up the blades, the cop looked at me and said, "You know, if you're on the level, you and that other guy should get some kind of medals."

I stared at him blankly.

"What I mean, is you're probably the only two cars to use that road in ten years. And you still manage to collide. Now that had to take some doing, didn't it?" He shook his head ruefully. "Not everybody could pull off a stunt like that. Like I said, they ought to give you a medal."

The interstate wasn't nearly as far from the cafe as it had seemed when I was walking. Once airborne, we covered the distance in less than five minutes. But there was something wrong. The highway looked somehow different from the air.

And suddenly I realized why. It was darker. Much darker. Most of the lights were out, and those that weren't were dim and flickering.

As I sat there stunned, the copter came down with a thud in the middle of a pool of sickly yellow light thrown

out by one of the fading lamps. I climbed out in a daze, and tripped as I accidentally stepped into one of the potholes that pockmarked the road. There was a big clump of weeds growing in the bottom of this one, and a lot more rooted in the jagged network of cracks that ran across the highway.

My head was starting to pound. This didn't make sense. None of it made sense. I didn't know what the hell was going on.

The cop came around from the other side of the copter, a portable med sensor slung over one shoulder on a leather strap. "Let's move it," he said. "Where's this accident of yours?"

"Down the road, I think," I mumbled, unsure of myself. There was no sign of my car, and I was beginning to think we might be on the wrong road altogether, although I didn't see how that could be.

It was the right road, though. We found my car a few minutes later, sitting by the guard rail on a pitch black section of highway where all the lights had burnt out. Yes, we found my car all right.

Only there wasn't a scratch on it. And there was no Edsel.

I remember the Jaguar as I had left it. The windshield shattered. The entire front of the car in ruins. The right fender smashed up where it had scraped along the guard rail. And here it was, in mint condition.

The cop, scowling, played the med sensor over me as I stood there staring at my car. "Well, you're not drunk," he said at last, looking up. "So I'm not going to run you in, though I should. Here's what you're going to do, mister —you're going to get in that relic, and turn around, and get out of here as fast as you can. 'Cause if I ever see you around here again, you might have a real accident. Understand?"

I wanted to protest, but I couldn't find the words. What could I say that would possibly make sense? Instead, I nodded weakly. The cop turned with disgust, muttering something about practical jokers, and stalked back to his copter.

When he was gone, I walked up to the Jaguar and felt the front of it incredulously, feeling like a fool. But it was real. And when I climbed in and turned the key in the

ignition, the engine rumbled reassuringly, and the headlights speared out into the darkness. I sat there for a long time before I finally swung the car out into the middle of the road, and made a U turn.

The drive back to San Breta was long and rough. I was constantly bouncing in and out of potholes. And thanks to the poor lighting and the treacherous road conditions, I had to keep my speed at a minimum.

The road was lousy. There was no doubt about that. Usually I went out of my way to avoid roads that were this bad. There was too much chance of blowing a tire.

I managed to make it to San Breta without incident, taking it slow and easy. It was two a.m. before I pulled into town. The exit ramp, like the rest of the road, was cracked and darkened. And there was no sign to mark it.

I recalled from previous trips through the area that San Breta boasted a large hobbyist garage and gas depot, so I headed there and checked my car with a bored young night attendant. Then I went straight to the nearest motel. A night's sleep, I thought, would make everything make sense.

But it didn't. I was every bit as confused when I woke up in the morning. More so, even. Now something in the back of my head kept telling me the whole thing had been a bad dream. I swatted down that tempting thought out of hand, and tried to puzzle it out.

I kept puzzling through a shower and breakfast, and the short walk back to the gas depot. But I wasn't making any progress. Either my mind had been playing tricks on me, or something mighty funny had been going on last night. I didn't want to believe the former, so I made up my mind to investigate the latter.

The owner, a spry old man in his eighties, was on duty at the gas depot when I returned. He was wearing an old-fashioned mechanic's coverall, a quaint touch. He nodded amiably when I checked out the Jaguar.

"Good to see you again," he said. "Where you headed this time?"

"L.A. I'm taking the interstate this time."

His eyebrows rose a trifle at that. "The interstate? I thought you had more sense than that. That road's a disaster. No way to treat a fine piece of machinery like that Jaguar of yours."

I didn't have the courage to try to explain, so I just grinned weakly and let him go get the car. The Jag had been washed, checked over, and gassed up. It was in prime shape. I took a quick look for dents, but there were none to be found.

"How many regular customers you get around here?" I asked the old man as I was paying him. "Local collectors, I mean, not guys passing through."

He shrugged. "Must be about a hundred in the state. We get most of their business. Got the best gas and the only decent service facilities in these parts."

"Any decent collections?"

"Some," he said. "One guy comes in all the time with a Pierce-Arrow. Another fellow specializes in the forties. He's got a really fine collection. In good shape, too."

I nodded. "Anybody around here own an Edsel?" I asked.

"Hardly," he replied. "None of my customers have that kind of money. Why do you ask?"

I decided to throw caution on the road, so to speak. "I saw one last night on the road. Didn't get to speak to the owner, though. Figured it might be somebody local."

The old man's expression was blank, so I turned to get into the Jag. "Nobody from around here," he said as I shut the door. "Must've been another guy driving through. Funny meeting him on the road like that, though. Don't often get—"

Then, just as I was turning the key in the ignition, his jaw dropped about six feet. "Wait a minute!" he yelled. "You said you were driving on the old interstate. You saw an Edsel on the interstate?"

I turned the motor off again. "That's right," I said.

"Christ," he said. "I'd almost forgotten, it's been so long. Was it a white Edsel? Five people in it?"

I opened the door and got out again. "Yeah," I said. "Do you know something about it?"

The old man grabbed my shoulders with both hands. There was a funny look in his eyes. "You just saw it?," he said, shaking me. "Are you sure that's all that happened?"

I hesitated a moment, feeling foolish. "No," I finally admitted. "I had a collision with it. That is, I thought I

had a collision with it. But then—" I gestured limply towards the Jaguar.

The old man took his hands off me, and laughed. "Again," he muttered. "After all these years."

"What do you know about this?" I demanded. "What the hell went on out there last night?"

He sighed. "C'mon," he said. "I'll tell you all about it."

"It was over forty years ago," he told me over a cup of coffee in a cafe across the street. "Back in the '70s. They were a family on a vacation outing. The kid and his father were taking shifts behind the wheel. Anyway, they had hotel reservations at San Breta. But the kid was driving, and it was late at night, and somehow he missed his exit. Didn't even notice it.

"Until he hit Exit 77, that is. He must've been really scared when he saw that sign. According to people who knew them, his father was a real bastard. The kind who'd give him a real hard time over something like that. We don't know what happened, but they figure the kid panicked. He'd only had his license about two weeks. Of all things, he tried to make a U turn and head back towards San Breta.

"The other car hit him broadside. The driver of that car didn't have his seat belt on. He went through the windshield, hit the road, and was killed instantly. The people in the Edsel weren't so lucky. The Edsel turned over and exploded, with them trapped inside. All five were burned to death."

I shuddered a little as I remembered the screams from the burning car. "But that was forty years ago, you said. How does that explain what happened to me last night?"

"I'm getting to that," the old man said. He picked up a donut, dunked it into his coffee, and chewed on it thoughtfully. "Next thing was about two years later," he said at last. "Guy reported a collision to the cops. Collision with an Edsel. Late at night. On the interstate. The way he described it, it was an instant replay of the other crash. Only, when they got out there, his car wasn't even dented. And there was no sign of the other car."

"Well, that guy was a local boy, so it was dismissed as a publicity stunt of some sort. But then, a year later, still another guy came in with the same story. This time he was

from the east, couldn't possibly have heard of the first accident. The cops didn't know what to make of it.

"Over the years it happened again and again. There were a few things common to all the incidents. Each time it was late at night. Each time the man involved was alone in his car, with no other cars in sight. There were never any witnesses, as there had been for the first crash, the real one. All the collisions took place just beyond Exit 77, when the Edsel swerved and tried to make a U turn.

"Lots of people tried to explain it. Hallucinations, somebody said. Highway hypnosis, claimed somebody else. Hoaxes, one guy argued. But only one explanation ever made sense, and that was the simplest. The Edsel was a ghost. The papers made the most of that. 'The haunted highway,' they called the interstate."

The old man stopped to drain his coffee, and then stared into the cup moodily. "Well, the crashes continued right up through the years whenever the conditions were right. Until '93. And then traffic began slacking off. Less and less people were using the interstate. And there were less and less incidents." He looked up at me. "You were the first one in more than twenty years. I'd almost forgotten." Then he looked down again, and fell silent.

I considered what he had said for a few minutes. "I don't know," I said finally, shaking my head. "It all fits. But a ghost? I don't think I believe in ghosts. And it all seems so out of place."

"Not really," said the old man, looking up. Think back on all the ghost stories you read as a kid. What did they all have in common?"

I frowned. "Don't know."

"Violent death, that's what. Ghosts were the products of murders and of executions, debris of blood and violence. Haunted houses were all places where someone had met a grisly end a hundred years before. But in twentieth-century America, you didn't find the violent death in mansions and castles. You found it on the highways, the blood-stained highways where thousands died each year. A modern ghost wouldn't live in a castle or wield an axe. He'd haunt a highway, and drive a car. What could be more logical?"

It made a certain amount of sense. I nodded. "But why

this highway? Why this car? So many people died on the roads. Why is this case special?"

The old man shrugged. "I don't know. What made one murder different from another? Why did only some produce ghosts? Who's to say? But I've heard theories. Some said the Edsel is doomed to haunt the highway forever because it is, in a sense, a murderer. It caused the accident, caused those deaths. This is a punishment."

"Maybe," I said doubtfully. "But the whole family? You could make a case that it was the kid's fault. Or even the father's, for letting him drive with so little experience. But what about the rest of the family? Why should they be punished?"

"True, true," the old man said. "I never bought that theory myself. I've got my own explanation." He looked me straight in the eye.

"I think they're lost," he said.

"Lost?" I repeated, and he nodded.

"Yes," he said. "In the old days, when the roads were crowded, you couldn't just turn around when you missed an exit. You had to keep going, sometimes for miles and miles, before you could find a way to get off the road and then get back on. Some of the cloverleaves they designed were so complicated you might never find your way back to your exit.

"And that's what happened to the Edsel, I think. They missed their exit, and now they can't find it. They've got to keep going. Forever." He sighed. Then he turned, and ordered another cup of coffee.

We drank in silence, then walked back to the gas depot. From there, I drove straight to the town library. It was all there, in the old newspapers on file. The details of the original accident, the first incident two years later, and the others, in irregular sequence. The same story, the same crash, over and over. Everything was identical, right down to the screams.

The old highway was dark and unlit that night when I resumed my trip. There were no traffic signs or white lines, but there were plenty of cracks and potholes. I drove slowly, lost in thought.

A few miles beyond San Bretta I stopped and got out of the car. I sat there in the starlight until it was nearly

dawn, looking and listening. But the lights stayed out, and I saw nothing.

Yet, around midnight, there was a peculiar whistling sound in the distance. It built quickly, until it was right on top of me, and then faded away equally fast.

It could have been a hovertruck off over the horizon somewhere, I suppose. I've never heard a hovertruck make that sort of noise, but still, it might have been a hovertruck.

But I don't think so.

I think it was the wind whistling through the nose of a rusty white ghost car, driving on a haunted highway you won't find on any road maps. I think it was the cry of a little lost Edsel, searching forever for the exit to San Breta.

CAR SINISTER

By Gene Wolfe

The sexual and erotic element in our car culture should not be underestimated. It can be found in our popular music from Chuck Berry's "Maybelline" to the late and lamented Phil Ochs's "My Kingdom for a Car"—"if you want me you'll have to pass me," in the mystique of the back seat—and in literary works, the ultimate example surely being Crash by J. G. Ballard.

But what of the cars themselves? After all, they have needs just like anybody else.

Q: What do you get if you cross a raccoon with a greyhound?

A: A furry brown animal that climbs trees and seats forty people.

—GRADE SCHOOL JOKE

There are three gas stations in our village. I suppose before I get any deeper into this I should explain that it really is a village, and not a suburb. There are two grocery stores (privately owned and so small my wife has to go to both when she wants to bake a cake), a hardware store with the post office in one corner, and the three gas stations.

Two of these are operated by major oil companies, and for convenience I'll call them the one I go to and the other one. I have a credit card for the one I go to, which is clean, well run, and trustworthy on minor repairs. I have no reason to think the other one is any different, in fact it looks just the same except for the colors on the sign, and I've noticed that the two of them exchange small favors

when the need arises. They are on opposite sides of the main road (it is the kind of road that was called a highway in the nineteen thirties), and I suppose both managers feel they're getting their share.

The third station isn't like that at all; it looks quite different and sells a brand of gasoline I've never seen anywhere else. This third station is at the low end of the village, run by a man called Bosko. Bosko appears stupid although I don't think he really is, and always wears an army fatigue hat and a gray coat that was once part of a bus driver's uniform. Another man—a boy, really—helps Bosko. The boy's name is Bubber; he is usually even dirtier than Bosko, and has something wrong with the shape of his head.

I own a Rambler American and, as I said, always have it serviced at one of the major-brand stations. I might add that I work in the city, driving thirty miles each way, and the car is very important to me; so I would never have taken it to Bosko's if it hadn't been for that foolish business about my credit card. I lost it, you see. I don't know where. Naturally I telegraphed the company, but before I got my new card I had to have the car serviced.

Of course, what I should have done was to go to my usual station and pay cash. But I wondered if the manager might not be curious and check his list of defaulting cards. I understand that the companies take great pains to keep these lists up to date, and since it had been two days since I'd wired them, it wasn't out of the question to suppose that my number would be there, and that he'd think I was a bad credit risk. A thing like that gets around fast in our village. I shouldn't really have worried about something like that, I know, but it was late and I was tired. And of course the other major oil company station would be even worse. The manager of my station would have seen me right across the road.

At any rate I was going on a trip the next day, and I thought of the old station at the low end of the village. I only wanted a grease job and an oil change. Hundreds, or at least dozens, of people must patronize the place every day. What could go wrong?

Bosko—I didn't know his name at the time, but I had seen him around the village and knew what he looked like—wasn't there. Only the boy, Bubber, covered with oil

from an incredible car he had been working on. I suppose he saw me staring at it because he said, "Ain't you never seen one like that?"

I told him I hadn't, then tried to describe what I wanted done to my American. Bubber wasn't paying attention. "That's a *funny car* there," he said. "They uses 'em for drag races and shows and what not. Rears right up on his back wheels. Wait'll I finish with him and I'll show you."

I said, "I haven't time. I just want to leave my car to be serviced."

That seemed to surprise him, and he looked at my American with interest. "Nice little thing," he said, almost crooning.

"I always see it has the best of care. Could you give me a lift home now? I'll need my car back before eight tomorrow morning."

"I ain't supposed to leave when Bosko ain't here, but I'll see if I can find one that runs."

Cars, some of them among the strangest I had ever seen, were parked on almost every square foot of the station's apron. There was an American Legion parade car rebuilt to resemble a "forty and eight" boxcar, now rusting and rotting; a bulking candy-apple hot rod that looked usable, but which Bubber dismissed with, "Can't get no rings for her, she's overbored"; stunted little British Minis with rickets; a Crosley, the first I had seen in ten years; a two-headed car with a hood, and I suppose an engine, at each end; and others I could not even put a name to. As we walked past the station for the second time in our search, I saw a sleek, black car inside and caught Bubber (soiling my fingers) by the sleeve. "How about that one? It looks ready to go."

Bubber shook his head positively and spat against the wall. "The Aston Martin? He's too damn mean."

And so I drove home, eventually, in a sagging school bus which had been converted into a sort of camper and had WABASH FAMILY GOSPEL SINGERS painted in circus lettering on its side. I spent the evening explaining the thing to my wife and went to bed rather seriously worried about whether or not I would have my car back by eight as well as about what Bubber's clothing would do to my upholstery.

I need not have concerned myself, as it turned out. I

was awakened about three (according to the illuminated dial of my alarm clock) by the sound of an engine in my driveway, and when I looked out through the Venetian blinds, I saw my faithful little Rambler parked there. I went back to sleep with most of my anxiety gone, listening to those strange little moans a warm motor makes as it cools. It seemed to me they lasted longer than normal that night, mingling with my dreams.

Next morning I found a grimy yellow statement for twenty-five dollars on the front seat. Nothing was itemized; it simply read (when I finally deciphered the writing, which was atrocious) "for service."

As I mentioned above, I was leaving on a trip that morning, and I had no time to contest this absurd demand. I jammed it into the map compartment and contrived to forget it until I returned home a week later. Then I went to the station—Bosko was there, fortunately—and explained that there must have been some mistake. Bosko glanced at my bill and asked me again, although I had just told him, what it was I had ordered done. "I wanted the oil changed and the chassis greased," I repeated, "and the tank filled. You know, the car serviced."

I saw that that had somehow struck a nerve. Bosko froze for a moment, then smiled broadly and with a ceremonious gesture tore the yellow slip to bits which he allowed to sift through his fingers to the floor. "Bubber made a mistake, I guess, Colonel," he said with what struck me as false bonhomie. "This one's on the house. She behave okay while you had her out?"

I was rattled at being called Colonel (I have found since that Bosko applies that honorific to all his customers) and could only nod. As a matter of fact the American's performance had been quite flawless, the little car seeming, if anything, a bit more eager than usual.

"Well, listen," Bosko said, "you let me know if there's any trouble at all with her. And like I said, this one's on the house. We'd like your business."

My new card came, and I had almost forgotten this incident when my car began giving trouble in the mornings. I would start the engine as usual, and it would run for a few seconds, cough, and stop; and after this prove impossible to start again for ten or fifteen minutes. I took it to the station I usually patronize several times and they tin-

kered with it dutifully, but the next morning the same thing would occur. After this had been going on for three weeks or so, I remembered Bosko.

He was sympathetic. This, I have to admit, made me warm to him somewhat. The manager of my usual station had been pretty curt the third time I complained about my car's "morning trouble," as I called it. When I had described the symptoms to Bosko, he asked, "You smell gas when it happens, Colonel?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, I do. There's quite a strong gasoline odor."

He nodded. "You see, Colonel, what happens is that your engine is drawin' in the gas from the carb, then pukin' it back up at you. You know, like it was sick."

So my American had a queasy stomach mornings. It was a remarkable idea, but on the other hand one of the very few things I've ever been told by a mechanic that made sense. Naturally I asked Bosko what we could do about it.

"There's a few things, but really they won't any of them help much. The best thing is just live with it. It'll go away by itself in a while. Only I got something serious to tell you, Colonel. You want to come in my office?"

Mystified, I followed him into the cluttered little room adjoining the garage portion of the station and seated myself in a chair whose bottom was dropping out. To be truthful, I couldn't really imagine what he could have to tell me since he hadn't so much as raised the hood to look at my engine; so I waited with equanimity for him to speak. "Colonel," he said, "you got a bun in the oven—you know what I mean? Your car does, that is. She's *that way*."

I laughed, of course.

"You don't believe me? Well, it's the truth. See, what we got here," he lowered his voice, "is kinda what you would call a stud service. An' when you told Bubber you wanted her *serviced*, you never havin' come here before, that's what he thought you meant. So he, uh," Bosko jerked his head significantly toward the sleek, black Aston Martin in the garage, "he, you know, he *serviced* it. I was hopin' it wouldn't take. Lots of times it don't."

"This is ridiculous. Cars don't breed."

Bosko waggled his head at me. "That's what they'd like you to think in Detroit. But if you'd ever lived around there

and talked to any of the union men, those guys would tell you how every year they make more and more cars with less and less guys comin' through the gate."

"That's because of automation," I told him. "Better methods."

"Sure!" He leveled a dirty finger at me. "Better methods is right. An' what's the best method of all, huh? Ain't it the way the farmer does? Sure there's lots of cars put together the old-fashioned way early in the year when they got to get their breedin' stock, but after that—well, I'm here to tell you, Colonel, they don't hire all them engineers up there for nothing. Bionics, they call it. Makin' a machine act like it was a' animal."

"Why doesn't everybody . . . ?"

He shushed me, finger to lips. "'Cause they don't like it, that's why. There's a hell of a big license needed to do it legal, and even if you're willin' to put up the bread, you don't get one unless you're one of the big boys. That's why I try to keep my little operation here quiet. Besides, they got a way of makin' sure most people *can't*."

"What do you mean?"

"You know anything about horses? You know what a gelding is?"

I admit I was shocked, though that may sound foolish. I said, "You mean they . . . ?"

"Sure." Bosko made a scissors gesture with his arms, snapping them like a giant shears. "Ain't you ever noticed how they make all these cars with real hairy names, but when you get 'em out on the road, they ain't really got anything? Geldings."

"Do you think . . ." I looked (delicately, I hope) toward my American, "it could be repaired? What they call an illegal operation?"

Bosko spread his hands. "What for? Listen, Colonel, it would just cost you a lot of bread, and that little car of yours might never recover. Ain't it come through to you yet that if you just let nature take her course for a while yet, you're goin' to have yourself a new car for nothing?"

I took Bosko's advice. I should not have; it was the first time in my life I have ever connived at anything against the law; but the idea of having a second car to give my wife attracted me, and I must admit I was fascinated as well. I dare say that in time Bosko must have regretted having

persuaded me; I pestered him with questions, and once even, by a little genteel blackmail, forced him to allow me to witness the Aston Martin in action.

For all its sleek good finish it was a remarkably unprepossessing car, with something freakish about it. Bosko told me it had been specially built for use on some British television program now defunct. I suppose the producers had wanted to project the most masculine possible image, and it was for this reason that it had been left reproductively intact—to fall, eventually, into Bosko's hands. When Bubber started the engine it made a sound such as I have never heard from any car in my life, a sort of lustful snarl.

The Aston Martin's bride for the night was a small and rather elderly Volks squareback, belonging I suppose to some poor man who could not afford to buy a new car through legal channels, or perhaps hoped to turn a small profit on his family's fecundity. I must say I felt rather sorry for her, forced to submit to a beast like the Aston Martin. In action all its appearance of feline grace proved a fraud; it experienced the same difficulties a swine breeder might expect with a huge champion boar, and had to be helped by Bosko with ramps and jacks while Bubber fought the controls.

The months of my American's time passed. Her gasoline consumption went up and up until I was getting barely eleven miles to the gallon. She acquired a swollen appearance as well, and became so deficient in endurance she could scarcely be forced up even a moderate hill, and overheated continually. When eight months had passed, the plies of her tires separated, forming ugly welts in the sidewalls, but Bosko warned me not to replace them since the same problem would only occur again.

On the night of the delivery Bosko offered to allow me to observe, but I declined. Call it squeamishness, if you will. Late that night—very late—I walked past his station and stared from the sidewalk at the bright glow of a trouble light and the scuttling shadows within, but I felt no urge to let them know I was there. The next morning, before I had breakfast, Bosko was on the phone asking if I wanted to pick my cars up: "I'll drive your old one over if you'll give me a lift back." Then I knew that my American had come through the ordeal, and breathed somewhat more easily.

My first sight of her son was, I admit, something of a shock. It—I find it hard to call him *he*—is a deep, jungle green inherited from Heaven knows what remote ancestor, and his seats are covered in a long-napped sleazy stuff like imitation rabbit fur. I had expected—I don't know quite why—that he would be of some recognizable make: a Pontiac, or perhaps a Ford, since they are made in both England and America. He is nothing of the sort, of course, and I realize now that those *marques* with which we are familiar must be carefully maintained purebred lines. As it is I have searched him everywhere for some sort of brand name that would allow me to describe the car to prospective purchasers, but beyond a sort of trademark that appears in several places (a shield with a band or stripe running from left to right) there is nothing. Where part numbers or serial numbers appear, they are often garbled or illegible, or do not match.

It was necessary to license him of course, and to do this it was necessary to have a title. Through Bosko I procured one from an unethical used-car dealer for thirty dollars. It describes the car as a '54 Chevrolet; I wish it were.

No dealer I have found will give me any sort of price for it, and so I have advertised it each Sunday for the past eight months in the largest paper in the city where I work, and also in a small, nationally circulated magazine specializing in collector's cars. There have been only two responses: one from a man who left as soon as he saw the car, the other from a boy of about seventeen who told me he would buy him as soon as he could find someone who would lend him the money. Had I been more alert I would have taken whatever he had, made over the spurious title to him, and trusted him for the rest; but at the time I was still hoping to find a bona fide buyer.

I have had to turn my American over to my wife since she refuses to drive the new car, and the several mechanical failures he had already suffered have been extremely inconvenient. Parts in the conventional sense are nonexistent. Either alterations must be made which will allow the corresponding part from some known make to be used, or the part must be made by a job shop. This, I find, is one of the penalties of our—as I thought—unique automotive miscegenation; but when, a few weeks ago, I grew so dis-

couraged I attempted to abandon the car, I discovered that someone else must have made the same crossing. When the police forced me to come and retrieve it, I found that the radiator, generator, and battery were missing.

INTERURBAN QUEEN

By R. A. Lafferty

It is a truism in America these days that if you hold onto something long enough, it will increase in value. This is the case for a wide variety of items from comic books to the early recordings of Sam Cooke. It is also true of old cars, especially those from companies that have gone out of business, like Packard, Studebaker, and De Soto, which are now worth many thousands of dollars in the lucrative "antique car" market.

A large part of the joy of the old cars is in the driving—they handle differently, you feel the road more, and you actually have to do something. In this typically strange and wonderful story, R. A. Lafferty allows us to share his vision of the automobile hobbyist of tomorrow.

"It was the year 1907 when I attained my majority and came into a considerable inheritance," the old man said. "I was a very keen young man, keen enough to know that I didn't know everything. I went to knowledgeable men and asked their advice as to how I might invest this inheritance.

"I talked with bankers and cattlemen and the new oil-men. These were not stodgy men. They had an edge on the future, and they were excited and exciting about the way that money might be made to grow. It was the year of statehood and there was an air of prosperity over the new state. I wished to integrate my patrimony into that new prosperity.

"Finally I narrowed my choice to two investments which then seemed about of equal prospect, though you will now smile to hear them equated. One of them was the stock-selling company of a certain Harvey Goodrich, a rubber

company, and with the new automobile coming into wider use, it seemed that rubber might be a thing of the future. The other was a stock-selling transportation company that proposed to run an interurban railway between the small towns of Kiefer and Mounds. It also proposed (at a future time) to run branches to Glenpool, to Bixby, to Kellyville, to Slick, to Bristow, to Beggs, even to Okmulgee and Sapulpa. At that time it also seemed that these little interurban railways might be things of the future. An interurban already ran between Tulsa and Sand Springs, and one was building between Tulsa and Sapulpa. There were more than one thousand of these small trolley railroads operating in the nation, and thoughtful men believed that they would come to form a complete national network, might become the main system of transportation."

But now the old man Charles Archer was still a young man. He was listening to Joe Elias, a banker in a small but growing town.

"It is a riddle you pose me, young man, and you set me thinking," Elias said. "We have dabbled in both, thinking to have an egg under every hen. I begin to believe that we were wrong to do so. These two prospects are types of two futures, and only one of them will obtain. In this state with its new oil discoveries, it might seem that we should be partial to rubber which has a tie-in with the automobile which has a tie-in with petroleum fuel. This need not be. I believe that the main use of oil will be in powering the new factories, and I believe that rubber is already oversold as to industrial application. And yet there *will be* a new transportation. Between the horse and the main-line railways there is a great gap. I firmly believe that the horse will be eliminated as a main form of transportation. We are making no more loans to buggy or buckboard manufacturers nor to harness makers. I have no faith in the automobile. It destroys something in me. It is the interurbans that will go into the smallest localities, and will so cut into the main-line railroads as to leave no more than a half dozen of the long-distance major lines in America. Young man, I would invest in the interurban with complete confidence."



Charles Archer was listening to Carl Bigheart, a cattle-man.

"I ask you, boy, how many head of cattle can you put into an automobile? Or even into what they call a lorry or trook? Then I ask you how many you can put into an honest cattle car which can be coupled onto any interurban on a country run? The interurban will be the salvation of us cattlemen. With the fencing regulations we cannot drive cattle even twenty miles to a railroad; but the little interurbans will go into the deep country, running along every second or third section line.

"And I will tell you another thing, boy: there is no future for the automobile. *We cannot let there be!* Consider the man on horseback, and I have been a man on horseback for most of my life. Well, mostly he is a good man, but there is a change in him as soon as he mounts. Every man on horseback is an arrogant man, however gentle he may be on foot. I know this in myself and in others. He was necessary in his own time, and I believe that time is ending. There was always extreme danger from the man on horseback.

"Believe me, young man, the man in the automobile is one thousand times as dangerous. The kindest man in the world assumes an incredible arrogance when he drives an automobile, and this arrogance will increase still further if the machine is allowed to develop greater power and sophistication. I tell you, it will engender absolute selfishness in mankind if the driving of automobiles becomes common. It will breed violence on a scale never seen before. It will mark the end of the family as we know it, the three or four generations living happily in one home. It will destroy the sense of neighborhood and the true sense of nation. It will create giantized cankers of cities, false opulence of suburbs, ruined countryside, and unhealthy conglomeration of specialized farming and manufacturing. It will breed rootlessness and immorality. It will make every man a tyrant. I believe the private automobile will be suppressed. *It will have to be!* This is a moral problem, and we are a moral nation and world; we will take moral action against it. And without the automobile, rubber has no real future. Opt for the interurban stock, young man."



Young Charles Archer was listening to Nolan Cushman, an oilman.

"I will not lie to you, young fellow, I love the automobile, the motorcar. I have three, custom-built. I am an emperor when I drive. Hell, I'm an emperor anyhow! I bought a castle last summer that had housed emperors. I'm having it transported, stone by stone, to my place in the Osage. Now, as to the motorcar, I can see how it should develop. It should develop with the roads, they becoming leveled and metaled or concreted, and the cars lower and lower and faster and faster. We would develop them so, if we were some species other than human. It is the logical development, but I hope it will not come, and it will not. That would be to make it common, and the commonality of men cannot be trusted with this power. Besides, I love a high car, and I do not want there to be very many of them. They should only be allowed to men of extreme wealth and flair. How would it be if the workingmen were ever permitted them? It would be murderous if they should come into the hands of ordinary men. How hellish a world would it be if all men should become as arrogant as myself! No, the automobile will never be anything but a rich man's pride, the rubber will never be anything but a limited adjunct to that special thing. Invest in your interurban. It is the thing of the future, or else I dread that future."

Young Charles Archer knew that this was a crossroads of the world. Whichever turning was taken, it would predicate a certain sort of nation and world and humanity. He thought about it deeply. Then he decided. He went out and invested his entire inheritance in his choice.

"I considered the two investments and I made my choice," said Charles Archer, the old man now in the now present. "I put all I had into it, thirty-five thousand dollars, a considerable sum in those days. You know the results."

"I am one of the results, Great-grandfather," said Angela Archer. "If you had invested differently you would have come to different fortune, you would have married differently, and I would be different or not at all. I like me here and now. I like everything as it is."

Three of them were out riding early one Saturday morn-

ing, the old man Charles Archer, his great-granddaughter Angela, and her fiance Peter Brady. They were riding through the quasiurbia, the rich countryside. It was not a main road, and yet it had a beauty (partly natural and partly contrived) that was as exciting as it was satisfying.

Water always beside the roadway, that was the secret! There were the carp ponds one after another. There were the hatcheries. There were the dancing rocky streams that in a less enlightened age might have been mere gutter runs or roadway runs. There were the small and rapid trout streams, and boys were catching big trout from them.

There were the deep bush-trees, there, sumac, witch hazel, sassafras—incense trees they might almost have been. There were the great trees themselves, pecan and hickory and black walnut, standing like high backdrops; and between were the lesser trees, willow, cottonwood, sycamore. Cattails and sedge grass and reeds stood in the water itself, and tall Sudan grass and bluestem on the shores. And always the clovers there, and the smell of wet sweet clover.

"I chose the wrong one," said old Charles Archer as they rode along through the textured country. "One can now see how grotesque was my choice, but I was young. In two years, the stock-selling company in which I had invested was out of business and my loss was total. So early and easy riches were denied me, but I developed an ironic hobby: keeping track of the stock of the enterprise in which I did *not* invest. The stock I could have bought for thirty-five thousand dollars would now make me worth nine million dollars."

"Ugh, don't talk of such a thing on such a beautiful day," Angela objected.

"They heard another of them last night," Peter Brady commented. "They've been hearing this one, off and on, for a week now, and haven't caught him yet."

"I always wish they wouldn't kill them when they catch them," Angela bemoaned. "It doesn't seem quite right to kill them."

A goose-girl was herding her white honking charges as they gobbled weeds out of fields of morning onions. Flowering kale was shining green-purple, and okra plants were standing. Jersey cows grazed along the roadway, and the patterned plastic (almost as patterned as the grasses) filled the roadway itself.

There were clouds like yellow dust in the air. Bees! Stingless bees they were. But dust itself was not. That there never be dust again!

"They will have to find out and kill the sly klunker makers," said old man Charles Archer. "Stop the poison at its source."

"There's too many of them, and too much money in it," said Peter Brady. "Yes, we kill them. One of them was found and killed Thursday, and three nearly finished klunkers were destroyed. But we can't kill them all. They seem to come out of the ground like snakes."

"I wish we didn't have to kill them," Angela said.

There were brightly colored firkins of milk standing on loading stoas, for this was a milk shed. There were chickens squawking in nine-story-high coops as they waited the pickups, but they never had to wait long. Here were a thousand dozen eggs on a refrigeration porch; there a clutch of piglings, or of red steers.

Tomato plants were staked two meters high. Sweet corn stood, not yet come to tassel. They passed cucumber vines and cantaloupe vines, and the potato hills rising up blue-green. Ah, there were grapevines in their tight acres, deep alfalfa meadows, living fences of Osage orange and white-thorn. Carrot tops zephyred like green lace. Cattle were grazing fields of red clover and of peanuts—that most magic of all clovers. Men mowed hay.

"I hear him now!" Peter Brady said suddenly.

"You couldn't. Not in the daytime. Don't even think of such a thing," Angela protested.

Farm ducks were grazing with their heads under water in the roadway ponds and farm ponds. Bower oaks grew high in the roadway parks. Sheep fed in hay grazer that was higher than their heads; they were small white islands in it. There was local wine and choc beer and cider for sale at small booths, along with limestone sculpture and painted fruitwood carvings. Kids danced on loading stoas to little post-mounted music canisters, and goats licked slate outcroppings in search of some new mineral.

The Saturday riders passed a roadway restaurant with its tables out under the leaves and under a little rock overhang. A one-meter-high waterfall gushed through the middle of the establishment, and a two-meter-long bridge of set shale stone led to the kitchen. Then they broke onto view

after never-tiring view of the rich and varied quasiurbia. The roadway forms, the fringe farms, the berry patches! In their seasons: Juneberries, huckleberries, blueberries, dewberries, elderberries, highbush cranberries, red raspberries, boysenberries, loganberries, nine kinds of blackberries, strawberries, greenberries.

Orchards! Can there ever be enough orchards? Plum, peach, sand plum and chokecherry, black cherry, apple and crab apple, pear, blue-fruited pawpaw, persimmon, crooked quince. Melon patches, congregations of beehives, pickle patches, cheese farms, flax farms, close clustered towns (twenty houses in each, twenty persons in a house, twenty of the little settlements along every mile of roadway, country honkey-tonks, as well as high-dog clubs already open and hopping with action in the early morning; roadway chapels with local statuary and with their rich-box-poor-boxes (one dropped money in the top if one had it and the spirit to give it, one tripped it out the bottom if one needed it), and the little refrigeration niches with bread, cheese, beef rolls, and always the broached cask of country wine: that there be no more hunger on the roadways forever!

"I hear it too!" old Charles Archer cried out suddenly. "High-pitched and off to the left. And there's the smell of monoxide and—gah—rubber. Conductor, conductor!"

The conductor heard it, as did others in the car. The conductor stopped the cars to listen. Then he phoned the report and gave the location as well as he might, consulting with the passengers. There was rough country over to the left, rocks and hills, and someone was driving there in broad daylight.

The conductor broke out rifles from the locker, passing them out to Peter Brady and two other young men in the car, and to three men in each of the other two cars. A competent-seeming man took over the communication, talking to men on a line further to the left, beyond the mad driver, and they had him boxed into a box no more than half a mile square.

"You stay, Angela, and you stay, Grandfather Archer," Peter Brady said. "Here is a little thirty carbine. Use it if he comes in range at all. We hunt him down now." Then Peter Brady followed the conductor and the rifle-bearing men, ten men on a death hunt. And there were now four

other groups out on the hunt, converging on their whining, coughing target.

"Why do they have to kill them, Great-grandfather? Why not turn them over to the courts?"

"The courts are too lenient. All they give them is life in prison."

"But surely that should be enough. It will keep them from driving the things, and some of the unfortunate men might even be rehabilitated."

"Angela, they are the greatest prison breakers ever. Only ten days ago, Mad Man Gudge killed three guards, went over the wall at State Prison, evaded all pursuit, robbed the cheesemakers' cooperative of fifteen thousand dollars, got to a sly klunker maker, and was driving one of the things in a wild area within thirty hours of his breakout. It was four days before they found him and killed him. They are insane, Angela, and the mental hospitals are already full of them. Not one of them has ever been rehabilitated."

"Why is it so bad that they should drive? They usually drive only in the very wild places, and for a few hours in the middle of the night."

"Their madness is infectious, Angela. Their arrogance would leave no room for anything else in the world. Our country is now in balance, our communication and travel is minute and near perfect, thanks to the wonderful trolleys and the people of the trolleys. We are all one neighborhood, we are all one family! We live in love and compassion, with few rich and few poor, and arrogance and hatred have all gone out from us. We are the people with roots, and with trolleys. We are one with our earth."

"Would it hurt that the drivers should have their own limited place to do what they wanted, if they did not bother sane people?"

"Would it hurt if disease and madness and evil were given their own limited place? But they will not stay in their place, Angela. There is the diabolical arrogance in them, the rampant individualism, the hatred of order. There can be nothing more dangerous to society than the man in the automobile. Were they allowed to thrive, there would be poverty and want again, Angela, and wealth and accumulation. And cities."

"But cities are the most wonderful things of all! I love to go to them."

"I do not mean the wonderful Excursion Cities, Angela. There would be cities of another and blacker sort. They were almost upon us once when a limitation was set on them. Uniqueness is lost in them; there would be mere accumulation of rootless people, of arrogant people, of duplicated people, of people who have lost their humanity. Let them never rob us of our involuted countryside, or our quasiurbia. We are not perfect; but what we have, we will not give away for the sake of wild men."

"The smell! I cannot stand it!"

"Monoxide. How would you like to be born in the smell of it, to live every moment of your life in the smell of it, to die in the smell of it?"

"No, no, not that."

The rifleshots were scattered but serious. The howling and coughing of the illicit klunker automobile were nearer. Then it was in sight, bouncing and bounding weirdly out of the rough rock area and into the tomato patches straight toward the trolley interurban.

The klunker automobile was on fire, giving off a ghastly stench of burning leather and rubber and noxious monoxide and seared human flesh. The man, standing up at the broken wheel, was a madman, howling, out of his head. He was a young man, but sunken-eyed and unshaven, bloodied on the left side of his head and the left side of his breast, foaming with hatred and arrogance.

"Kill me! Kill me!" he croaked like clattering broken thunder. "There will be others! We will not leave off driving so long as there is one desolate place left, so long as there is one sly klunker maker left!"

He went rigid. He quivered. He was shot again. But he would die howling.

"Damn you all to trolley heaven! A man in an automobile is worth a thousand men on foot! He is worth a million men in a trolley car! You never felt your black heart rise up in you when you took control of one of the monsters! You never felt the lively hate choke you off in rapture as you sneered down the whole world from your bouncing center of the universe! Damn all decent folks! I'd rather go to hell in an automobile than to heaven in a trolley car!"

A spoked wheel broke, sounding like one of the muted volleys of rifle fire coming from behind him. The klunker automobile pitched onto its nose, upended, turned over, and exploded in blasting flames. And still in the middle of the fire could be seen the two hypnotic eyes with their darker flame, could be heard the demented voice:

"The crankshaft will still be good, the differential will still be good, a sly klunker maker can use part of it, part of it will drive again—*ahhhiiii.*"

Some of them sang as they rode away from the site in the trolley cars, and some of them were silent and thoughtful. It had been an unnerving thing.

"It curdles me to remember that I once put my entire fortune into that future," Great-grandfather Charles Archer moaned. "Well, that is better than to have lived in such a future."

A young couple had happily loaded all their belongings onto a baggage trolley and were moving from one of the Excursion Cities to live with kindred in quasiurbia. The population of that Excursion City (with its wonderful theaters and music halls and distinguished restaurants and literary coffeehouses and alcoholic oases and amusement centers) had now reached seven thousand persons, the legal limit for any city. Oh, there were a thousand Excursion Cities and all of them delightful! But a limit must be kept on size. A limit must be kept on everything.

It was a wonderful Saturday afternoon. Fowlers caught birds with collapsible kite-cornered nets. Kids rode free out to the diamonds to play Trolley League ball. Old gaffers rode out with pigeons in pigeon boxes, to turn them loose and watch them race home. Shore netters took shrimp from the semisaline Little Shrimp Lake. Banjo players serenaded their girls in grassy lanes.

The world was one single bronze gong song with the nelodious clang of trolley cars threading the country on their green-iron rails, with the sparky fire following them overhead and their copper gleaming in the sun. By law there must be a trolley line every mile, but they were often. By law no one trolley line might run for more than twenty-five miles. This was to give a sense of locality. But transfers between the lines were worked out perfectly. If

one wished to cross the nation, one rode on some one hundred and twenty different lines. There were no more long-distance railroads. They also had had their arrogance, and they also had had to go.

Carp in the ponds, pigs in the clover, a unique barn-factory in every hamlet and every hamlet unique, bees in the air, pepper plants in the lanes, and the whole land as sparky as trolley fire and right as rails.

WAVES OF ECOLOGY

By Leonard Tushnet

The late dentist from New Jersey again, with another fascinating and humorous solution to all those nasty social and environmental problems brought on by the automobile.

The meter maid noticed the little green stencils, FUTURE TREE, while she was checking the cars parked on Floral Boulevard in Gordonia, an enclave in the San Fernando Valley section of Los Angeles. At lunch she asked her fiancé, who was in the Department of Public Works, what the signs meant. He shrugged. "I dunno."

The next day, curious and as usual bored with his sinecure, he drove up and down the boulevard. The stencil appeared every fifty feet on the sidewalk near the curb. He asked his supervisor who had painted the signs. His supervisor grunted, "Not us. Probably the Commissioner of Parks and Public Property has some wild idea of beautifying the city. Election time's coming up."

His opinion that the planned trees were an absurd political move was shared by others. Concerned Taxpayer wrote a letter to the *Herald* in which he said, among other things, "To expect trees to grow on such a busy thoroughfare, exposed as they would be to gasoline fumes, is an example of how the present incumbents think. The exhaust gases will kill the trees in a couple of weeks. All that would be accomplished is an expenditure of money the city can ill afford . . ."

The Commissioner of Parks and Public Property saw the letter. He hadn't authorized the tree planting but, "What the hell!" he thought. "If all goes well, I'll get credit. If not, then I'll raise Cain about somebody exceeding his powers." Privately he told his secretary, "I think the

mayor's got a deal going with some nutty ecology group. Maybe like the crazies who want the city vehicles to go around with dichondra growing on their roofs. 'Keep California Green' nuts." He snickered. "The best way to keep it green is to bring money."

Work went ahead on the trees. A squad car, responding to a complaint about unnecessary noise from a record shop on the boulevard, found a green truck with a crew busily ripping up the sidewalk with pneumatic hammers at one of the stencils. The truck bore the sign GORDONIA GREENERIES. The workmen wore buttons reading "Employ the Handicapped." They were deaf-mutes. The policemen tried to tell them not to work during business hours, but they got nowhere. They hesitated about giving them a citation for fear one of the municipal judges might make a big publicity play about that. By the time they decided to shift the responsibility by a call back to the station house, the workers had finished the block and had moved to the next, in another precinct.

The actual planting of the trees was done in early February, accompanied by the jeers of knowledgeable bystanders. "Just look at those dry sticks and those puny branches!" one said. "And those tangled roots!" said another. "That tree doesn't have a chance. Even if we do get rain this month, the sun's too hidden by the buildings on the boulevard. I'll bet it'll never even put out a leaf."

But February had rain alternating with warm California sunshine. The trees put out tiny leaves that grew rapidly to cover the branches. New branches appeared. By the beginning of April wee pink flowerets began to show. The teacher of the second-grade nature-study group at Juniper School wrote to the Commissioner of Parks and Public Property asking what kind of trees they were. The commissioner passed the inquiry down to the Shade Tree Supervisor. He in turn sent a branch with leaves and flowerets to the County Agricultural Station.

The County Agricultural Agent, unwilling to admit his ignorance, reported that the tree was a variety of flowering crabapple. "Who'll contradict us?" growled the agent. "A variety can be anything."

The flowerets dropped off, leaving behind small globules that grew so fast that by the middle of May they were almost the size of apples. The fruit was a brilliant scarlet,

striped with yellow. The glossy green leaves and the colorful fruit gave Floral Boulevard the appearance of an orchard.

Some adventurous boys picked the fruit. It was hard as stone, but they cut and pounded it until the rind gave way to expose large tan seeds like pods. "Is the fruit edible?" one woman phoned in to ask the office of the Commissioner of Parks and Public Property. "No," was the reply, on the ground that a negative answer was the safest. But the commissioner, worried about the elections and the possibility of a child being poisoned by the fruit, ordered his secretary to check with Gordonia Greeneries.

Gordonia Greeneries did not exist. At least, according to the telephone company, it had no phone. The commissioner frowned. He had a private conference with his buddy, the Commissioner of Public Safety. In the next week, the squad cars patrolling the city rode up and down side streets and alleys. No Gordonia Greeneries.

The two commissioners recognized an underhanded political trick. They demanded a private special meeting of the City Commission and the mayor. To their surprise they found that neither of the other three commissioners nor the mayor had anything to do with the planting of the trees. A cut fruit lay on the council table before them. Deep yellow striations ran from stem to base but the rind was still hard. The pods were now larger and a deep brown in color. "What'll we do?" asked the mayor. "Try to get some advantage out of this," answered the Commissioner of Public Health. "Let's mobilize all sanitation workers, firemen, police, health inspectors, and school bus drivers. In one day we ought to be able to pick all the fruit. Who knows what'll happen when it ripens and falls? It could stink like gingko fruit, or poison pets or kids, or attract flies. We have to get rid of it at once." Agreed.

Easier said than done. The union leaders had to be cajoled, wined and dined, and given honoraria for consultants' fees (not bribes!) before they consented to order their members to co-operate. The rank-and-file members grumbled, threatened wildcat strikes, and gave in only after they were promised double time for the unusual task.

The harvesting of the fruit was set for Saturday, June fifth, when most of the businesses on Floral Boulevard

would be closed and the fruit pickers would be unimpeded by traffic.

They never had a chance to pick the fruit. On June First, about midnight, the citizens living along the boulevard were awakened by what seemed like a series of small backfires. They rushed to their windows. One reported, "Each one of those red apples like swelled up like a balloon and all of a sudden, pop!—the balloon burst and those brown seeds fell all over the ground. There's a street-light right by me, and when a car went over the seeds, a yellow powder like came out."

The pods covered the pavement and the adjoining gutter. By nine o'clock they had been swept into the street by the storekeepers on Floral Boulevard. Some pods had been crushed by the few pedestrians passing that early in the day; the yellow powder was flushed off with difficulty. The yellow slurry that resulted from contact of the powder with water was extremely tenacious, almost gluelike in consistency.

Traffic on the boulevard was very heavy because the most recent earthquake had cracked part of the Ventura Freeway, so that vehicles had been diverted onto the length of the boulevard until the next approach to the freeway. By ten o'clock most of the pods had been pulverized by the passing cars and trucks. At eleven special streetcleaning crews went into action by order of the Sanitation Department. They washed down the streets. The job was not easy because of the viscosity of the mixture of the yellow powder and water. At four o'clock, when the crews went off duty, stray globs still remained here and there on the street, but the traffic eventually wore down those globs by attrition.

The executive committee of CAP met that evening. "Well," said the chairman, with a smile, "Phase One of Clean Air Project is over. Now we wait for the late news." The agrochemists, botanists, and environmental engineers grinned at each other.

The news they were expecting came almost as an after-thought on one station and in the final so-called human interest section at the end of the others. "The AAA was swamped by an epidemic of flat tires this morning . . . The Highway Police announced that abandoned cars will be

towed away at the owner's expense . . . Garage men and gas stations were overwhelmed by the demand for new tires . . . A record number of accidents caused by blowouts was reported. Fortunately because of the very slow speed at which cars were moving due to the tie-ups there were no fatalities and only minor injuries . . ." One mathematically minded commentator pointed out that the outbreak of flat tires, while unusual, was not inconsistent with the theory of probability. "What is peculiar," he said, "is the skewed nature of the curve. A quick survey of the affected vehicles indicates that they (except for a few instances) came from the Valley communities served by the Ventura Freeway."

The TV sets were switched off. Dr. Schonberg, the originator of the project, whistled and shook his head. "Too soon. It will take another four months before the next fruiting in Gordonia. We can only hope no one follows up that man's intuitive guess."

"Perhaps we ought to recruit him?" suggested Dr. Verde.

The chairman said no. "We'll have to take a chance. Now that we have had a successful field experiment, we can proceed with Phase Two."

No one paid attention to the green trucks bearing the stylized tree emblem and the Bear State insigne except to grumble as they had to shift lanes. The silent workmen planted their trees along the borders of the Ventura Freeway and then did all the others, the San Diego, the Golden State, Santa Monica, the Hollywood, the San Bernardino, and the Harbor Freeway. They ran out of trees halfway down the Santa Ana Freeway. The trees were spaced fifty feet apart; where overpasses and bridges provided no soil, the trees were deposited in large redwood planters. The trees rooted quickly in the summer sun and required no watering except that routinely provided by the Highways Authority. Pink flowerets appeared and then the fruit. Because of the time lag between plantings, by the time one set of trees had dropped its fruit, other sets were just beginning to bud. Summer speeded up the plant metabolism. Time from flowering to dropping of the fruit was only three months.

The daily users of the freeways took the beautiful display in their stride (or ride). They were too intent on get-

ting where they were going. Tourists exclaimed at the gorgeous colors and wrote letters to the newspapers complimenting Los Angeles for its civil enterprise in changing jejune highways into aesthetic joys.

In city hall, in the county offices, in the Roads Department, in the Motor Vehicle Division, no one knew who had authorized the plantings. But no government body refused to take the bouquets being thrown at it instead of the customary brickbats. As long as it did not have to pay the bills, it kept quiet.

The bursting of the fruit and the subsequent spreading and crushing of the pods on the concrete of the freeways caused no concern. Some of the yellow powder was blown to drift on city streets but, there, was quickly picked up by the tires of passing cars. The various governing bodies had troubles other than the trees.

The accident rate on the freeways was rising alarmingly. Tie-ups became so frequent that motorists began to abandon the freeways for the city streets, discovering that in the long run they saved time. Traffic engineers held emergency sessions. They recognized the seriousness of the situation but were baffled by the irregular pattern of the tie-ups. Congestion on the city streets increased to such an extent that parking on the major arteries was forbidden at all times so that the flow of traffic would not be impeded. Parking lots overflowed. Businessmen complained. Ingenious drivers found ways to avoid the regulations by using other streets. Then parking on any city street was prohibited.

The public outcry was directed at the traffic authorities and at the tire companies for their shoddy merchandise. The former developed ulcers from frustration but found no solution to the problem. The latter excused themselves by pointing out they had no trouble with their tires elsewhere in the United States. But they did increase their R&D departments. They soon found out that in the Los Angeles area both natural and synthetic rubber used in tires ceased being amorphous and was converted into a semicrystalline substance worthless for the uses it was intended to provide.

The executive committee was disappointed at the slowness of the response. Dr. Grundorfer expressed the general

opinion. "They're just attacking the problem ass-backwards. I suppose we ought to be glad that they haven't yet found the cause. Nevertheless, by this time I expected definite social and demographic changes."

"Phase Three can't be started yet, I admit," sighed the chairman. "And the longer it's postponed the greater is the danger of discovery. We'll just have to wait."

"There's a bright side to waiting," said Dr. Schonberg. "Our hybridization and genetic-change experiments are beginning to show results. We're near to having the trees fruit in climates colder than California. What would be the use of our project if it were confined to the southwestern part of the United States?"

"How long do you think we have before some bright boy in the government will put two and two together?" asked Dr. Horetz.

The chairman shrugged. "Allowing for the very remote possibility that some agency has employed a person with a scientific bent, four months at least. By that time we should see definite changes."

The chairman was right. Intensive investigation was undertaken to determine the cause of the rapid deterioration of the tires. It was attributed to the high acid content of the smog by some, and to faulty aggregates in the concrete pavement by others. Research in those areas leading nowhere, experiments were done on the effects of nitrogenous waste products and photochemical oxidants. And when those experiments were equally fruitless, there arose a growing conviction that sabotage by disgruntled elements in the rubber factories was the cause. Some wild extremists talked about the existence of an un-American underground conspiracy directed against the conservative citizens of California. The conspirators were said to spray a mysterious chemical on the freeway during the night. Bands of volunteer vigilantes set up posts on the freeway. No one thought of the trees.

Six weeks later the situation on the freeways had become so chaotic and the traffic in the city so heavy that a large industrial enterprise announced a new hiring policy. Because of the lower production level stemming from absenteeism due to transportation problems, the firm said that henceforth it would hire only those workers who lived

within two miles of the plant, a reasonable walking distance. While the novel case of territorial discrimination was being fought in the courts, several other companies found a different solution. They provided free bus transportation from as far away as Orange County and San Bernardino for their workers. That was of little help because the buses shunned the freeways and used the city streets only.

The City and County of Los Angeles, alarmed by the possibility of the flight of industry from the area, instituted a crash program for the construction of the long-delayed rapid transit subway. Japanese experts were called in, given adequate funds, and told to get to work.

Motor-driven vehicles, including trucks, unable to use the freeways, turned to the streets. They became so clogged that often a man could walk faster than a car could go. Bicycle riding increased. Bicycles were maneuverable for individuals but of little value for moving goods. The rush to horse-drawn transportation was started by a large brewing company which said it could no longer afford the great expense of tire replacement. People recognized the statement as merely an advertising stunt, but nevertheless the idea caught on. Large wagons made good time on the freeways. Teamsters got paid more than truck drivers. Next came the return of carriages and hansom cabs. Young bloods preferred riding their own horses. The San Diego Freeway from Mulholland Drive to Wilshire Boulevard became a veritable Bois de Boulogne with trotters and cabriolets bearing fashionable ladies with parasols. Strivers and arrivistes vied with each other in the elegance of their conveyances. Livery stables sprang up all over Los Angeles. The parking meters were used as hitching posts. Organic gardening got a big boost from the abundance of manure available.

Dr. Schonberg was pessimistic at the next meeting of the executive committee. "We didn't expect this. The computers predicted decentralization, not a return to horse-and-buggy days."

The chairman laughed. "Our programming didn't take into account human ingenuity. Let's face it. Cities, metropolises like Los Angeles, are part of our civilization. They have enormous advantages over what Lenin called the idiocy of rural life. No one would willingly give up those

advantages without a struggle. Horses are only a make-shift, a passing fad. What counts is that individually driven automobiles will soon disappear completely, to be replaced by mass urban transit. And since 90 percent of the smog is caused by automobiles here, the air will get cleaner and cleaner. After all, that was the major goal of our project, wasn't it?"

Dr. Villanova, the treasurer, was worried. She was an economist. She said, "If the computers were wrong in one direction, they may be wrong in another. Perhaps the whole industrial and commercial structure of the country will be damaged by this local change in ecology. I know we planned to finance CAP by buying up tire company stock during the initial phase, selling it for a quick profit, and then selling the stock short. So far we've been very successful financially. But we may have been too short-sighted. What about the rubber workers in Ohio who are unemployed? And the shutting down last week of Kelsey-Hayes and other auto-parts makers? And the layoffs in Detroit?"

"And what about Los Angeles itself?" added Dr. Nit-tunkel. "Buses can't use the freeways, and we can't plant trees on every street and byway in the city. Traffic goes so slowly now that staggering of work hours will certainly follow, and that means more night work with its consequent neuroses and disruption of family life."

Dr. Grundorfer nodded. "We tossed a pebble into the center of the lake, expecting it to sink without a trace, but we didn't count on how the waves spread in every direction. Decentralization was what we hoped for, not further urban glut."

The chairman remained sanguine. "I'm sure all will turn out well as soon as the subway is opened. I've seen the plans. It will combine the best features of the Paris Metro, the Moscow subway, and the London Underground. Super-fast, quiet, comfortable trains, express and local service, escalators so that no one will have to walk more than a few steps, and so laid out that anyone in Los Angeles can get to any other part of the city in less time than it formerly took on the freeways. And with no contamination of the air and with no loss of life or limb in accidents."

"But truckers can't use the freeways, either," Dr. Villanova pointed out. "And the railway system is too archaic

to take up the slack. All we've done is transfer pollution from the freeways to the streets. Horses can never take the place of trucks."

"That's where American inventiveness will take over," said the chairman. "Now we'll see a spurt in research on other than internal-combustion engines. I foresee that in a year the first electrically driven truck will be commercially available."

In spite of his confident remarks, the committee voted to postpone the projected plantings elsewhere for another six months.

The chairman was right and was wrong. The completed subway became one of the wonders of American technology. Los Angeles residents boasted of its efficiency. No point was more than half an hour from any other point, incredibly faster than the previous travel time on the freeways. Used automobiles began to be sold in such quantities in the Los Angeles area that their price was depressed in the rest of the country. Even the poorest family in Appalachia could now afford a car, with the result that traffic congestion and air pollution increased in all but Los Angeles at a fearful rate. Furthermore, the availability of such a cheap form of individual transportation speeded up the flight from the central city cores to the surrounding suburbs and countryside. Then followed the spread of trucking goods and food to the urban sprawl, and inevitably the building of new highways to expedite traffic.

The air in Los Angeles was once more breathable. Eye irritations, asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema diminished to such an extent that some specialists in those disorders turned to geriatrics because people began to live longer. Unfortunately the morbidity and mortality rate in the rest of the state and country went up more than enough to cancel the improvement in Southern California.

The executive committee read the accumulated statistics with dismay. They put off all plans to plant more trees for two years until they had ample time to digest the data and communicate their findings to the general membership.

The freeways were deserted. Grass grew in tiny cracks, splitting the pavement. But since man, as well as nature, abhors a vacuum, a demand rose that all freeways be

opened to pedestrian and horse-drawn vehicles. The Highway Authority acceded to the demands. For a few weeks hiking enthusiasts, joggers, and just plain strollers used the freeways, but when their sneakers and rubber-soled shoes gave out after a mile or two, they went back to their former routes.

The freeways again became empty of all but commercial wagons with metal-rimmed wheels.

While CAP was reprogramming its computers for a more thoroughgoing prediction of the results of nationwide planting, an intelligent high-school student from Encino undertook a special-credit project in inductive logic. He gathered all the data available from various governmental and industrial research agencies having to do with rubber deterioration in Los Angeles. He arranged his facts: a,b,c, d,e . . . for time of onset of the tire trouble, age of the freeway, type of cement and concrete used, and so forth. He came to the conclusion that the trees had something to do with tire destruction. A few simple experiments, and he had the answer. He showed without question that the yellow powder released when the pods were crushed destroyed both natural and synthetic rubber.

Like Columbus's egg, everyone said, "Of course!" Aided by a generous grant from the automobile industry, the Highway Authority uprooted and destroyed every offending tree.

The freeways were again opened to motor vehicles, but traffic changed its character. Only a few individuals used the freeways; most preferred the convenience, safety, and lower cost of the subway. The freeways were used mainly by truckers, school and chartered tourist buses, and ambulances. Draft horses again became a rarity.

The convenience of fast truck transportation, now that private cars no longer got in the way, gave an impetus to the development of industry in the farthest reaches of Los Angeles County. Efficient lobbies, using ecology arguments, succeeded in having the freeways closed to all but commercial traffic. Slowly, slowly the air once more became polluted.

CAP was dissolved. "It was fun while it lasted," said the chairman in his final speech, "but it didn't last long

enough. One thing I've learned—the Lady Bountiful technique of doing good to others doesn't work with ecology. People have to want the good to be done to them for results to be permanent."

THE MARY CELESTE MOVE

By Frank Herbert

One of the great benefits claimed for the Age of the Automobile is the freedom it has provided for many of us. The ability to get up and get away, to leave problems behind for a few hours (which can also be accomplished by reading a book like this one), to go "wherever I want, whenever I want," has made the car a precious commodity for many people, especially adolescents, and there is little doubt that it has been a major factor in the erosion of parental authority.

However, we need to ask ourselves if what we are really talking about in regard to the automobile isn't dependency, not freedom—a societal dependency as much as a personal one. Some people can't function without their cigarettes or their drinks, and for many, many people the automobile is a habit.

In this story, Frank Herbert, the award-winning author of The Dune Trilogy and The Dosadi Experiment gives us a glimpse of people who have lost their freedom.

Martin Fisk's car, a year-old 1997 Buick with triple turbines and jato boosters, flashed off the freeway, found a space between a giant mobile refueling tanker and a commuter bus, darted through and surged into the first of the eight right-hand lanes in time to make the turnoff marked "NEW PENTAGON ONLY—Reduce Speed to 75."

Fisk glanced at his surface/air rate-of-travel mixer, saw he was down to 80 miles per hour, close enough to legal speed, and worked his way through the press of morning traffic into the second lane in plenty of time to join the cars diverging onto the fifth-level ramp.

At the last minute, a big official limousine with a two-

star general's decal-flag on its forward curve cut in front of him and he had to reduce speed to 50, hearing the drag-bar rasping behind him as his lane frantically matched speed. The shadow of a traffic copter passed over the roadway and Fisk thought: *Hope that general's driver loses his license!*

By this time he was into the sweeping curve-around that would drop him to the fifth level. Speed here was a monitored 55. The roadway entered the building and Fisk brought his R-O-T up to the stated speed, watching for the code of his off-slot: BR71D_d. It loomed ahead, a flashing mnemonic blinker in brilliant green.

Fisk dropped behind an in-building shuttle, squeezed into the right-hand lane, slapped the turn-off alert that set all his rim lights blinking and activated the automatics. His machine caught the signal from the roadway, went on automatic and swerved into the off-slot still at 55.

Fisk released his control bar.

Drag hooks underneath the Buick snagged the catch ribbands of the slot, jerked his car to a stop that sent him surging against the harness.

The exit-warning wall ahead of him flashed a big red "7 SECONDS! 7 SECONDS!"

Plenty of time, he thought.

He yanked his briefcase out of its dashboard carrier with his right hand while unsnapping his safety harness with his left and hitting the door actuator with his knee. He was out onto the pedestrian ramp with three seconds to spare. The warning wall lifted; his car jerked forward into the down-elevator rack to be stored in a coded pile far below. His personal I-D signal to the computer-monitored system later would restore the car to him all checked and serviced and ready for the high-risk evening race out of the city.

Fisk glanced at his wrist watch—four minutes until his appointment with William Merill, the President's liaison officer on the Internal Control Board and Fisk's boss. Adopting the common impersonal courtesy, Fisk joined the press of people hurrying along the ramp.

Some day, he thought, I'll get a nice safe and sane job on one of the ocean hydroponic stations where all I have to do is watch gauges and there's nothing faster than a 40 mph pedestrian ramp. He fished a green pill out of his coat

pocket, gulped it, hoped he wouldn't have to take another before his blood pressure began its downslant to normal.

By this time he was into the pneumatic lift capsule that would take him up in an individual curve to easy walking distance from his destination. He locked his arms on the brace bars. The door thumped closed. There was a distant hiss, a feeling of smooth downward pressure that evened off. He stared at the familiar blank tan of the opposite wall. Presently the pressure slackened, the capsule glided to a stop, its door swung open.

Fisk stepped out into the wide hall, avoided the guidelines for the high-speed ramp and dodged through thinning lines of people hurrying to work around him.

Within seconds he was into Merill's office and facing the WAC secretary, a well-endowed brunette with an air of brisk efficiency. She looked up from her desk as he entered.

"Oh, Mr. Fisk," she said, "how nice that you're a minute early. Mr. Merill's already here. You can have nine minutes. I hope that'll be enough. He has a very full schedule today and the Safety Council subcommittee session with the President this afternoon." She already was up and holding the inner door open for him, saying: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could invent a forty-eight hour day?"

We already have, he thought. We just compressed it into the old twenty-four-hour model.

"Mr. Fisk is here," she said, announcing him as she stepped out of his way.

Fisk was through to the inner sanctum then, wondering why his mind was filled with the sudden realization that he had driven out of his apartment's garage lift one hundred miles away only thirty-two minutes before. He heard the WAC secretary close the door behind him.

Merill, a wiry redhead with an air of darting tension, pale freckled skin and narrow face, sat at a desk directly opposite the door. He looked up, fixed his green eyes on Fisk, said: "Come on in and sit down, Marty, but make it snappy."

Fisk crossed the office. It was an irregular space of six sides about forty feet across at its widest point. Merill sat with his back to the narrowest of the walls and with the widest wall at an angle to his right. A computer-actuated

map of the United States covered that surface, its color-intensity lines of red, blue and purple showing traffic density on the great expressway arteries that crisscrossed the nation. The ceiling was a similar map, this one showing the entire western hemisphere and confined to the Prime-1 arteries of twenty lanes or greater.

Fisk dropped into the chair across the desk from Merill, pushed a lock of dark hair back from his forehead, feeling the nervous perspiration there. *Blast it!* he thought. *"I'll have to take another pill!"*

"Well?" Merill said.

"It's all here," Fisk said, slapping the briefcase onto Merill's desk. "Ten days, forty thousand miles of travel and eighteen personal interviews plus fifty-one other interviews and reports from my assistants."

"You know the President's worried about this," Merill said. "I hope you have it in some kind of order so I can present it to him this afternoon."

"It's in order," Fisk said. "But you're not going to like it."

"Yeah, well I was prepared for that," Merill said. "I don't like much of what comes across this desk." He glanced up suddenly at a strip of yellow that appeared on the overhead map indicating a partial blockage on the intercontinental throughway near Caracas. His right hand hovered over an intercom button, poised there as the yellow was replaced by red then blue shading into purple.

"Fourth problem in that area in two days," Merill said, removing his hand from the button. "Have to work a talk with Mendoza into this morning's schedule. Okay." He turned back to Fisk. "Give me your economy model brief rundown. What's got into these kooks who're moving all over the landscape?"

"I've about twenty interlocking factors to reinforce my original hunch," Fisk said. "The Psych Department confirms it. The question is whether this thing'll settle into some kind of steady pattern and even out. You might caution the President, off the record, that there are heavy political implications in this. Touchy ones if this leaks out the wrong way."

Merill pushed a recording button on his desk, said: "Okay, Marty, put the rest on the record. Recap and sum-

mate. I'll listen to it for review while I'm reading your report."

Fisk nodded. "Right." He pulled sheaves of papers in file folders out of the briefcase, lined them up in front of him. "We had the original report, of course, that people were making bold moves from one end of the country to the other in higher than usual numbers from unlikely starting places to unlikelier destinations. And these people turned out to be mostly mild, timid types instead of bold pioneers who'd pulled up their roots in the spirit of adventure."

"Are the psych profiles in your report?" Merill asked. "I'm going to have a time convincing the President unless I have all the evidence."

"Right here," Fisk said, tapping one of the folders. "I also have photostats of billings from the mobile refueling tankers and mobile food canteens to show that the people in these reports are actually the ones we've analyzed."

"Weird," Merill said. He glanced at another brief flicker of yellow on the overhead map near Seattle, returned his attention to Fisk.

"State and federal income-tax reports are here," Fisk said, touching another of the folders. "And, oh yes, car ownership breakdowns by area. I also have data on drivers' license transfers, bank and loan company records to show the business transactions involved in these moves. You know, some of these kooks sold profitable businesses at a loss and took up different trades at their new locations. Others took new jobs at lower pay. Some big industries are worried about this. They've lost key people for reasons that don't make sense. And the Welfare Department figures that . . ."

"Yeah, but what's this about car ownership breakdowns?" Merill asked.

Trust him to dive right through to the sensitive area, Fisk thought. He said: "There's a steep decline in car ownership among these people."

"Do the Detroit people suspect?" Merill asked.

"I covered my tracks best I could," Fisk said, "but there're bound to be some rumbles when their investigators interview the same people I did."

"We'd better invite them to review our findings," Merill said. "There're some big political contributors in that area.

What's the pattern on communities chosen by these kooks?"

"Pretty indicative," Fisk said. "Most of the areas receiving a big influx are what our highway engineers irreverently call 'headwater swamps'—meaning areas where the highway feeder routes thin out and make it easy to leave the expressways."

"For example?"

"Oh . . . New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles."

"That all?"

"No. There've been some significant population increases in areas where highway construction slowed traffic. There've been waves into Bangor, Maine . . . Blaine, Washington . . . and, my God! Calexico, California! They were hit on two consecutive weekends by one hundred and seventy of these weird newcomers."

In a tired voice, Merill said, "I suppose the concentration pattern's consistent?"

"Right down the line. They're all of middle age or past, drove well-preserved older cars, are afraid to travel by air, are reluctant to explain why they moved such long distances. The complexion of entire areas in these headwater regions is being changed. There's a sameness to them—people all conservative, timid . . . you know the pattern."

"I'm afraid I do. Bound to have political repercussions, too. Congressional representation from these areas will change to fit the new pattern, sure as hell. That's what you meant, wasn't it?"

"Yes." Fisk saw that he only had a few minutes more, began to feel his nervousness mount. He wondered if he'd dare gulp a pill in front of Merill, decided against it, said: "And you'd better look into the insurance angle. Costs are going up and people are beginning to complain. I saw a report on my desk when I checked in last night. These kooks were almost to a man low-risk drivers. As they get entirely out of the market, that throws a bigger load onto the others."

"I'll have the possibility of a subsidy investigated," Merill said. "Anything else? You're running out of time."

Running out of time, Fisk thought. *The story of our lives.* He touched another of the folders, said, "Here are the missing persons reports. There's a graph curve in them

to fit this theory. I also have divorce records that are worth reviewing—wives who refused to join their husbands in one of these moves, that sort of thing."

"Husband moved and the wife refused to join him, eh?"

"That's the usual pattern. There are a couple of them, though, where the wife moved and refused to come back. Desertion charged . . . very indicative."

"Yeah, I was afraid of that," Merill said. "Okay, I'll review this when . . ."

"One thing more, Chief," Fisk said. "The telegrams and moving company records." He touched a thicker folder on the right. "I had photocopies made because few people would believe them without seeing them."

"Yeah?"

"The moving company gets an order from, say, Bangor, to move household belongings there from, for example, Tulsa, Oklahoma. The request contains a plea to feed the cat, the dog, the parrot or whatever. The movers go to the address and they find a hungry dog or cat in the house—or even a dead one on some occasions. One mover found a bowl of dead goldfish."

"So?"

"These houses fit right into the pattern," Fisk said. "The moving men find dinners that've been left cooking, plates on the table—all kinds of signs that people left and intended to come back . . . but didn't. They've got a name for this kind of thing in the moving industry. They call it the 'Mary Celeste' move after the story of the sailing ship that . . ."

"I know the story," Merill said in a sour voice.

Merill passed a hand wearily across his face, dropped his hand to the desk with a thump. "Okay, Marty, it fits," he said. "These characters go out for a Saturday or Sunday afternoon drive. They take a wrong turn onto a one-way access ramp and get trapped onto one of the highspeed expressways. They've never driven over 150 before in their lives and the expressway carrier beam forces them up to 280 or 300 and they panic, lock onto the automatic, and then they're afraid to touch the controls until they reach a region where the automatics slow them for diverging traffic. And after that you're lucky if you can ever get them into something with wheels on it again."

"They sell their cars," Fisk said. "They stick to local

tube and surface transportation. Used-car buyers have come to spot these people, call them 'Panics.' A kook with out-of-state licenses drives in all glassy-eyed and trembling, asks: 'How much you give me for my car?' The dealer makes a killing, of course."

"Of course," Merill said. "Well, we've got to keep this under wraps at least until after Congress passes the appropriation for the new trans-Huron expressway. After that . . ." He shrugged. "I don't know, but we'll think of something." He waved a hand to dismiss Fisk, bent to a report-corder that folded out of the desk, and said, "Stay where I can get you in a hurry, Marty."

Within seconds, Fisk was out in the hallway facing the guidelines to the high-speed ramp that would carry him to his own office. A man bumped into him and Fisk found that he was standing on the office lip reluctant to move out into the whizzing throngs of the corridor.

No, he thought, I'm not reluctant. I'm afraid.

He was honest enough with himself, though, to realize that he wasn't afraid of the high-speed ramp. It was what the ramp signified, where it could carry him.

I wonder what my car would bring? he asked himself. And he thought: *Would my wife move?* He dried his sweating palm on his sleeve before taking another green pill from his pocket and gulping it. Then he stepped out into the hall.

X MARKS THE PEDWALK

By Fritz Leiber

Each year, something like 55,000 Americans lose their lives in auto accidents and more than 4,000,000 are injured. Automobile travel is by far the most dangerous form of transportation when compared with bus, rail, and air travel. A substantial proportion of these victims are members of that endangered species called the "pedestrian." Are we walkers all just going to continue to take this lying down? Or are we going (as in this delightful tale) to rise up and do something about it?

Based on material in Ch. 7—"First Clashes of the Wheeled and Footed Sects"—of Vol. 3 of Burger's monumental *History of Traffic*, published by the Foundation for Twenty-Second Century Studies.

The raggedy little old lady with the big shopping bag was in the exact center of the crosswalk when she became aware of the big black car bearing down on her.

Behind the thick bulletproof glass its seven occupants had a misty look, like men in a diving bell.

She saw there was no longer time to beat the car to either curb. Veering remorselessly, it would catch her in the gutter.

Useless to attempt a feint and double-back, such as any venturesome child executed a dozen times a day. Her reflexes were too slow.

Polite vacuous laughter came from the car's loudspeaker over the engine's mounting roar.

From her fellow pedestrians lining the curbs came a sigh of horror.

The little old lady dipped into her shopping bag and

came up with a big blue-black automatic. She held it in both fists, riding the recoils like a rodeo cowboy on a bucking bronco.

Aiming at the base of the windshield, just as a big-game hunter aims at the vulnerable spine of a charging water buffalo over the horny armor of its lowered head, the little old lady squeezed off three shots before the car chewed her down.

From the right-hand curb a young woman in a wheelchair shrieked an obscenity at the car's occupants.

Smythe-de Winter, the driver, wasn't happy. The little old lady's last shot had taken two members of his car pool. Bursting through the laminated glass, the steel-jacketed slug had traversed the neck of Phipps-McHeath and buried itself in the skull of Horvendile-Harker.

Braking viciously, Smythe-de Winter rammed his car over the right-hand curb. Pedestrians scattered into entries and narrow arcades, among them a youth bounding high on crutches.

But Smythe-de Winter got the girl in the wheelchair.

Then he drove rapidly out of the Slum Ring into the Suburbs, a shred of rattan swinging from the flange of his right fore mudguard for a trophy. Despite the two-for-two casualty list, he felt angry and depressed. The secure, predictable world around him seemed to be crumbling.

While his companions softly keened a dirge to Horvy and Phipps and quietly mopped up their blood, he frowned and shook his head.

"They oughn't to let old ladies carry magnums," he murmured.

Witherspoon-Hobbs nodded agreement across the front-seat corpse. "They oughn't to let 'em carry anything. God, how I hate Feet," he muttered, looking down at his shrunken legs. "Wheels forever!" he softly cheered.

The incident had immediate repercussions throughout the city. At the combined wake of the little old lady and the girl in the wheelchair, a fiery-tongued speaker inveighed against the White-Walled Fascists of Suburbia, telling to his hearers, the fabled wonders of old Los Angeles, where pedestrians were sacrosanct, even outside crosswalks. He called for a hobnail march across the nearest lawn-bowling

alleys and perambulator-traversed golf courses of the motorists.

At the Sunnyside Crematorium, to which the bodies of Phipps and Horvy had been conveyed, an equally impassioned and rather more grammatical orator reminded his listeners of the legendary justice of old Chicago, where pedestrians were forbidden to carry small arms and anyone with one foot off the sidewalk was fair prey. He broadly hinted that a holocaust, primed if necessary with a few tankfuls of gasoline, was the only cure for the Slums.

Bands of skinny youths came loping at dusk out of the Slum Ring into the innermost sections of the larger doughnut of the Suburbs, slashing defenseless tires, shooting expensive watchdogs and scrawling filthy words on the pristine panels of matrons' runabouts which never ventured more than six blocks from home.

Simultaneously squadrons of young suburban motorcycles and scooterites roared through the outermost precincts of the Slum Ring, harrying children off sidewalks, tossing stink-bombs through second-story tenement windows and defacing hovel-fronts with sprays of black paint.

Incidents—a thrown brick, a cut corner, monster tacks in the portico of the Auto Club—were even reported from the center of the city, traditionally neutral territory.

The Government hurriedly acted, suspending all traffic between the Center and the Suburbs and establishing a 24-hour curfew in the Slum Ring. Government agents moved only by centipede-car and pogo-hopper to underline the point that they favored neither contending side.

The day of enforced non-movement for Feet and Wheels was spent in furtive vengeful preparations. Behind locked garage doors, machine-guns that fired through the nose ornament were mounted under hoods, illegal scythe blades were welded to oversize hubcaps and the stainless steel edges of flange fenders were honed to razor sharpness.

While nervous National Guardsmen hopped about the deserted sidewalks of the Slum Ring, grim-faced men and women wearing black arm-bands moved through the web-work of secret tunnels and hidden doors, distributing heavy-caliber small arms and spike-studded paving blocks, piling cobblestones on strategic roof-tops and sapping upward from the secret tunnels to create car-traps. Children got ready to soap intersections after dark. The Committee

of Pedestrian Safety, sometimes known as Robespierre's Rats, prepared to release its two carefully hoarded anti-tank guns.

At nightfall, under the tireless urging of the Government, representatives of the Pedestrians and the Motorists met on a huge safety island at the boundary of the Slum Ring and the Suburbs.

Underlings began a noisy dispute as to whether Smythe-de Winter had failed to give a courtesy honk before charging, whether the little old lady had opened fire before the car had come within honking distance, how many wheels of Smythe-de's car had been on the sidewalk when he hit the girl in the wheelchair and so on. After a little while the High Pedestrian and the Chief Motorist exchanged cautious winks and drew aside.

The red writhing of a hundred kerosene flares and the mystic yellow pulsing of a thousand firefly lamps mounted on yellow sawhorses ranged around the safety island illumined two tragic, strained faces.

"A word before we get down to business," the Chief Motorist whispered. "What's the current S.Q. of your adults?"

"Forty-one and dropping," the High Pedestrian replied, his eyes fearfully searching from side to side for eavesdroppers. "I can hardly get aides who are halfway *compos mentis*."

"Our own Sanity Quotient is thirty-seven," the Chief Motorist revealed. He shrugged helplessly. "The wheels inside my people's heads are slowing down. I do not think they will be speeded up in my lifetime."

"They say Government's only fifty-two," the other said with a matching shrug.

"Well, I suppose we must scrape out one more compromise," the one suggested hollowly, "though I must confess there are times when I think we're all the figments of a paranoid's dream."

Two hours of concentrated deliberations produced the new Wheel-Foot Articles of Agreement. Among other points, pedestrian handguns were limited to a slightly lower muzzle velocity and to .38 caliber and under, while motorists were required to give three honks at one block distance before charging a pedestrian in a crosswalk. Two wheels

over the curb changed a traffic kill from third-degree manslaughter to petty homicide. Blind pedestrians were permitted to carry hand grenades.

Immediately the Government went to work. The new Wheel-Foot Articles were loudspeakered and posted. Detachments of police and psychiatric social hoppers centipedaled and pogoed through the Slum Ring, seizing outside weapons and giving tranquilizing jet-injections to the unruly. Teams of hypnotherapists and mechanics scuttled from home to home in the Suburbs and from garage to garage, in-chanting a conformist serenity and stripping illegal armament from cars. On the advice of a rogue psychiatrist, who said it would channel off aggressions, a display of bull-fighting was announced, but this had to be canceled when a strong protest was lodged by the Decency League, which had a large mixed Wheel-Foot membership.

At dawn, curfew was lifted in the Slum Ring and traffic reopened between the Suburbs and the Center. After a few uneasy moments it became apparent that the *status quo* had been restored.

Smythe-de Winter tooled his gleaming black machine along the Ring. A thick steel bolt with a large steel washer on either side neatly filled the hole the little old lady's slug had made in the windshield.

A brick bounced off the roof. Bullets pattered against the side windows. Smythe-de ran a handkerchief around his neck under his collar and smiled.

A block ahead children were darting into the street, cat-calling and thumbing their noses. Behind one of them limped a fat dog with a spiked collar.

Smythe-de suddenly gunned his motor. He didn't hit any of the children, but he got the dog.

A flashing light on the dash showed him the right front tire was losing pressure. Must have hit the collar as well! He thumbed the matching emergency-air button and the flashing stopped.

He turned toward Witherspoon-Hobbs and said with thoughtful satisfaction, "I like a normal orderly world, where you always have a little success, but not champagne-heady; a little failure, but just enough to brace you."

Witherspoon-Hobbs was squinting at the next crosswalk. Its center was discolored by a brownish stain ribbon-tracked by tires.

"That's where you bagged the little old lady, Smythe-de," he remarked. "I'll say this for her now: she had spirit."

"Yes, that's where I bagged her," Smythe-de agreed flatly. He remembered wistfully the witchlike face growing rapidly larger, the jerking shoulders in black bombazine, the wild white-circled eyes. He suddenly found himself feeling that this was a very dull day.

WHEELS

By Robert Thurston

It is said that pets and cars are extensions of their owners' personalities, and we have all seen bulldogs and sheepdogs that looked like their masters. Although the cause-and-effect relationship is somewhat cloudy here (people could, after all, be extensions of their pets' personalities) there seems to be some truth to the generalization.

But what about cars? Does an owner's personality come through in the kind of car he drives? Does this mean that since there are no more convertibles being produced in this country there are no more open people? Technology has provided many things for people. Here Robert Thurston speculates on the possibility of a machine helping a man to find himself.

Got to have wheels. No other out, no other escape from this. Lincoln Rockwell X says he can get me a car. Only catch, I got to go to the ghetto for it.

I might get wheels all right, but I might drive out dead. Still—if I don't do anything about it now, I'll be too old when I can.

I'll never get a safedry license anyhow. You got to be the son of a safedry. They'll shove you that crap about safedry's high life expectancy, being hereditary, just to hide what's true, that it's all kissass games. My father's screwed me royal. He's a known traffic vile. I been turned down now seventeen times for a learner's permit. Bureau clerks laugh among themselves when I come in.

I want to have wheels, I go to the ghetto. Today.

Bus clerk, bastard, turned me down. No seats available. Had to walk crosstown. Three or four carloads of punk

safedrys out cruising. They shout insults at me. Can't offer to fight them 'cause I'm alone. Crummy bastards, they drive through the streets, their windows locked tight when they're not throwing out challenges, when they're not throwing out rocks, their bodies moving to music we can't hear through the soundproofing.

At least it's not night. At night, in areas police cars avoid, they search us out and scare us by backing us against walls with their cars. They come up on the pavement after us. We steal their license plates when we can. We bend them out of shape and bury them in the ground.

Street debris clings to my trousers. Dust flies into my eyes. I need something different. My whole life needs a kick in the balls. Work is sleepwalking from desk to desk. Home is sneaking looks at my father sneaking drinks. Play is dodging the traps, play is bumping bodies to drumbeats you can't hear. Sex is just bumping bodies. The cops may crack me for illegal driving. But they got to catch me first.

Easy time slipping past the pig line, crawling across the rubble of the abandoned buildings. I walk through the sniper zone unscathed (a distant shot keeps me alert) and meet Lincoln Rockwell X at the designated streetcorner. Blackfolk stare at me but leave me alone. Only an idiot sneaks into their territory, Lincoln Rockwell X says, and they don't think it's Christian to maim idiots. Don't let them know you're not an idiot, he says. I walk along with my tongue sticking out the corner of my mouth.

Lincoln Rockwell X leads me to wheels. It's in the basement of an abandoned Afro-Methodist church. We have to maneuver around upended and broken pews. To get to the car we have to go down steps behind what's left of an altar. We pass office doors with broken windows. You can see only junk inside.

He takes me to a recreation room. No electricity, he says, I'll light candles and you get the Big Show, dig? He makes an elaborate thing out of placing the candles on the stage. Lights each one with a swishy hand move. He sings a trumpet call through his nose as he opens a curtain that's got burn holes all over it.

And there you go, he says. Wheels.

Which is so, though it's not exactly like I imagined it. All the cars you see on the street are shined-up no matter

how old they are. Safedrys think a glossy car's better than a big prick. And they don't allow any bumps anywhere on the body of the car. If anything happens, they quick get to a garage before anybody finds out and they get points against them. They'll pay anything to keep their record clean, to keep their license.

But this car! This car's got pain in every curve. It'd choked to death and gone to hell. It looked menacing. Like if you touched it, you'd get cancer.

Five hundred dollars, says Lincoln Rockwell X.

Five hundred dollars? I say. For *that*?

You got a better deal, you go make it. No small talk on my time, man.

I know better than to argue. I'm deep in his territory, more than five hundred bucks in my pocket. Lincoln Rockwell X's got blades for teeth. Sight unseen I'd already bought this baby.

Still—I make like a reluctant buyer. I walk around the car. I kick a tire; it wraps rubber around my foot. I grab a door handle which almost comes off in my hand.

What do I know about cars? Nothing. But I pretend.

What year? I ask.

'67, he says.

'67 what?

'67 Mustang. Saved from a graveyard and reconditioned in '75. My granddaddy did the job himself.

'75. That was the year they stopped carmaking altogether.

No, man. Ford kept going till '79. Went down fighting.

I brush away a layer of dirt. The car is dark green underneath. Dark green where it's not rust. I run a finger along the fold-line of a dent. Dark-green flecks come off onto my fingertip.

Jeez, how'm I gonna drive this heap around? Look at all the dents. Cops'll crack me in a minute.

Your PR with the fuzz is your business, baby. You wanted wheels, these're the only bootleg wheels left in town. You got five hundred dollars, you got wheels. You can leave the small talk in your wallet.

Okay, okay, but how'm I gonna get this junkpile on the street? Drive it through the ceiling?

You got five hundred, I'll open sesame for free.

I open the door real easy and get in. Dashboard's in

scarred leather. Seats are ripped bad, too. A part of the steering wheel's missing, making it look like a broken-off piece of pretzel. I try out the accelerator. Creaks on the down motion, cries on the up. I move the automatic floor shift, the only undamaged part of the car.

I tell Lincoln Rockwell X okay I'll take it, and hand him the five bills. He takes over the driver's seat. He produces the key with another swishy flourish and puts it in the ignition. The car moans, gurgles, trembles, threatens suicide, but doesn't start.

Don't worry boy, Lincoln Rockwell X says. Cars're like this when they're not used every day.

He invokes a tribal curse and re-presses the accelerator. The car curses back but gives in.

He gets the car out of the building through use of a freight elevator at the back of the stage.

Up a ramp and out in the light, I get my first good look at my wheels. I see all the bumps and dents I missed in candlelight. The thing looks like a crumpled piece of paper. Front and back windows both have cracks in them. Headlights point in opposite directions. Fenders are separating at the seams. Bumper's rippled like sea waves. The mustang on the insignia's laid down and died. Another hole in the roof and it'll be a convertible.

How you ever had this heap on the road I'll never know, I tell Lincoln Rockwell X.

Around here cops see a car in this condition riding the asphalt, they lay off cause they know the driver's got blades for fingers.

But how'm I gonna get it across the police lines?

You own the car now, man, you make it run wherever you want to make it go. There's gas cans in the trunk. Call me when you need more.

But where'll I take it?

Take it anywhere but keep it moving. Only white allowed around here gotta be blurred.

You have a responsibility to me.

Shove that, man. I put you in the motherfucker seat and that's all is necessary.

He walks away, waving the five bills like a flag. I locate the horn, push it in to get his attention. It wheezes shyly but makes no other sound. I'll get out, run after him,

snatch the five bills, run like hell. The door handle comes off in my hand.

I've had the course. What can I do? Stay in the ghetto, dodge between blades? Race cops around the city? Drive only on moonless nights?

My Mustang, motor running, has a coughing fit. I quick depress the accelerator, run it hard to keep the engine from dying out. The accelerator pedal vibrates. The whole car begins to shake.

I better get this car moving before it really gets angry. I shift to D, press the accelerator pedal. A delay before the car responds, then a growling jump forward. Spinning tires set gravel flying, striking the underside of the car with hollow clanging noises.

Ghetto streets make good practice runways. I see only two other cars, each dilapidated, though in better condition than the Mustang. The streets are filled with obstacles—potholes, chunks of broken pavement, jagged trash. People jump into doorways when I drive along the sidewalk.

The Mustang is reluctant. When I try to gun the motor, it groans and waits a second before granting the speed increase. None of the dashboard gauges work right. The gas gauge doesn't work at all. Maybe I should just joyride, let the gas run out and abandon the car. Kiss the five bills goodbye.

Getting through the police line is easy. Both cops're busy beating up a spade rummy. They got him backed up against a piece of building and they're trading off who slams the club into his gut. The black man shouts out old militant slogans. A carful of white kids parked on the safe side of the line call out ratings for each blow. I speed by them and they hardly glance at me.

The Mustang, which rattles a lot at slow speeds, quiets down with acceleration. I never drove a car before, but my father described driving to me and one time I rode with a social worker and watched everything he did. I make a few mistakes now but I learn fast.

I can't go home now with no place to hide wheels. If I keep driving around the city, I'll have fuzz scrambling around the windshield in an hour or two. Or the night-roamers'll run me off the road once they see the car's illegal.

It took almost three workdays to get the five bills, so I might as well get some value for my money. I'll take a chance, drive around till something happens. What can happen? I can get the shit beat out of me, that's what. I can get five to twenty for driving without a license, another rap for the illegal vehicle itself. I can get sliced up. I can die.

Still—what's a few risks if you got wheels?

Suddenly I'm in the country. Open fields, overhanging trees, telephone poles, soft shoulders, road signs—the works. I look in the rearview mirror to make sure the city's still behind me, that it hasn't disappeared. The change is too fast, too abrupt. I'd expected a police line, or some barrier, a sign saying This Is the Countryside.

I begin to notice signs at the side of the road; around a circle each says To the Expressway. Inside the circle is an arrow pointing the way. We got expressways in the city, great cracked-up roads with their entrances blocked off with walls. Kids play on them 'cause they're safe. I decide to check this expressway out.

I give the Mustang its head. I slam down on the accelerator. Gradually the car picks up speed, I don't know how much because the speedometer needle jams at 50 mph. At a certain speed the car begins to vibrate menacingly. I slow it down to the fastest safe speed.

The car has a tendency to veer to the right. I have to clutch the steering wheel to keep the car on the road. I'm learning that the Mustang does what it wants to do. I have no control over it, I just make suggestions and hang on.

I pass another car, wheels screaming. Scared, I look in the rearview mirror. The other car kicks into action and begins to follow me. I push the pedal to the floorboards. Vibrating like hell the Mustang goes faster, reaches its top speed. It is not enough. My wreck of a Mustang is no match for the sleek tuned-up model chasing us. I try evasive tactics, hogging the middle of the road so that our pursuer can't pass. Around a curve he glides to the outside, comes alongside, and convinces us to pull over.

You can read fuzz all over his face. He's skinny but he walks like a fat man. His little eyes look out between the

only bulges in his face. Cram-course muscles hang from his thin shoulders like meat on hooks.

He pulls open my door. It makes a loud snap like it's going to break off. He grabs my collar with huge hands and drags me out of the car. My feet get tangled and I start to fall. He tosses me the rest of the way. I hit my head against a rear fender. The pain makes everything blur.

You pukes're getting braver all the time, he says.

I don't know what you're talking about.

I'm talking, you asshole, about how far you're willing to venture from the Cloverleaf. Which group of bums you belong to—the Roadrunners, the Mechs, the Hundred-plus-sers?

I tell him I don't understand. I stand up. He gives a kind of nasal grunt and slaps me across the face backhand. He grabs my shoulders, twists me around, pushes me against the trunk. I double over, a sharp fender edge caving in my stomach. He frisks me, takes away my wallet. I start to stand up. He pushes me down. Pinpoints of colored light flash like TV interference and I black out.

As I wake up, I hear the cop saying:

Get your ass here pronto. I can't sit on the lid all day just for this jerk. Okay, okay. Ten-four.

I'm laid out on the ground, on my back. He must've put me there, arranged me carefully like an undertaker with a corpse he really likes.

You okay, old buddy? he says.

I test all my breakable parts.

Yeah. Okay.

Stupid, you shouldn't take such chances.

Chances?

When you got a gang, stay with them. You guys that think you can go it on your own—why, that car of yours couldn't outrun a fat nurse pushing a baby buggy.

I don't get it.

What are you trying, getting off on a schmuck defense? Stupid's not an excuse. We're not going to baby you jerks any more. Any day now, we're going to tear up the roads and pour your skulls into the new cement.

His voice is strange. Like, he's telling me how his side is going to brutalize me and he sounds like he's giving me friendly advice.

I sit up. He leans against a car door, puffing on a joint. Funny, you don't look like a jerk. You're not scruffy enough.

He hands me the joint. I try not to look surprised. I accept it and take a big drag. It makes the pains better.

You look like a guy who used to be my partner on a city beat. We'd go off to a coop and rap about things. He didn't know shit about being a good cop but he read a lot and could tell me in a few words what he read.

I pass back the joint. His fingers are so big he can hardly take it out of my hand.

He'd been one of you jerks, maybe that's why you remind me of him. He could explain the radical line so it almost made sense. Shit, I think he figured on revolutionizing the force.

He takes another drag, holds it for a long time.

Nice kid. Got sliced from hairline to heel by some punk out looking for wheels to cop. Ain't run with a partner since.

I hold onto a fender of the Mustang and pull myself up. The fender almost breaks off under the strain of my weight. My gut feels like it's ripped to pieces.

You'll be okay, kid. Just be glad I didn't give you my patented Sergeant Allen special. They can't get up from that—they beg for amputations.

You Sergeant Allen?

Yeah. You heard of me?

No.

He seems disappointed.

You ain't been on the road long then, he says.

I look around. We're in the middle of the curve. You can't see far either way.

You got any information, I can see you get off easy.

He seems embarrassed to be saying it.

No. I don't know shit. Really.

He gives me a strange smile, like he likes the answer.

Ah, you jerks, he says, and I think he means something good.

I wonder if he's jazzing me. He talks like no pig I ever heard. I mean, he makes me want to talk to him. I decide to.

You like being a cop?

He laughs. An explosion.

You really are a dumbass from the word go. Shit, I bet if we still had to read off the rights for you jerks, I'd have to spell out every word for you.

I don't understand, but I'm learning it's better to keep my mouth shut. He takes a last drag on the joint, then crushes it between his big fingers and throws it away.

I hear the sound of an approaching car. I wonder how long I've been hearing it. Allen's body tenses. He reaches in his glove compartment and pulls out a gun. I haven't seen a gun up close since I was thirteen. This one has a short barrel and a thick grip. Allen holds it like he wants to use it.

Squad car's coming from town, he says, ain't nobody else out here on patrol. So that must be buddies of yours. You got something arranged, jerk?

I can't tell him the only arrangement I ever made is buying this screwjob of a car.

The sound stops just around the curve. Car doors open and slam. Feet glide across gravel. Moving shadows through a clump of trees.

I hear you, you stupid bastards, Allen shouts. I don't know what you're up to but I got four clubs joining me any minute.

As if to prove his statement, a siren begins to sound in the distance. I see something on the other side of the Mustang, a dark blur in the bushes. I look to see if Allen noticed. No, he's watching the other side of the road. His body's crouched. The siren gets louder.

Rescuing this dummy's not worth your time, Allen shouts.

Something flies out of the bushes at me. It comes at me chest-level and I catch it. I look down. It's a monkey wrench. A flying monkey wrench. I look at Allen; he hasn't seen. The siren sounds very close. The dark blur jumps silently out of the bushes and crouches beyond the Mustang. I walk three steps to Allen. He hears only the last step and turns. I swing the wrench backhanded, hit the side of his head, scrape the wrench across his forehead, hit him a second time cheekbone level.

Get moving, calls a voice behind me. The siren sounds like it's next door. I run to the Mustang, climb in, too panicked to look at the dark blur, who now occupies the

other front seat. I turn the ignition key. The motor wheezes.

Get moving, you dumb shit, says the dark blur, hitting the dashboard with both fists. I can tell by the voice it's a girl. The Mustang must be scared of her, 'cause it starts up right away.

I push the Mustang to its limit. Every time I think it's having its death rattle, instead it finds a new resource of power and keeps going. The other car, the one from around the curve, joins us and we ride side by side down the highway. Four guys are in the other car. They wave and make odd signs at me.

This car's out of sight *bad*, my companion says. What you got under the hood, a rusty sewing-machine motor?

I look over at her, try to examine what can be seen of her. Which isn't much 'cause she's so small. She's black. Very dark, so I suspect she wears a darkening makeup, the kind they advertise as AfroBlack.

Keep your motherfucking eyes on the road, she says. Up ahead it's all broken up and you got to ride the shoulder. It's only a mile to the Cloverleaf.

I continue to sneak looks at her.

Where'd you guys come from? I say. How'd you know Allen had me?

She has white-girl-texture hair and she ties it back as if ashamed of it.

We keep tabs, she says. We got a good lookout post up in the hills with a highpower telescope. They saw Aller beating up on you.

She has a white girl's small-nose nostril nose, but the lips are right.

What's your name? I say.

She has childlike shoulders and arms, a series of round pipes with ball-bearing joints.

Cora. Cora Natalie Townsend. What's yours?

She has practically no tits at all, just a hint of nipple beneath a tight sweater.

Lee Kestner.

She has thin but well-proportioned legs.

I want to see her eyes but she won't look at me.

We come to the Cloverleaf. The other car speeds ahead and leads me through its maze. We cross a bridge. Down

below are eight lanes of highway, four on each side of a center mall. I see at least three abandoned cars at the sides of the road but not a moving vehicle from one horizon to the other.

This the Expressway? I say.

Shit, you really *don't* know. Where you come from, a cave?

No, I just never been out of the city before.

You mean to tell me you never rode the Expressway?

Yes.

Well, you're about to now. I should've known when I saw this rotten car that you were a dumb-shit newcomer. Because it's so slow. Newcomers' cars're lucky if they do 75 on a straightaway.

I just bought this car.

You *paid* for this wreck? Boy, you may be the Newcomer of All Time.

The other car stops by a Merge sign. Its driver rolls down a window. Cora tells me to stop.

The Savarin? the other driver shouts.

The Savarin, she shouts back.

As the other car pulls away, picking up speed fast, she says:

Chuck's impatient. Doesn't want to drag along at your speed. He doesn't believe in wet-nursing other vehicles, leaves them on their own. C'mon, let's see how fast this horsecart can go.

She looks at me and I see her eyes. They are dark, expressive. They say, you fool with me and I'll slice off whatever part of you I want.

We got to the Savarin, Cora cursing the Mustang all the way. The Savarin is on top of a hill at the end of a long curved access road. Parked around it are more cars than I've ever seen at one time. Some of them are being worked on. Others have people sitting in them, on them, leaning against them, eating off them.

With so many cars *here*, how come you don't see any on the road?

Cora gives me a dumb-shit look.

Two reasons. One, to conserve gas and materials, which are becoming harder to get and more expensive all the time. The legal service stations that deal on the side charge

an arm and leg just to negotiate. Two, it's safer to travel at night. In the daytime we're more vulnerable to sneak attacks from the fuzz. Once we're on the highway they see us as legal game and they get all kinds of plaudits when they round up a few of us.

Why don't they just come here and get a bunch of you all at once?

Too many of us, not enough of them. It's volunteer duty out here: the smart pigs stay in the city and they can only get a few freaks like Allen to take country duty. Anyway, they like to keep us as far outside the city as they can, no room for us in the jails or the camps any more. So they don't bug us much. They hide at the access roads and exits, and look for strays. They only attack when the odds are in their favor. Except Allen. He wants our blood and he wants it flowing. C'mon, I'm going to introduce you to the one man you need desperately right now.

She takes me to a tall, heavy-set man in grease-stained coveralls.

This is The Mech, she says, some reverence in her voice. If anyone can resuscitate that corpse you drive, he can.

The Mech says he'll get to it later. Cora and I go into the Savarin.

She introduces me to a lot of people and then sits me down at the remains of a counter to eat. The room is crowded. Some people sleep in cots lined along the wall. Children run in and out. One man works on a long poem which he is inscribing in Magic Marker around an enormous coffee percolator.

Cora seems to look for an excuse to escape from me. I set traps to keep her with me.

I want to touch her—but so she'll know I touched her because I wanted to. Instead I brush against her arm reaching for a sugar shaker, graze knees while swaying the counterstool.

This Allen, he's mean, huh?

Mean? Yeah. Yeah, I guess. He's tough. He can scramble your brains with one punch if he wants to. But you got to respect him.

I don't understand.

You wouldn't. See, he's a loner and they're hard to come by out here. Most of the time, they cram four-five pigs into

one car, but he comes after us all by himself. He digs it, taking us on by himself. He's a spooky dude.

You ever had a run-in with him?

Once. Almost took a bunch of us in. He was pretty nice to me, told me some legal tricks I might use.

Outside, a score of engines start up. Nervous laughter and fidgeting indicate the eagerness of the crowd to hit the road.

We go out to check if The Mech's revived the Mustang. He's taken it inside the garage part of the Savarin building. Crouched over the engine, he's taking pieces out and throwing them over his shoulder. Parts lie scattered all around him on the concrete floor. When he sees us, he says:

Not ready yet. Got a lot to do before I can make this baby even run a straight line without wobbling.

Is it salvageable? I say.

It's salvageable all right. But never expect it to chase rabbits. With new parts and a tune-up and a speed booster, it might hit 85 or 90 but you can give up any hopes of it being a hundredplusser.

So long as it runs on more than wishful thinking I'll be satisfied.

As night falls, cars leave the parking area, usually in groups of four or five.

Any more crowds their piece of road, Cora says.

Where do they go?

Anywhere.

I mean why do they go out on the road at all?

The dumb-shit look again.

They got to, she says.

The Savarin empties, becomes barnlike in its emptiness. Cora and I sit in a booth. She wants to get out on the road, you can see that in her fumbling hands, her over-eager smiles, the vacant look in her eyes. Many people invite her to ride, but she says no.

I hate being just a rider, she says. I had my own car but I smashed it against an abutment. I'll get wheels again, soon's I find a deal.

Many accidents along this road?

Not many. Sometimes a spinoff or a car that dies completely. Not many fatalities. We take care of our own

when anything happens. If only the cops'd leave us alone completely.

We don't talk much now. I watch the front of her sweater, trying to locate the shape of breasts behind the nipples. She is so tiny. Standing up, she comes to chest-level on me. She must weigh under a hundred pounds.

The Mech comes into the Savarin. He announces that all transplants have been made and the car still lives. He won't take money, but he accepts half the cans of gas in the trunk. At the garage I notice that he'd already taken them.

Shall we try her out? I say, patting the Mustang on the hood.

We better wait. Till somebody can drive out with us.

I don't want to run in packs. Look, you heard what The Mech said, it can't even go as fast as other cars. Who'd drive out with us? Who wants to wet-nurse slower vehicles?

I don't know. It's risky.

Good, let's go.

She's hot for it, I can see that. She looks at the Mustang like it's a souped-up racer. I take her hand, a legal touch, and lead her to the car.

I slam down the accelerator. A roar shakes the whole car. I take it down the exit ramp and onto the main highway, giving it a little gas at a time, letting it speed up by degrees.

The Mech's done a good job. I can feel a thousand little differences. The steering's steadier, the engine smoother, the car's responses more immediate. It holds the road with sureness. Cora flicks a switch and the goddamned radio works. She finds a program of chant-rock. The heavy beat underscores the evenness of the Mustang's ride.

Finally I hit top speed, glancing sideways to see if Cora's impressed. She isn't. As the Mech says, the car's not going to set any speed records, but it does glide along. We enter a stretch of road with woods on each side; shadow trees fly by. We pass several abandoned cars, some with their hoods up, many with windows broken, most apparently stripped of valuable items.

The scenery flashing by, the car rumbling pleasantly around me, I think of making it with Cora. I glance over at

her, trying to devise a way in which fantasy might meet reality. She smiles at me, a hopeful sign. I reach out my hand. She squeezes it, but does not hold it, a gesture more like affirmation of brotherhood than love.

Still—she's here in the car with me, and we're cutting a wide slice through the night. I'm better off than when I didn't have wheels.

As we leave the wooded area, a metallic glint of light flashes through the last trees. Cora doesn't see it and I don't say anything. I alternate looking at the sideview and rearview mirrors. Another ray of light, but this time not in the forest. Out on the road this time. The third gleam and whatever it is, is closer to us. The Mustang is already going as fast as it will go. I try to nudge the pedal further into the floorboards. A sign informs me it is twenty-three miles to the next rest area. Cora senses my tension. She twists around, looks out the back window.

What's back there? she says.

I'm not sure.

Dumb-shit look.

It's another car, I guess.

You guess?! It's a pig car. It's Allen, it's got to be. He's the only one with nerve enough to buzz this stretch.

What'll we do?

I don't know, I can't think—keep going straight ahead till something happens. He's got the speed, but it'll still take him a few miles to catch up.

Maybe we should ditch the car, make a run for it.

Shit, I got to be in a spot like this with an idiot who don't know his ass from a crack in the road. It's open country here. We'd never get far. We'll have to chance what comes. Keep driving.

It catches up with us quicker than she'd guessed. It slows down behind us, staying on our tail but far enough back to remain a black ghost. A black ghost, its headlights off, stalking us.

It's Allen all right, Cora says. He likes fun and games. We got to make the first move. Hit the brake.

What?

Hit the brake, shithead!

We burn rubber in a long skid but hold our lane. The other car eases past us. He's in front of us before he realizes what happened. His brake lights flash on, but we're

controlling speed now. He tries to slow but we stay right on his tail. With four lanes leeway he can't set up a block or run us off the road. He guns his motor and pulls away from us.

Okay, Cora says, we've got him taking a chance.

Let's turn around, head back.

Can't, too risky. He'd catch up. No, forward's best. We have to wait him out.

As she gives me the instructions, I feel really stupid. She speaks to me as if I'm a kid.

She's tense. She hugs her legs to her chest.

Maybe we should slow down and get off the road, I say. Maybe he won't try to find us.

No, if he did get to us, we wouldn't have a chance. Shut off the headlights so at least he won't see us coming for miles.

I can barely see the road in the dim moonlight. The Mustang hums steadily, going along at about 40 mph. A couple of times it slides off the road onto the shoulder but most of the time finds its own way as if it had built-in radar.

Maybe you should pull over, Cora says, and let me drive.

I don't say anything, just keep going. She mutters something that I'm glad I can't understand. I roll down a window, listen to night noises. A shadowy blur turns out to be nothing more than a shadowy blur. I slow down further. To my left we seem to pass the sound of a quiet engine idling. The sound skips and I hear tires against gravel.

Open her up, Cora screams.

I increase speed. I have to turn the headlights on again so I can see where I'm going. He flashes his on, too. So he can take aim, as it turns out. The first shot, although it doesn't hit anything, is close enough to frighten me. I get a quick mental picture of Allen, leaning out the window and taking aim, a fat hand around the tiny gun, the other hand on the steering wheel. An anatomical absurdity, but if it's Allen, it's probably what he's doing.

I swerve but regain control. Next shot goes through the back window, leaving a circular area in white-lined little fragments. A third ricochets off the side of the car.

Switch lanes, Cora shouts, and keep switching.

I start zigzagging. He guns his motor and comes up even with me on the outside.

Get out of his way, damn it, Cora shouts.

He sideswipes me. A terrifying crunch of metal. I almost go into a spin, but the Mustang responds and I ease back into a lane. Through my sideview I see that he's had the worst of the swipe. Body damage my Mustang can take in stride. He's skidded sideways and has to straighten out.

I feel a weird sense of satisfaction, but can only hold it for a second because he's catching up again.

I pass a sign. Exit, Food, Gas, Lodging, one mile. I keep dodging from lane to lane.

Exit, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

We'll get off there, I say.

Cora looks terrified.

No, you dumb shit.

Why the hell not?

He'll cream you there. That's his territory, man.

What the fuck are we supposed to do? He'll cream us here.

I'll think of something.

I already have.

I let him almost catch up. At the last minute I swerve onto the exit ramp. He overshoots it. His tires scream as he turns around. Cora screams at me, but I can't make out what she's saying. I go around the long curve, over the bridge. Behind me I can see Allen's car at the far curve of the exit ramp. I turn right onto the access road and floor the pedal. The Mustang makes the long curve. On two wheels, it feels like. I mutter long, involved promises to it. Under the bridge I execute a skidding U-turn and stop the car.

I grope for the monkey wrench which is behind Cora's seat.

What are you going to do with that? she says in a frightened voice.

What do you think?

She makes a grab for my arm as I get out of the car. No, she screams. Don't! She says it again as I run across the road, the monkey wrench a dead weight in my hand. I hear his tires screeching around the curve.

It's like my own death. Everything important flashes before my eyes. Not the events of my life—the events of

the day. Maybe they are the events of my life. I see the car and Lincoln Rockwell X and the beating and Cora's hidden tits. I see all the blurs and bumps and rising dust of the road. I see myself running scared. All the things I always wanted to do. I see the road stretching to its perspective point, bisected by the flashes of oncoming headlights.

All this at once, as I watch the car round the last curve of the access road and come directly at me. I release the heavy wrench and my arm feels weightless. The wrench shatters the windshield glass, sails on across the side of Allen's head, floats out through the rear side window.

Inches from me the car swerves and heads across the four lanes. Cora screams, but it misses the Mustang, bounces off an abutment, hits another abutment broadside, and stops.

I don't want to look but I do.

His left arm is part of the mangled steering wheel. The rest of his body is relaxed, leaning slightly forward like someone exhausted from heat. His head rests against the splintered glass of the window. I avoid looking at what the wrench did to the side of his head.

I return to the Mustang. The wheels. Its motor throbs the whole car shakes. I get in and turn off the ignition.

I touch Cora's arm and she slides away from me.

You dumb fucking shit, she says.

She begins to beat her fists on the scarred leather of the dashboard.

SEDAN DEVILLE

By Barry N. Malzberg

This charming little story is by one who knows, since Barry Malzberg has a thing about Cadillacs—he buys them fairly often, he likes the way they feel, and he drives around alone in them at night. In fact, when last seen he was behind the wheel of his latest acquisition, driving west, toward the Dream Quarter.

Dear Sir:

Big coupe de ville Deora custom option on it; she say put all this together explain your case. I say to coupe de ville no this is not way to do it but she say fantastic big car power antenna power door locks power seats power windows power trunk release FM radio and signal seek she say you state your case to them just like I state mine to yours. Gaskets loose I fix, I think. Kurt Delvecchio take advice.

I published writer Kurt Delvecchio. Eight months ago I send short story based on true life experiences with Cadillac cars to editor *Terrific Science Fiction* he ask if I ever publish before and say will clean up grammar but buy story because it unusual. I write second story also based on true life experience and editor take this one too and then I write another story which he take and then I write still one more just like other three based on life experience of Cadillac car and editor reject saying stories amusing and original at first but all pretty much in same key. Then I get letter from publisher saying magazine going out of business except for last issue enclosed with my first story and also check and also other two stories not publishing. They say tight market.

Reading story in magazine discourage because cleaning up grammar seems to have taken out heart but as editor

explain readership of science-fiction magazines wants good grammar and so he does this for me because I have fine idea at first and what he call "instinctual feel." So this is situation right now: one story publish two stories would be publish but return with no money one story rejected no good and one story half finished because of news I receive. White coupe de ville say I put this very good you not misunderstand.

I understand that you are agent. That your job as agent is to sell stories of writers and deduct ten percent (10%) of sale price after sale. I ask you to sell this story I send with letter; it is the second (2nd) story I wrote which he would have bought had it not been for accident. Once you sell story you get next story to sell then next then I finish up fifth and so on. I have much to tell as you see also true and real message which must be explained now.

I also enclose copy of publish story in magazine so that you can see I am publish writer.

Dear Sir:

In answer to your question I engine mechanic in Cadillac dealership in Paramus New Jersey eight miles from the Washington Bridge this is how I got material for story and how I got what you call "convincing portrait of Cadillac car." Cadillac overhead valve V-8 fantastic big engine four hundred and seventy-five cubic inches since nineteen seventy-one standard, five hundred cc in Eldorado convertible and coupe both turning two hundred and seventy-five horsepower. Engine was once big and simple but now is big and complicated due to intake manifolds complex carburetor attachments high-temperature condensers and other technical things to meet new emission control requirements. Working on overhead valve V-8 all day most jobs relating to poor carburetion with underhood temperatures near one thousand degrees farenheit enables man to understand workings of Cadillac car.

Cadillac car is a simple and elegant tool and engines last forever. Know from transmission and electrical system men in shop that in Cadillacs these go all the time fuses popping bands slipping but even in auto graveyard on Pennsylvania Avenue Cadillac engine still turns over, still works; engine is heart of car and will not die. Transmissions and electrical not so good also front wheel alignment

terrible very hard to wheels balance but not this department. Working under hoods of Cadillac vehicles gives me good understanding of cars and I put this understanding in my stories which Mr. Walter Thomas complimented me upon and published one would have published two others in his magazine.

You ask why second story also about Cadillac do I not have range? I do not know what you mean by "range" I tell you only Cadillac car is like a woman great in its mysteries and not exhausted not even in twenty-five stories. Second story takes different point of view like woman would to two different men and I surprise you not see this.

I do not understand what you mean either by reading fee for unpublished writers; I am not unpublished writer as issue of magazine I sent to you makes quite clear but published writer once two other stories accepted. Wages at dealership are union scale plus overtime; take home to wife one hundred and sixty-three dollars and twenty cents last week which was typical week less sick benefits union dues taxes and so on. I can no afford to pay fee for reading or sending around stories. I began writing stories to make more money to add to wages. I enclose third story also accepted story by Mr. Walter Thomas which I hope you like and will sell for me.

Dear Sir:

Boss mechanic very pleased by idea Kurt Delvecchio is published writer; pass magazine around in shop. Some make jokes about what Cadillac mechanic doing writing for comic-book type magazine but they over in Fleetwood department working on series seventy-five chassis and do not speak English most of them quite stupid. Salesmen also very impressed; sometimes they take customers and point out me, Kurt Delvecchio, the "writing mechanic."

I do not understand your remark about third story; third story about Cadillac just as second and first were because all I write about is Cadillacs because I heard you must write what you know and that is what I know . . . Cadillac sedan de ville, Cadillac coupe de ville, Cadillac calais and Fleetwood, Eldorado Coupe and Convertible, flower cars and commercial chassis for ambulance and hearses. That is what I know and working on overhead valve V-8 plugs and points singing to me at idle speed two thousand rpm

true when well tuned it is like car is alive and speaking to me. All I do is put down words that car speaks car is real and alive I merely its messenger at times like these. Other times I just like other mechanics although have ambitions which most do not. I no pay a reading or marketing fee to circulate one (1) story of published writer and send you this fourth story which Mr. Walter Thomas reject because he say it too different in scope and style while still being too much like in others. I hope you read and send this one out for me as due to recent crisis which you must know and read about I mean so-called "energy crisis" business in dealership down eighty percent business in shop down twenty-seven percent junior men being laid off and although Kurt Delvecchio has some seniority I wish to find another source of income just in case.

Dear Sir:

Story told from point of view of see-through hood ornament (option extra cost twenty dollars \$20.00) because that is what I feel when wrote it; the way see-through hood ornament on coupe de ville would feel as being driven around Paramus Route 4 and Route 17 intersection also Bergen Mall. If had not felt it would not have written it Cadillac car is a real thing even though "energy crisis" going to destroy it is just as real as "aliens" or "Terrans" and other things in Mr. Walter Thomas's magazines (which I have read) and you wrong to say that it not salable also to say that this is positively last time you will react to story without fee I must pay fee of thirty dollars (\$30) in future. This show no understanding also no realization that Kurt Delvecchio is not amateur but true professional writer who combine love and knowledge of Cadillac car with stories that make Cadillac car *real* for first time in universe it give it side of story.

Very angry at you for this treatment white coupe de ville on which I worked today (only car in shop) also very mad despite defective ignition and dropped gaskets which have drenched oil pan and suspension system. White coupe de ville and I agree will not deal with you any more.

Instead to prove that Kurt Delvecchio is no fool and that he know how to sell to science-fiction magazines or anywhere else for that matter coupe de ville and I (it is '72 coupe de ville with customized Cabriolet roof and Deora

option on portholes) are going to send copies of my letters to you copies which I very cleverly keep at advice of Mr. Walter Thomas who encouraging new author tells him always to keep copies of letters he writes to publishers or editors or agents and white coupe de ville and I send out story *together* story being copies of these letters to next science-fiction magazine on list.

When next science-fiction magazine publishes letters *proving* that Kurt Delvecchio has something of great interest to say you will be sorry! but I will give you no percentage because of the many insults you have heaped on me in your own letters. White cabriolet coupe de ville stay overnight in shop tonight; tomorrow morning early I finish gaskets and it go away and I cry when it leave shop because shop then empty Kurt Delvecchio being one of only three (3) mechanics left but that is life as Mr. Walter Thomas would have said. If you do not think that these cars are alive or that evil men are killing them you not understand what is happening or what real meaning of stories is is what Deora and I we say to you. "*Energy crisis*" *a plot to kill deora*.

ROMANCE IN A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY USED-CAR LOT

By Robert F. Young

The work of Robert F. Young has been admired by writers with styles as diverse as those of Fritz Leiber and Avram Davidson. "Romance in a Twenty-First Century Used-Car Lot" is a fine illustration of his ability to capture a mood of strangeness and make it seem commonplace, and of his craftsmanship in introducing a vast amount of fascinating detail into a few thousand words.

This story is one of a trio of interrelated tales on a car-dominated future, the other two being "This Day Had September" and "Chrome Pastures."

The car-dress stood on a pedestal in the Big Jim display window, and a sign beneath it said:

THIS BEAUTIFUL NEW CHEMMY IS GOING
GOING GONE FOR ONLY \$6499.99! GENEROUS
TRADE-IN ALLOWANCE ON YOUR PRESENT
CAR-DRESS—HARDTOP HAT THROWN IN
FREE!

Arabella didn't mean to slam on her brakes, but she couldn't help herself. She had never seen a car-dress quite so stunning. And for only \$6499.99!

It was Monday afternoon and the spring street was filled with homeward-hurrying office workers, the April air with the beeping of horns. The Big Jim establishment stood near the corner next to a large used-car lot with a Cape Cod fence around it. The architecture of the building was

American Colonial, but the effect was marred by a huge neon sign projecting from the façade. The sign said:

BERNIE, THE BIG JIM MAN.

The beeping of horns multiplied, and belatedly realizing that she was holding up traffic, Arabella cut in front of an old man wearing a fuchsia Grandrapids and pulled over on the concrete shoulder in front of the display window.

Seen at close range, the car-dress was less dazzling, but still irresistible to the eye. Its sleek turquoise flanks and its sequined grille gleamed in the slanted rays of the sun. Its tailfinned bustle protruded like the twin wakes of a catamaran. It was a beautiful creation, even by modern manufacturing standards, and a bargain worth taking advantage of. Even so, Arabella would have let it go by if it hadn't been for the hardtop hat.

A dealer—presumably Bernie—wearing an immaculate two-toned Lansing de mille advanced to meet her when she drove in the door. "Can I help you, madam?" he asked, his voice polite, but his eyes, behind his speckless windshield, regarding the car-dress she was wearing with obvious contempt.

Shame painted Arabella's cheeks a bright pink. Maybe she *had* waited too long to turn the dress in for a new one at that. Maybe her mother was right: maybe she was too indifferent to her clothes. "The dress in the window," she said. "Do—do you really throw in a hardtop hat with it?"

"We most certainly do. Would you like to try it on?"
"Please."

The dealer turned around and faced a pair of double doors at the rear of the room. "Howard!" he called, and a moment later the doors parted and a young man wearing a denim-blue pickup drove in. "Yes sir?"

"Take the dress in the window back to the dressing room and get a hardtop hat to match it out of the stock-room." The dealer turned around to Arabella. "He'll show you where to go, madam."

The dressing room was just beyond the double doors and to the right. The young man wheeled in the dress, then went to get the hat. He hesitated after he handed it to her, and an odd look came into his eyes. He started to say

something, then changed his mind and drove out of the room.

She closed and locked the door and changed hurriedly. The upholstery-lining felt deliciously cool against her body. She donned the hardtop hat and surveyed herself in the big three-way mirror. She gasped.

The tailfinned bustle was a little disconcerting at first (the models she was accustomed to did not stick out quite so far behind), but the chrome-sequined grille and the flush fenders did something for her figure that had never been done for it before. As for the hardtop hat—well, if the evidence hadn't been right there before her eyes, she simply wouldn't have believed that a mere hat, even a hardtop one, could achieve so remarkable a transformation. She was no longer the tired office girl who had driven into the shop a moment ago; now she was Cleopatra . . . Bathsheba . . . Helen of Troy!

She drove self-consciously back to the display room. A look akin to awe crept into the dealer's eyes. "You're not *really* the same person I talked to before, are you?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," Arabella said.

"You know, ever since we got that dress in," the dealer went on, "I've been hoping someone would come along who was worthy of its lines, its beauty, its—its personality." He raised his eyes reverently. "Thank you, Big Jim," he said, "for sending such a person to our door." He lowered his eyes to Arabella's awed countenance. "Like to try it out?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very well. But just around the block. I'll draw up the papers while you're gone. Not," he added hastily, "that you'll be in any way obligated to take it; but just in case you decide to, we'll be all ready to do business."

"How—how much allowance can you give me on my old dress?"

"Let's see, it's two years old, isn't it? H'm'm." The dealer frowned for a moment, then: "Look. I'll tell you what I'll do. You don't look like the type of person who'd wear a dress very hard, so I'll allow you a good, generous one thousand and two dollars. How does that sound?"

"Not—not very good." (Maybe, if she went without eating lunch for a year . . .)

"Don't forget, you're getting the hardtop hat free."

"I know, but—"

"Try it out first, and then we'll talk," the dealer said. He got a dealer's plate out of a nearby cabinet and clamped it onto her rear end. "There, you're all set," he said, opening the door. "I'll get right to work on the papers."

She was so nervous and excited when she pulled into the street that she nearly collided with a young man wearing a white convertible, but she got control of herself quickly, and to demonstrate that she was really a competent driver, first impressions to the contrary, she overtook and passed him. She saw him smile as she went by, and a little song began in her heart and throbbed all through her. Somehow that very morning she'd just known that something wonderful was going to happen to her. A perfectly ordinary day at the office had somewhat dimmed her expectations, but now they shone forth anew.

She had to stop for a red light, and when she did so, the young man drove up beside her. "Hi," he said. "That's a swell dress you're wearing."

"Thank you."

"I know a good drive-in. Like to take in a movie with me tonight?"

"Why, I don't even know you!" Arabella said.

"My name is Harry Fourwheels. Now you know me. But I don't know you."

"Arabella. Arabella Grille . . . But I don't know you very well."

"That can be remedied. Will you go?"

"I—"

"Where do you live?"

"611 Macadam Place," she said before she thought.

"I'll stop by at eight."

"I—"

At that very moment the light changed, and before she could voice her objection, the young man was gone. Eight, she thought wonderingly. Eight o'clock . . .

After that, she simply had to take the dress. There was no other alternative. Having seen her in such a resplendent model, what would he think if she was wearing her old bucket of bolts when he showed up to take her out? She

returned to the display room, signed the papers, and went home.

Her father stared at her through the windshield of his three-tone Cortez when she drove into the garage and parked at the supper table. "Well," he said, "it's about time you broke down and bought yourself a new dress!"

"I guess so!" said her mother, who was partial to stationwagons and wore one practically all the time. "I was beginning to think you were never going to wise up to the fact that you're living in the twenty-first century and that in the twenty-first century you've got to be *seen*."

"I'm—I'm only twenty-seven," Arabella said. "Lots of girls are still single at that age."

"Not if they dress the way they should," her mother said.

"Neither one of you has said whether you liked it yet or not," Arabella said.

"Oh, I like it fine," her father said.

"Ought to catch somebody's eyes," said her mother.

"It already has."

"Well!" said her mother.

"At long last!" said her father.

"He's coming for me at eight."

"For heaven's sake, don't tell him you read books," her mother said.

"I won't. I don't, really—not anymore."

"And don't mention any of those radical notions you used to have, either," said her father. "About people wearing cars because they're ashamed of the bodies God gave them."

"Now Dad, you know I haven't said things like that in years. Not since, not since—"

—Not since the Christmas office party, she went on to herself, when Mr. Upswept had patted her rearend and had said, when she repulsed him, "Crawl back into your history books, you creep. You don't belong in this century!"

—Not since ever so long ago," she finished lamely.

Harry Fourwheels showed up at eight sharp, and she hurried down the drive to meet him. They drove off side by side, turned into Blacktop Boulevard, and left the town

behind them. It was a lovely night, with just enough winter lingering in the skirts of spring to paint the gibbous moon a vivid silver and to hone the stars to pulsing brightness.

The drive-in was crowded but they found two places way in the rear, not far from the edge of a small woods. They parked close together, so close their fenders almost touched, and presently she felt Harry's hand touch her chassis and creep tentatively around her waist, just above her tailfinned bustle. She started to draw away, but remembering Mr. Upswept's words, she bit her lip and tried to concentrate on the movie.

The movie concerned a retired vermicelli manufacturer who lived in a boarding garage. He had two ungrateful daughters, and he worshipped the concrete they drove on, and did everything in his power to keep them in luxury. To accomplish this, he had to deny himself all but the barest essentials, and consequently he lived in the poorest section of the garage and dressed in used-car suits so decrepit they belonged in the junkyard. His two daughters, on the other hand, lived in the most luxurious garages available and wore the finest car-clothes on the market. A young engineering student named Rastignac also lived in the boarding garage, and the plot concerned his efforts to invade the upper echelons of modern society and to acquire a fortune in the process. To get himself started, he chiseled enough money from his sister to outfit himself in a new Washington convertible, and contrived an invitation, through a rich cousin, to a dealer's daughter's debut. There he met one of the vermicelli manufacturer's daughters and—

Despite her best efforts, Arabella's attention wandered. Harry Fourwheels' hand had abandoned her waist in favor of her headlights and had begun a tour of inspection. She tried to relax, but she felt her body stiffen instead, and heard her tense voice whisper, "Don't, please don't!"

Harry's hand fell away. "After the show, then?"

It was a way out and she grabbed it. "After the show," she said.

"I know a swell spot up in the hills. Okay?"

"Okay," she heard her frightened voice say.

She shuddered, and patted her headlights back in place. She tried to watch the rest of the movie, but it wasn't any use. Her mind kept drifting off to the hills and she kept

trying to think of some excuse, any excuse, that would extricate her from her predicament. But she couldn't think of a single one, and when the movie ended she followed Harry through the exit and drove beside him down Black-top Boulevard. When he turned off into a dirt road, she accompanied him resignedly.

Several miles back in the hills, the road paralleled the local nudist reservation. Through the high electric fence, the lights of occasional cottages could be seen twinkling among the trees. There were no nudists abroad, but Arabella shuddered just the same. Once, she had felt mildly sympathetic toward them, but since the Mr. Upswept incident, she had been unable to think of them without a feeling of revulsion. In her opinion Big Jim gave them a much better break than they deserved; but then, she supposed, he probably figured that some of them would repent someday and ask forgiveness for their sins. It was odd, though, that none of them ever did.

Harry Fourwheels made no comment, but she could sense his distaste, and even though she knew that it stemmed from a different source than hers did, she experienced a brief feeling of camaraderie toward him. Maybe he wasn't quite as predatory as his premature passes had led her to think. Maybe, at heart, he was as bewildered as she was by the codes of conduct that regulated their existence—codes that meant one thing in one set of circumstances, and the diametrical opposite in another set. Maybe . . .

About a mile past the reservation, Harry turned into a narrow road that wound among oaks and maples into a park-like clearing. Diffidently, she accompanied him, and when he parked beneath a big oak, she parked beside him. She regretted it instantly when she felt his hand touch her chassis and begin its relentless journey toward her headlights again. This time her voice was anguished: "Don't!"

"What do you mean, don't!" Harry said, and she felt the hard pressure of his chassis against hers, and the fumbling of his fingers around her headlights. She managed, somehow, to wheel out of his grasp, and find the road that led out of the clearing, but a moment later he was abreast of her, edging her toward the ditch. "Please!" she cried, but he paid no attention and moved in even closer. She felt his fender touch hers, and instinctively she shied away. Her right front wheel lost purchase, and she felt her whole

chassis toppling. Her hardtop hat fell off, caromed off a rock and into a thicket. Her right front fender crumpled against a tree. Harry's wheels spun furiously and a moment later the darkness devoured the red dots of his tail-lights.

There was the sound of tree-toad and katydid and cricket, and far away, the traffic sound of Blacktop Boulevard. There was another sound too—the sound her sobs made as they wrenched free from her throat. Gradually, though, the sound subsided as the pain dulled, and the wound began to knit.

It would never knit wholly, though. Arabella knew that. Any more than the Mr. Upswept wound had. She recovered her hardtop hat and eased back onto the road. The hat was dented on top, and a ragged scratch marred its turquoise sheen. A little tear ran down her cheek as she put it on and patted it into place.

But the hat represented only half her problem. There was the crumpled right fender to contend with too. What in the world was she going to do? She didn't dare show up at the office in the morning in such a disheveled state. Someone would be sure to turn her in to Big Jim if she did, and he'd find out how she'd been secretly defying him all these years by owning only one car outfit when he'd made it perfectly clear that he expected everybody to own at least two. Suppose he took her license away and relegated her to the nudist reservation? She didn't think he would for such a minor deviation, but it was a possibility that she had to take into consideration. The mere thought of such a fate surfeited her with shame.

In addition to Big Jim, there were her parents to be considered too. What was she going to tell *them*? She could just see them when she came down to breakfast in the morning. She could hear them too. "So you wrecked it already!" her father said. "I've had hundreds of car-dresses in my life," said her mother, "and I never wrecked a single one, and here you go out and get one one minute and smash it up the next!"

Arabella winced. She couldn't possibly go through with it. Some way, somehow, she had to get the dress repaired tonight. But where? Suddenly she remembered a sign she'd noticed in the display window that afternoon—a sign

which her preoccupation with the car-dress had crowded out of her awareness: *24-hour service*.

She drove back to town as fast as she dared and made a bee-line for the Big Jim building. Its windows were square wells of darkness and its street door was closed tight. Her disappointment became a sick emptiness in her stomach. Had she read the sign wrong? She could have sworn that it said *24-hour service*.

She drove up to the display window and read it again. She was right: it did say *24-hour service*; but it also said, in smaller, qualifying letters, *After 6 P.M., apply at used-car lot next door*.

The same young man who had taken the dress out of the window drove up to meet her when she turned into the entrance. Howard, his name was, she remembered. He was still wearing the same denim-blue pickup, and the old look she had noticed in his eyes before came back when he recognized her. She had suspected it was pity; now she knew it was. "My dress," she blurted, when he braked beside her. "It's ruined! Can you fix it, please?"

He nodded. "Sure, I can fix it." He pointed to a garagette at the back of the lot. "You can take it off in there," he said.

She drove hurriedly across the lot. Used car-dresses and -suits lay all about her in the darkness. She glimpsed her old model, and the sight of it made her want to cry. If only she'd held on to it! If only she hadn't let her better judgment be swayed by so tawdry an accouterment as a hard-top hat!

It was cold in the garagette, cold and damp. She slipped out of her dress and hat and shoved them through the doorway to Howard, being careful not to reveal herself. But she needn't have bothered, because he looked the other way when he took them. Probably he was used to dealing with modest females.

She noticed the cold much more now, without her dress, and she huddled in a corner trying to keep warm. Presently she heard someone pounding outside and she went to the single window and peeked out into the lot. Howard was working on her right front fender. She could tell from the way he was going about it that he must have straightened hundreds of them. Except for the sound of his rubber mallet, the night was silent. The street beyond the Cape

Cod fence was empty, and save for a lighted window or two, the office buildings across the way were in darkness. Above the building tops, the huge Big Jim sign that preempted the public square in the center of town was visible. It was an alternating sign:

WHAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR BIG JIM IS
GOOD ENOUGH FOR EVERYBODY,

it said on the first circuit.

IF IT WASN'T FOR BIG JIM, WHERE WOULD
EVERYBODY BE?

it asked on the second.

Hammer hammer hammer . . . Suddenly she thought of a TV musical—one of a series entitled *Opera Can Be Fun When Brought Up to Date*—she'd listened to once, called *Siegfried Roads*, and she remembered the opening act in which Siegfried had kept importuning a sawed-off mechanic—supposedly his father—named Mime to build him a hot-rod superior to the Fafner model owned by the villain so that he could beat the latter in a forthcoming race at Valhalla. The hammer motif kept sounding forth on the bongo drums while Mime worked desperately on the new hot-rod, and Siegfried kept asking over and over who his real father was. *Hammer hammer hammer . . .*

Howard had finished straightening her fender, and now he was working on her hardtop hat. Someone wearing a citron Providence passed in the street with a swish of tires, and a quality about the sound made her think of the time. She looked at her watch: 11:25. Her mother and father would be delighted when they asked her at breakfast what time she got in and she said, "Oh, around midnight." They were always complaining about her early hours.

Her thoughts came back to Howard. He had finished pounding out the dent in the hardtop hat and now he was touching up the scratch. Next, he touched up the scratches on the fender, and presently he brought both hat and dress back to the garagette and shoved them through the doorway. She slipped into them quickly and drove outside.

His eyes regarded her from behind his windshield. A

gentle light seemed to emanate from their blue depths.
"How beautiful with wheels," he said.

She stared at him. "What did you say?"

"Nothing, really. I was thinking of a story I read once."

"Oh." She was surprised. Mechanics didn't usually go in for reading—mechanics or anyone else. She was tempted to tell him that she liked to read too, but she thought better of it. "How much do I owe you?" she asked.

"The dealer will send you a bill. I only work for him."

"All night?"

"Till twelve. I just came on when you saw me this afternoon."

"I—I appreciate your fixing my dress. I—I don't know what I would have done—" She left the sentence unfinished.

The gentle light in his eyes went out. Bleakness took its place. "Which one was it? Harry Fourwheels?"

She fought back her humiliation, forced herself to return his gaze. "Yes. Do—do you know him?"

"Slightly," Howard said, and she got the impression that slightly was enough. His face, in the tinselly radiance of the Big Jim sign, seemed suddenly older, and little lines she hadn't noticed before showed at the corners of his eyes. "What's your name?" he asked abruptly.

She told him. "Arabella," he repeated, "Arabella Grille." And then: "I'm Howard Highways."

They nodded to each other. Arabella looked at her watch. "I have to go now," she said. "Thank you very much, Howard."

"You're welcome," Howard said. "Good night."

"Good night."

She drove home through the quiet streets in the April darkness. Spring tiptoed up behind her and whispered in her ear: *How beautiful with wheels. How beautiful with wheels!* . . .

"Well," her father said over his eggs the following morning, "how was the double feature?"

"Double feature?" Arabella asked, buttering a slice of toast.

"Hah!" her father said. "So it wasn't a double feature!"

"In a way it probably was," said her mother. "Two drive-ins—one with movie and one without."

Arabella suppressed a shudder. Her mother's mind functioned with the directness of a TV commercial. In a way it matched the gaudy stationwagons she wore. She had on a red one now, with a bulbous grille and swept-back fins and dark heavy wipers. Again Arabella suppressed a shudder. "I—I had a nice time," she said, "and I didn't do a thing wrong."

"That's news?" said her father.

"Our chaste little twenty-seven—almost twenty-eight—year-old daughter," said her mother. "Pure as the driven snow! I suppose you'll do penance now for having stayed out so late by staying in nights and reading books."

"I told you," Arabella said, "I don't read books anymore."

"You might as well read them," her father said.

"I'll bet you told him you never wanted to see him again just because he tried to kiss you," said her mother. "The way you did with all the others."

"I did not!" Arabella was trembling now. "As a matter of fact I'm going out with him again tonight!"

"Well!" said her father.

"Three cheers!" said her mother. "Maybe now you'll start doing right by Big Jim and get married and raise your quota of consumers and share the burden of the economy with the rest of your generation."

"Maybe I will!"

She backed away from the table. She had never lied before and she was angry with herself. But it wasn't until she was driving to work that she remembered that a lie, once made, either had to be lived up to or admitted. And since admitting this one was unthinkable, she would have to live up to it . . . or at least give the impression that she was living up to it. That night she would have to go someplace and remain there till at least midnight or her parents would suspect the truth.

The only place she could think of was a drive-in.

She chose a different one from the one Harry Fourwheels had taken her to. The sun had set by the time she got there and the main feature was just beginning. It was a full-length animated fairy tale and concerned the adventures of a cute little teen-ager named Carbonella who lived with her stepmother and her two ugly stepsisters. She spent most of her time in a corner of the garage, washing and simonizing

her stepmother's and stepsisters' car-dresses. They had all sorts of beautiful gowns—Washingtons and Lansings and Flints—while she, little Carbonella, had nothing but clunkers and old junk-heaps to wear. Finally, one day, the Big Jim dealer's son announced that he was going to throw a big whinging at his father's palatial garage. Immediately, the two stepsisters and the stepmother got out their best gowns for Carbonella to wash and simonize. Well, she washed and simonized them, and cried and cried because she didn't have a decent dress to her name and couldn't go to the whinging, and finally the night of the big event arrived and her two stepsisters and her stepmother got all chromed up in their car-gowns and took off gaily for the dealer's garage. Left behind, Carbonella sank to her knees in the car-wash corner and burst into tears. Then, just as it was beginning to look as though Big Jim had deserted her, who should appear but the Fairy Car Mother, resplendent as a shining white Lansing de mille! Quick as scat, she waved her wand, and all of a sudden there was Carbonella, radiant as a new day, garbed in a carnation-pink Grand-rapids with hubcaps so bright they almost knocked your eyes out. So Carbonella got to the whinging after all, and wheeled every dance with the dealer's son while her ugly stepsisters and her stepmother did a slow burn along the wall. She was so happy she forgot that the Fairy Car Mother's spell was scheduled to expire at midnight, and if the clock on the dealer's Big Jim sign hadn't begun to dong the magic hour she might have turned back into a car-wash girl right there in the middle of the showroom floor. She zoomed out the door then, and down the ramp, but in her haste to hide herself before the spell ended, she lost one of her wheels. The dealer's son found it, and next day he made the rounds of all the garages in the Franchise, asking all the women who had attended his whinging to try it on. However, it was so small and dainty that it wouldn't even begin to fit any of their axles no matter how much grease they used. After trying it on the axles of the two ugly stepsisters, the dealer's son was about to give up when he happened to espied Carbonella sitting in the car-wash corner, simonizing a car-dress. Well, he wouldn't have it any other way than for Carbonella to come out of the corner and try the wheel on, and what do you know, there before the horrified stares of the stepsisters and the stepmother, the

wheel slid smoothly into place without even a smidgin of grease being necessary! Off Carbonella went with the dealer's son, and they drove happily ever after.

Arabella glanced at her watch: 10:30. Too early to go home yet, unless she wanted to leave herself wide open to another cynical cross-examination. Grimly she settled down in her parking place to watch *Carbonella* again. She wished now that she'd checked to see what picture was playing before driving in. *Carbonella* was classified as adult entertainment, but just the same, there were more kids in the drive-in than there were grownups, and she couldn't help feeling self-conscious, parking there in her big car-dress in the midst of so many kiddy-car outfits.

She stuck it out till eleven, then she left. It was her intention to drive around till midnight, and she probably would have done just that if she hadn't decided to drive through town—and hadn't, as a consequence, found herself on the street where the used-car lot was. The sight of the Cape Cod fence evoked pleasant associations, and she instinctively slowed down when she came opposite it. By the time she reached the entrance she was virtually crawling, so when she noticed the pickup-clad figure parked in front of it, it was only natural that she should stop.

"Hi," she said, "What are you doing?"

He drove out to the curb, and when she saw his smile she was glad she had stopped. "I'm drinking a glass of April," he said.

"How does it taste?"

"Delicious. I've always been partial to April. May comes close, but it's slightly on the tepid side. As for June, July and August, they only whet my thirst for the golden wine of fall."

"Do you always talk in metaphors?"

"Only to very special people," he said. He was quiet for a moment then: "Why don't you come in and park with me till twelve? Afterwards we'll go some place for a hamburger and a beer."

". . . All right."

Used car-dresses and -suits still littered the lot, but her old car-dress was gone. She was glad, because the sight of it would only have depressed her, and she wanted the effervescence that was beginning in her breast to continue unchecked. Continue it did. The night was quite warm for

April, and it was even possible now and then to see a star or two between the massive winks of the Big Jim sign. Howard talked about himself for a while, telling her how he was going to school days and working nights, but when she asked him what school, he said he'd talked about himself long enough and now it was her turn. So she told him about her job, and about the movies she went to, and the TV programs she watched, and finally she got around to the books she used to read.

They both started talking then, first one and then the other, and the time went by like a robin flying south, and almost before she knew what had happened, there was the twelve-to-eight man driving into the lot, and she and Howard were heading for the Gravel Grille.

"Maybe," he said afterwards, when they drove down Macadam Place and paused in front of her garage, "you could stop by tomorrow night and we could drink another glass of April together. That is," he added, "if you have no other plans."

"No," she said. "I have no other plans."

"I'll be waiting for you then," he said, and drove away.

She watched his taillights diminish in the distance, and disappear. From somewhere came the sound of singing, and she looked around in the shadows of the street to find its source. But the street was empty except for herself and she realized finally that the singing was the singing of her heart.

She thought the next day would never end, and then, when it finally did end, rain was falling out of an uninspiring sky. She wondered how April would taste in the rain, and presently she discovered—after another stint in a drive-in—that rain had little to do with the taste if the other ingredients *were* present, and she spent another winged night talking with Howard in the used-car lot, watching the stars between the winks of the Big Jim sign, afterwards driving with him to the Gravel Grille for hamburgers and beer, and finally saying good night to him in front of her garage.

The other ingredients were present the next night, too, and the next and the next. Sunday she packed a lunch and they drove up into the hills for a picnic. Howard chose the highest one, and they climbed a winding road and parked

on the crest under a wind-gaunt elm tree and ate the potato salad she had made, and the sandwiches, passing the coffee-thermos back and forth. Afterwards they smoked cigarettes in the afternoon wind and talked in lazy sentences.

The hilltop provided a splendid view of a wooded lake fed by a small stream. On the other side of the lake, the fence of a nudist reservation shattered the slanted rays of the sun, and beyond the fence, the figures of nudists could be seen moving about the streets of one of the reservation villages. Owing to the distance, they were hardly more than indistinguishable dots, and at first Arabella was only vaguely aware of them. Gradually, though, they penetrated her consciousness to a degree where they pre-empted all else.

"It must be horrible!" she said suddenly.

"What must be horrible?" Howard wanted to know.

"To live naked in the woods like that. Like—like savages!"

Howard regarded her with eyes as blue—and as deep—as the wooded lake. "You can hardly call them savages," he said presently. "They have machines the same as we do. They maintain schools and libraries. They have trades and professions. True, they can only practice them within the confines of the reservation, but that's hardly more limited than practicing them in a small town or even a city. All in all, I'd say they were civilized."

"But they're naked!"

"It it so horrible to be naked?"

He had opened his windshield and was leaning quite close to her. Now he reached up and opened her windshield too, and she felt the cool wind against her face. She saw the kiss in his eyes, but she did not draw away, and presently she felt it on her lips. She was glad, then, that she hadn't drawn away, because there was nothing of Mr. Upswept in the kiss, or of Harry Fourwheels; nothing of her father's remarks and her mother's insinuations. After a while she heard a car door open, and then another, and presently she felt herself being drawn out into the sunshine and the April wind, and the wind and the sun were cool and warm against her body, cool and warm and clean, and shame refused to rise in her, even

when she felt Howard's car-less chest pressing against hers.

It was a long sweet moment and she never wanted it to end. But end it did, as all moments must. "What was that?" Howard said, raising his head.

She had heard the sound too—the whirring sound of wheels—and her eyes followed his down the hillside and caught the gleaming tailgate of a white convertible just before it disappeared around a bend in the road. "Do—do you think they saw us?" she asked.

Howard hesitated perceptibly before he answered. "No, I don't think so. Probably someone out for a Sunday drive. If they'd climbed the hill we would have heard the motor."

"Not—not if there was a silencer on it," Arabella said. She slipped back into her car-dress. "I—I think we'd better go."

"All right." He started to slip back into his pickup, paused. "Will—will you come here with me next Sunday?" he asked.

His eyes were earnest, imploring. "Yes," she heard her voice say, "I'll come with you."

It was even lovelier than the first Sunday had been—warmer, brighter, bluer of sky. Again Howard drew her out of her dress and held her close and kissed her, and again she felt no shame. "Come on," he said, "I want to show you something." He started down the hill toward the wooded lake.

"But you're walking," she protested.

"No one's here to see, so what's the difference? Come on."

She stood undecided in the wind. A brook sparkling far below decided her. "All right," she said.

The uneven ground gave her trouble at first, but after a while she got used to it, and soon she was half-skipping along at Howard's side. At the bottom of the hill they came to a grove of wild apple trees. The brook ran through it, murmuring over mossy stones. Howard lay face down on the bank and lowered his lips to the water. She followed suit. The water was winter-cool, and the coolness went all through her, raising goose bumps on her skin.

They lay there side by side. Above them, leafshoots and limbs arabesqued the sky. Their third kiss was even

sweeter than its predecessors. "Have you been here before?" she asked when at last they drew apart.

"Many times," he said.

"Alone?"

"Always alone."

"But aren't you afraid Big Jim might find out?"

He laughed. "Big Jim? Big Jim is an artificial entity. The automakers dreamed him up to frighten people into wearing their cars so that they would buy more of them and turn them in more often, and the government co-operated because without increased car-turnover, the economy would have collapsed. It wasn't hard to do, because people had been wearing their cars unconsciously all along. The trick was to make them wear them consciously—to make them self-conscious about appearing in public places without them; ashamed, if possible. That wasn't hard to do either—though of course the size of the cars had to be cut way down, and the cars themselves had to be designed to approximate the human figure."

"You shouldn't say such things. It's—it's blasphemy! Anyone would think you were a nudist."

He looked at her steadily. "Is it so despicable to be a nudist?" he asked. "Is it less despicable, for example, to be a dealer who hires shills like Harry Fourwheels to sway undecided women customers and to rough up their purchases afterwards so that they can't take advantage of the twenty-four-hour clause in their sales contract? . . . I'm sorry, Arabella, but it's better for you to know."

She had turned away so that he would not see the tears rivuleting down her cheeks. Now she felt his hand touch her arm, creep gently round her waist. She let him draw her to him and kiss her tears away, and the re-opened wound closed again, this time forever.

His arms tightened around her. "Will you come here with me again?"

"Yes," she said. "If you want me to."

"I want you to very much. We'll take off our cars and run through the woods. We'll thumb our noses at Big Jim. We'll—"

Click, something went in the bushes on the opposite bank.

She went taut in Howard's arms. The bushes quivered, and a uniformed shape grew out of them. A cherubic face

beamed at them across the ripples. A big square hand raised and exhibited a portable audio-video recorder. "Come on you two," a big voice said. "Big Jim wants to see you."

The Big Jim judge regarded her disapprovingly through the windshield of his black Cortez when they brought her before him. "Well, that wasn't very nice of you, was it?" he said. "Taking off your clothes and cavorting with a nudist."

Arabella's face grew pale behind her windshield. "A nudist!" she said disbelievingly. "Why, Howard's not a nudist. He can't be!"

"Oh yes he can be. As a matter of fact, he's even worse than a nudist. He's a *voluntary* nudist. We realize, however," the judge went on, "that you had no way of knowing it, and in a way we are to blame for your becoming involved with him, because if it hadn't been for our inexcusable lack of vigilance he wouldn't have been able to lead the double life he did—going to a nudist teachers' institute days and sneaking out of the reservation nights and working in a used-car lot and trying to convert nice people like yourself to his way of thinking. Consequently we're going to be lenient with you. Instead of revoking your license we're going to give you another chance—let you go home and atone for your reprehensible conduct by apologizing to your parents and by behaving yourself in the future. Incidentally, you've got a lot to thank a young man named Harry Fourwheels for."

"Have—have I?"

"You certainly have. If it hadn't been for his alertness and his loyalty to Big Jim we might not have discovered your dereliction until it was too late."

"Harry Fourwheels," Arabella said wonderingly. "He must hate me very much."

"*Hate* you? My dear girl, he—"

"And I think I know why," Arabella went on, unaware of the interruption. "He hates me because he betrayed to me what he really is, and in his heart he despises what he really is. Why . . . that's why Mr. Upswept hates me too!"

"See here, Miss Grille, if you're going to talk like that I may have to reconsider my decision. After all—"

"And my mother and father," Arabella continued. "They hate me because they've also betrayed to me what they

really are, and in their hearts they despise themselves too. Even cars can't hide that kind of nakedness. And Howard. He loves me. He doesn't hate what he really is—any more than I hate what I really am. What—what have you done with him?"

"Escorted him back to the reservation, of course. What else could we do with him? I assure you, though, that he won't be leading a double life any more. And now, Miss Grille, as I've already dismissed your case, I see no reason for you to remain any longer. I'm a busy man and—"

"How does a person become a voluntary nudist, Judge?"

"By willful exhibitionism. Good day, Miss Grille."

"Good day . . . and thank you."

She went home first to pack her things. Her mother and father were waiting up for her in the kitchen.

"Filthy hussy!" her mother said.

"To think that a daughter of mine—" said her father.

She drove through the room without a word, and up the ramp to her bedroom. Packing did not take long: except for her books, she owned very little. Back in the kitchen, she paused long enough to say good-bye. Her parents' faces fell apart. "Wait," said her father. "Wait!" cried her mother. Arabella drove out the door without a single glance into her rearview mirror.

After leaving Macadam Place, she headed for the public square. Despite the lateness of the hour, there were still quite a few people. She took off her hardtop hat first. Next she took off her car-dress. Then she stood there in the winking radiance of the Big Jim sign in the center of the gathering crowd and waited for the vice squad to come and arrest her.

It was morning when they escorted her to the reservation. Above the entrance, a sign said:

UNAUTHORIZED PERSONNEL KEEP OUT.

A line of fresh black paint had been brushed across the words, and above them other words had been hastily printed:

**WEARING OF MECHANICAL FIG LEAVES
PROHIBITED.**

The guard on her left glowered behind his windshield.
"Some more of their smart-aleck tricks!" he grumbled.

Howard met her just inside the gate. When she saw his eyes she knew that it was all right, and in a moment she was in his arms, her nakedness forgotten, crying against his lapel. He held her tightly, his hands pressing hard against the fabric of her coat. She heard his voice over the bleak years: "I knew they were watching us, and I let them catch us together in hopes that they'd send you here. Then, when they didn't, I hoped—I prayed—that you'd come voluntarily. Darling, I'm so glad you did! You'll love it here. I have a cottage, with a big back yard. There's a community swimming pool, a woman's club, an amateur-players group, a—"

"Is there a minister?" she asked through her tears.

He kissed her. "A minister, too. If we hurry, we can catch him before he starts out on his morning rounds."

They walked down the lane together.

EAST WIND, WEST WIND

By Frank M. Robinson

Frank M. Robinson is best known as the co-author of a number of realistically portrayed disaster novels. Here he again writes of disaster, its logical aftermath, and of the love of a man for a machine.

It wasn't going to be just another bad day, it was going to be a terrible one. The inversion layer had slipped over the city four days before and it had been like putting a lid on a kettle; the air was building up to a real Donora, turning into a chemical soup so foul I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't been trying to breathe the stuff. Besides sticking in my throat, it made my eyes feel like they were being bathed in acid. You could hardly see the sun—it was a pale, sickly disc floating in a mustard-colored sky—but even so, the streets were an oven and the humidity was so high you could have wrung the water out of the air with your bare hands . . . dirty water, naturally.

On the bus a red-faced salesman with denture breath recognized my Air Central badge and got pushy. I growled that we didn't *make* the air—not yet, at any rate—and finally I took off the badge and put it in my pocket and tried to shut out the coughing and the complaints around me by concentrating on the faint, cheery sound of the "corn poppers" laundering the bus's exhaust. Five would have gotten you ten, of course, that their effect was strictly psychological, that they had seen more than twenty thousand miles of service and were now absolutely worthless. . . .

At work I hung up my plastic sportscoat, slipped off the white surgeon's mask (black where my nose and mouth had been) and filled my lungs with good machine-pure air that smelled only faintly of oil and electric motors; one of the

advantages of working for Air Central was that our office air was the best in the city. I dropped a quarter in the coffee vendor, dialed it black, and inhaled the fumes for a second while I shook the sleep from my eyes and speculated about what Wanda would have for me at the Investigators' Desk. There were thirty-nine other Investigators besides myself, but I was junior and my daily assignment card was usually just a listing of minor complaints and violations that had to be checked out.

Wanda was young and pretty and redhaired and easy to spot even in a secretarial pool full of pretty girls. I offered her some of my coffee and looked over her shoulder while she flipped through the assignment cards. "That stuff out there is easier to swim through than to breathe," I said. "What's the index?"

"Eighty-four point five," she said quietly. "And rising."

I just stared at her. I had thought it was bad, but hardly that bad, and for the first time that day I felt a sudden flash of panic. "And no alert? When it hits seventy-five this city's supposed to close up like a clam!"

She nodded down the hall to the Director's office. "Lawyers from Sanitary Pick-Up, Oberhausen Steel, and City Light and Power got an injunction—they were here to break the news to Monte at eight sharp. Impractical, unnecessary, money-wasting, and fifteen thousand employees would be thrown out of work if they had to shut down the furnaces and incinerators. They got an okay right from the top of Air Shed Number Three."

My jaw dropped. "How could they? Monte's supposed to have the last word!"

"So go argue with the politicians—if you can stand the hot air." She suddenly looked very fragile and I wanted to run out and slay a dragon or two for her. "The chicken-hearts took the easy way out, Jim. Independent Weather's predicting a cold front for early this evening and rising winds and rain for tomorrow."

The rain would clean up the air, I thought. But Independent Weather could be bought and as a result it had a habit of turning in cheery predictions that frequently didn't come true. Air Central had tried for years to get IW outlawed, but money talks and their lobbyist in the capital was quite a talker. Unfortunately, if they were wrong this

time, it would be as if they had pulled a plastic bag over the city's head.

I started to say something, then shut up. If you let it get to you, you wouldn't last long on the job. "Where's my list of small-fry?"

She gave me an assignment card. It was blank except for *See Me* written across its face. "Humor him, Jim, he's not feeling well."

This worried me a little because Monte was the father of us all—a really sweet old guy, which hardly covers it all because he could be hard as nails when he had to. There wasn't anyone who knew more about air control than he.

I took the card and started up the hall and then Wanda called after me. She had stretched out her long legs and hiked up her skirt. I looked startled and she grinned. "Something new—sulfur-proof nylons." Which meant they wouldn't dissolve on a day like today when a measurable fraction of the air we were trying to breathe was actually dilute sulfuric acid . . .

When I walked into his office, old Monte was leaning out the window, the fly ash clinging to his bushy gray eyebrows like cinnamon to toast, trying to taste the air and predict how it would go today. We had eighty Sniffers scattered throughout the city, all computerized and delivering their data in neat, graphlike form, but Monte still insisted on breaking internal air security and seeing for himself how his city was doing.

I closed the door. Monte pulled back inside, then suddenly broke into one of his coughing fits.

"Sit down, Jim," he wheezed, his voice sounding as if it were being wrung out of him, "be with you in a minute." I pretended not to notice while his coughing shuddered to a halt and he rummaged through the desk for his little bottle of pills. It was a plain office, as executive offices went, except for Monte's own paintings on the wall—the type I liked to call Twentieth Century Romantic. A mountain scene with a crystal clear lake in the foreground and anglers battling huge trout, a city scene with palm trees lining the boulevards, and finally, one of a man standing by an old automobile on a winding mountain road while he looked off at a valley in the distance.

Occasionally Monte would talk to me about his boyhood

around the Great Lakes and how he actually used to go swimming in them. Once he tried to tell me that orange trees used to grow within the city limits of Santalosdiego and that the oranges were as big as tennis balls. It irritated me and I think he knew it; I was the youngest Investigator for Air Central but that didn't necessarily make me naïve.

When Monte stopped coughing I said hopefully, "IW claims a cold front is coming in."

He huddled in his chair and dabbed at his mouth with a handkerchief, his thin chest working desperately trying to pump his lungs full of air. "IW's a liar," he finally rasped. "There's no cold front coming in, it's going to be a scorcher for three more days."

I felt uneasy again. "Wanda told me what happened," I said.

He fought a moment longer for his breath, caught it, then gave a resigned shrug. "The bastards are right, to an extent. Stop garbage pick-ups in a city this size and within hours the rats will be fighting us in the streets. Shut down the power plants and you knock out all the air conditioners and purifiers—right during the hottest spell of the year. Then try telling the yokels that the air on the outside will be a whole lot cleaner if only they let the air on the inside get a whole lot dirtier."

He hunched behind his desk and drummed his fingers on the top while his face slowly turned to concrete. "But if they don't let me announce an alert by tomorrow morning," he said quietly, "I'll call in the newspapers and . . ." The coughing started again and he stood up, a gnomelike little man slightly less alive with every passing day. He leaned against the windowsill while he fought the spasm. "And we think this is bad," he choked, half to himself. "What happens when the air coming in is as dirty as the air already here? When the Chinese and the Indonesians and the Hottentots get toasters and ice-boxes and all the other goodies?"

"Asia's not that industrialized yet," I said uncomfortably.

"Isn't it?" He turned and sagged back into his chair, hardly making a dent in the cushion. I was bleeding for the old man but I couldn't let him know it. I said in a low voice, "You wanted to see me," and handed him the assignment card.

He stared at it for a moment, his mind still on the Chinese, then came out of it and croaked, "That's right, give you something to chew on." He pressed a button on his desk and the wall opposite faded into a map of the city and the surrounding area, from the ocean on the west to the low-lying mountains on the east. He waved at the section of the city that straggled off into the canyons of the foothills. "Internal-combustion engine—someplace back there." His voice was stronger now, his eyes more alert. "It isn't a donkey engine for a still or for electricity, it's a private automobile."

I could feel the hairs stiffen on the back of my neck. Usually I drew minor offenses, like trash burning or secret cigarette smoking, but owning or operating a gasoline-powered automobile was a felony, one that was sometimes worth your life.

"The Sniffer in the area confirms it," Monte continued in a tired voice, "but can't pinpoint it."

"Any other leads?"

"No, just this one report. But—we haven't had an internal-combustion engine in more than three years." He paused. "Have fun with it, you'll probably have a new boss in the morning." *That* was something I didn't even want to think about. I had my hand on the doorknob when he said quietly, "The trouble with being boss is that you have to play Caesar and his Legions all the time."

It was as close as he came to saying good-bye and good luck. I didn't know what to say in return, or how to say it, and found myself staring at one of his canvases and babbling, "You sure used a helluva lot of blue."

"It was a fairly common color back then," he growled. "The sky was full of it."

And then he started coughing again and I closed the door in a hurry; in five minutes I had gotten so I couldn't stand the sound.

I had to stop in at the lab to pick up some gear from my locker and ran into Dave Ice, the researcher in charge of the Sniffers. He was a chubby, middle-aged little man with small, almost feminine hands; it was a pleasure to watch him work around delicate machinery. He was our top-rated man, after Monte, and I think if there was anybody whose shoes I wanted to step into someday, it would have been

Dave Ice's. He knew it, liked me for it, and usually went out of his way to help.

When I walked in he was changing a sheet of paper in one of the smoke shade detectors that hung just outside the lab windows. The sheet he was taking out looked as if it had been coated with lampblack.

"How long an exposure?"

He looked up, squinting over his bifocals. "Hi, Jim—a little more than four hours. It looks like it's getting pretty fierce out there."

"You haven't been out?"

"No, Monte and I stayed here all night. We were going to call an alert at nine this morning but I guess you know what happened."

I opened my locker and took out half a dozen new masks and a small canister of oxygen; if you were going to be out in traffic for any great length of time, you had to go prepared. Allowable vehicles were buses, trucks, delivery vans, police electrics and the like. Not all exhaust-control devices worked very well and even the electrics gave off a few acid fumes. And if you were stalled in a tunnel, the carbon-monoxide ratings really zoomed. I hesitated at the bottom of the locker and then took out my small Mark II gyrojet and shoulder holster. It was pretty deadly stuff: no recoil and the tiny rocket pellet had twice the punch of a .45.

Dave heard the clink of metal and without looking up asked quietly, "Trouble?"

"Maybe," I said. "Somebody's got a private automobile—gasoline—and I don't suppose they'll want to turn it in."

"You're right," he said, sounding concerned, "they won't." And then: "I heard something about it; if it's the same report, it's three days old."

"Monte's got his mind on other things," I said. I slipped the masks into my pocket and belted on the holster. "Did you know he's still on his marching-Chinese kick?"

Dave was concentrating on one of the Sniffer drums slowly rolling beneath its scribing pens, logging a minute-by-minute record of the hydrocarbons and the oxides of nitrogen and sulfur that were sickening the atmosphere. "I don't blame him," he said, absently running a hand over his glistening scalp. "They've started tagging chimney exhausts in Shanghai, Djakarta, and Mukden with radioac-

tives—we should get the first results in another day or so."

The dragon's breath, I thought. When it finally circled the globe it would mean earth's air sink had lost the ability to cleanse itself and all of us would start strangling a little faster.

I got the rest of my gear and just before I hit the door, Dave said: "Jim?" I turned. He was wiping his hands on a paper towel and frowning at me over his glasses. "Look, take care of yourself, huh, kid?"

"Sure thing," I said. If Monte was my professional father, then Dave was my uncle. Sometimes it was embarrassing but right then it felt good. I nodded good-bye, adjusted my mask, and left.

Outside it seemed like dusk; trucks and buses had turned on their lights and almost all pedestrians were wearing masks. In a lot across the street some kids were playing tag and the thought suddenly struck me that nowadays most kids seemed small for their age; but I envied them . . . the air never seemed to bother kids. I watched for a moment, then started up the walk. A few doors down I passed an apartment building, half hidden in the growing darkness, that had received a "political influence" exemption a month before. Its incinerator was going full blast now, only instead of floating upward over the city the small charred bits of paper and garbage were falling straight down the front of the building like a kind of oily black snow.

I suddenly felt I was suffocating and stepped out into the street and hailed a passing electricab. Forest Hills, the part of the city that Monte had pointed out, was wealthy and the homes were large, though not so large that some of them couldn't be hidden away in the canyons and gullies of the foothills. If you lived on a side road or at the end of one of the canyons it might even be possible to hide a car out there and drive it only at night. And if any of your neighbors found out . . . well, the people who lived up in the relatively pure air of the highlands had a different view of things than those who lived down in the atmospheric sewage of the flats. *But where would a man get a gasoline automobile in the first place?*

And did it all really matter? I thought, looking out the window of the cab at the deepening dusk and feeling depressed. Then I shook my head and leaned forward to give

the driver instructions. Some places could be checked out relatively easily.

The Carriage Museum was elegant—and crowded, considering that it was a weekday. The main hall was a vast cave of black marble housing a parade of ancient internal-combustion vehicles shining under the subdued lights; most of them were painted a lustrous black, though there was an occasional gray and burst of red and a few sparkles of old gold from polished brass headlamps and fittings.

I felt like I was in St. Peter's, walking on a vast sea of marble while all about me the crowds shuffled along in respectful silence. I kept my eyes to the floor, reading off the names on the small bronze plaques: *Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, Mercer Raceabout, Isotta-Fraschini, Packard Run-about, Hispano-Suiza, Model J Duesenberg, Flying Cloud Reo, Cadillac Imperial V16, Pierce Arrow, the first of the Ford V8s, Lincoln Zephyr, Chrysler Windsor Club Coupe . . .* And in small halls off to the side, the lesser breeds: *Hudson Terraplane, Henry J., Willys Knight, something called a Jeepster, the Mustang, Knudsen, the 1986 Volkswagen, the last Chevrolet . . .*

The other visitors to the museum were all middle-aged or older; the look on their faces was something I had never seen before—something that was not quite love and not quite lust. It flowed across their features like ripples of water whenever they brushed a fender or stopped at a hood that had been opened so they could stare at the engine, all neatly chromed or painted. They were like my father, I thought. They had owned cars when they were young, before Turn-In Day and the same date a year later when even most private steam and electrics were banned because of congestion. For a moment I wondered what it had been like to own one, then canceled the thought. The old man had tried to tell me often enough, before I had stormed out of the house for good, shouting how could he love the damned things so much when he was coughing his lungs out . . .

The main hall was nothing but bad memories. I left it and looked up the office of the curator. His secretary was on a coffee break, so I rapped sharply and entered without waiting for an answer. On the door it had said "C. Pearson," who turned out to be a thin, overdressed type, all

regal nose and pencil moustache, in his mid-forties. "Air Central," I said politely, flashing my wallet ID at him.

He wasn't impressed. "May I?" I gave it to him and he reached for the phone. When he hung up he didn't bother apologizing for the double check, which I figured made us even. "I have nothing to do with the heating system or the air-conditioning," he said easily, "but if you'll wait a minute I'll—"

"I only want information," I said.

He made a small tent of his hands and stared at me over his fingertips. He looked bored. "Oh?"

I sat down and he leaned toward me briefly, then thought better of it and settled back in his chair. "How easy would it be," I asked casually, "to steal one of your displays?"

His moustache quivered slightly. "It wouldn't be easy at all—they're bolted down, there's no gasoline in their tanks, and the batteries are dummies."

"Then none ever have been?"

A flicker of annoyance. "No, of course not."

I flashed my best hat-in-hand smile and stood up. "Well, I guess that's it, then, I won't trouble you any further." But before I turned away I said, "I'm really not much on automobiles but I'm curious. How did the museum get started?"

He warmed up a little. "On Turn-In Day a number of museums like this one were started up all over the country. Some by former dealers, some just by automobile lovers. A number of models were donated for public display and . . ."

When he had finished I said casually, "Donating a vehicle to a museum must have been a great ploy for hiding private ownership."

"Certainly the people in your bureau would be aware of how strict the government was," he said sharply.

"A lot of people must have tried to hide their vehicles," I persisted.

Dryly. "It would have been difficult . . . like trying to hide an elephant in a playpen."

But still, a number would have tried, I thought. They might even have stockpiled drums of fuel and some spare parts. In the city, of course, it would have been next to impossible. But in remote sections of the country, in the moun-

tain regions out west or in the hills of the Ozarks or in the forests of northern Michigan or Minnesota or in the bad-lands of the Dakotas . . . A few would have succeeded, certainly, and perhaps late at night a few weed-grown stretches of highway would have been briefly lit by the headlights of automobiles flashing past with muffled exhausts, tires singing against the pavement . . .

I sat back down. "Are there many automobile fans around?"

"I suppose so, if attendance records here are any indication."

"Then a smart man with a place in the country and a few automobiles could make quite a bit of money renting them out, couldn't he?"

He permitted himself a slight smile. "It would be risky. I really don't think anybody would try it. And from everything I've read, I rather think the passion was for actual ownership—I doubt that rental would satisfy that."

I thought about it for a moment while Pearson fidgeted with a letter opener and then, of course, I had it. "All those people who were fond of automobiles, there used to be clubs of them, right?"

His eyes lidded over and it grew very quiet in his office. But it was too late and he knew it. "I believe so," he said after a long pause, his voice tight, "but . . ."

"But the government ordered them disbanded," I said coldly. "Air Control regulations thirty-nine and forty, sections three through seven, 'concerning the dissolution of all organizations which in whole or in part, intentionally or unintentionally, oppose clean air.'" I knew the regulations by heart. "But there still are clubs, aren't there? Unregistered clubs? Clubs with secret membership files?" A light sheen of perspiration had started to gather on his forehead. "You would probably make a very good membership secretary, Pearson. You're in the perfect spot for recruiting new members—"

He made a motion behind his desk and I dove over it and pinned his arms behind his back. A small address book had fallen to the floor and I scooped it up. Pearson looked as if he might faint. I ran my hands over his chest and under his arms and then let him go. He leaned against the desk, gasping for air.

"I'll have to take you in," I said.

A little color was returning to his cheeks and he nervously smoothed down his damp black hair. His voice was on the squeaky side. "What for? You have some interesting theories, but . . ."

"My theories will keep for court," I said shortly. "You're under arrest for smoking—section eleven thirty point five of the health and safety code." I grabbed his right hand and spread the fingers so the tell-tale stains showed. "You almost offered me a cigarette when I came in, then caught yourself. I would guess that ordinarily you're pretty relaxed and sociable, you probably smoke a lot—and you're generous with your tobacco. Bottom right hand drawer for the stash, right?" I jerked it open and they were there, all right. "One cigarette's a misdemeanor, a carton's a felony, Pearson. We can accuse you of dealing and make it stick." I smiled grimly. "But we're perfectly willing to trade, of course."

I put in calls to the police and Air Central and sat down to wait for the cops to show. They'd sweat Pearson for all the information he had but I couldn't wait around a couple of hours. The word would spread that Pearson was being held, and Pearson himself would probably start remembering various lawyers and civil rights that he had momentarily forgotten. My only real windfall had been the address book . . .

I thumbed through it curiously, wondering exactly how I could use it. The names were scattered all over the city, and there were a lot of them. I could weed it down to those in the area where the Sniffer had picked up the automobile, but that would take time and nobody was going to admit that he had a contraband vehicle hidden away anyway. The idea of paying a visit to the club I was certain must exist kept recurring to me and finally I decided to pick a name, twist Pearson's arm for anything he might know about him, then arrange to meet at the club and work out from there.

Later, when I was leaving the museum, I stopped for a moment just inside the door to readjust my mask. While I was doing it the janitor showed up with a roll of weather-stripping and started attaching it to the edge of the doorway where what looked like thin black smoke was seeping

in from the outside. I was suddenly afraid to go back out there . . .

The wind was whistling past my ears and a curve was coming up. I feathered the throttle, downshifted, and the needle on the tach started to drop. The wheel seemed to have a life of its own and twitched slightly to the right. I rode high on the outside of the track, the leafy limbs of trees that lined the asphalt dancing just outside my field of vision. The rear started to come around in a skid and I touched the throttle again and then the wheel twitched back to center and I was away. My eyes were riveted on Number Nine, just in front of me. It was the last lap and if I could catch him there would be nothing between me and the checkered flag . . .

I felt relaxed and supremely confident, one with the throbbing power of the car. I red-lined it and through my dirt-streaked goggles I could see I was crawling up on the red splash that was Number Nine and next I was breathing the fumes from his twin exhausts. I took him on the final curve and suddenly I was alone in the world of the straight-away with the countryside peeling away on both sides of me, placid cows and ancient barns flowing past and then the rails lined with people. I couldn't hear their shouting above the scream of my car. Then I was flashing under banners stretched across the track and thundering toward the finish. There was the smell of burning rubber and spent oil and my own perspiration, the heat from the sun, the shimmering asphalt, and out of the corner of my eye a blur of grandstands and cars and a flag swooping down . . .

And then it was over and the house lights had come up and I was hunched over a toy wheel in front of me, gripping it with both hands, the sweat pouring down my face and my stomach burning because I could still smell exhaust fumes and I wanted desperately to put on my face mask. It had been far more real than I had thought it would be—the curved screen gave the illusion of depth and each chair had been set up like a driver's seat. They had even pumped in odors . . .

The others in the small theatre were stretching and getting ready to leave and I gradually unwound and got to my feet, still feeling shaky. "Lucky you could make it, Jim," a voice gravedled in my ear. "You missed Joe Moore and the

lecture but the documentary was just great, really great. Next week we've got *Meadowdale '73*, which has its moments but you don't feel like you're really there and getting an eyeful of cinders, if you know what I mean."

"Who's Joe Moore?" I mumbled.

"Old time race track manager—full of anecdotes, knew all the great drivers. Hey! You okay?"

I was finding it difficult to come out of it. The noise and the action and the smell, but especially the feeling of actually driving . . . It was more than just a visceral response. You had to be raised down in the flats where you struggled for your breath every day to get the same feeling of revulsion, the same feeling of having done something dirty . . .

"Yeah, I'm okay," I said. "I'm feeling fine."

"Where'd you say you were from, anyway?"

"Bosnywash," I lied. He nodded and I took a breath and time out to size him up. Jack Ellis was bigger and heavier than Pearson and not nearly as smooth or as polished—Pearson perspired, my bulky friend sweated. He was in his early fifties, thinning brown hair carefully waved, the beginning of a small paunch well hidden by a lot of expensive tailoring, and a hulking set of shoulders that were much more than just padding. A business bird, I thought. The hairy-chested genial backslapper . . .

"You seen the clubrooms yet?"

"I just got in," I said. "First time here."

"Hey, great! I'll show you around!" He talked like he was programmed. "A little fuel and a couple of stiff belts first, though—dining room's out of this world . . ."

And it almost was. We were on the eighty-seventh floor of the new Trans-America building and Ellis had secured a window seat. Above, the sky was almost as bright a blue as Monte had used in his paintings. I couldn't see the street below.

"Have a card," Ellis said, shoving the pasteboard at me. It read *Warshawsky & Warshawsky, Automotive Antiques*, with an address in the Avenues. He waved a hand at the room. "We decorated all of this—pretty classy, huh?"

I had to give him that. The walls were covered with murals of old road races, while from some hidden sound system came a faint, subdued purring—the roaring of cars drifting through the esses of some long-ago race. In the center of the room was a pedestal holding a highly-chromed

engine block that slowly revolved under a baby spot. While I was admiring the setting a waitress came up and set down a lazy Susan; it took a minute to recognize it as an old-fashioned wooden steering wheel, fitted with sterling silver hors d'oeuvre dishes between the spokes.

Ellis ran a thick thumb down the menu. "Try a Barney Oldfield," he suggested. "Roast beef and American cheese on pumpernickel."

While I was eating I got the uncomfortable feeling that he was looking me over and that somehow I didn't measure up. "You're pretty young," he said at last. "We don't get many young members—or visitors, for that matter."

"Grandfather was a dealer," I said easily. "Had a Ford agency in Milwaukee—I guess it rubbed off."

He nodded around a mouthful of sandwich and looked mournful for a moment. "It used to be a young man's game, kids worked on engines in their backyards all the time. Just about everybody owned a car . . ."

"You, too?"

"Oh sure—hell, the old man ran a gas station until Turn-In Day." He was lost in his memories for a moment, then said, "You got a club in Bosnywash?"

"A few, nothing like this," I said cautiously. "And the law's pretty stiff." I nodded at the window. "They get pretty uptight about the air back east . . ." I let my voice trail off.

He frowned. "You don't *believe* all that guff, do you? Biggest goddamn pack of lies there ever was, but I guess you got to be older to know it. Power plants and incinerators, they're the ones to blame, always have been. Hell, people, too—every time you exhale you're polluting the atmosphere, ever think of that? And Christ, man, think of every time you work up a sweat. . . ."

"Sure," I nodded, "sure, it's always been blown up." I made a mental note that someday I'd throw the book at Ellis.

He finished his sandwich and started wiping his fat face like he was erasing a blackboard. "What's your interest? Mine's family sedans, the old family workhorse. Fords, Chevys, Plymouths—got a case of all the models from '50 on up, one eighteenth scale. How about you?"

I didn't answer him, just stared out the window and worked with a toothpick for a long time until he began to

get a little nervous. Then I let it drop. "I'm out here to buy a car," I said.

His face went blank, as if somebody had just pulled down a shade. "Damned expensive hobby," he said, ignoring it. "Should've taken up photography instead."

"It's for a friend of mine," I said. "Money's no object."

The waitress came around with the check and Ellis initialed it. "Damned expensive," he repeated vaguely.

"I couldn't make a connection back home," I said. "Friends suggested I try out here."

He was watching me now. "How would you get it back east?"

"Break it down," I said. "Ship it east as crates of machine parts."

"What makes you think there's anything for sale out here?"

I shrugged. "Lots of mountains, lots of forests, lots of empty space, lots of hiding places. Cars were big out here, there must have been a number that were never turned in."

"You're a stalking horse for somebody big, aren't you!"

"What do you think?" I said. "And what difference does it make anyway? Money's money."

If it's true that the pupil of the eye expands when it sees something that it likes, it's also true that it contracts when it doesn't—and right then his were in the cold buckshot stage.

"All right," he finally said. "Cash on the barrelhead and remember, when you have that much money changing hands, it can get dangerous." He deliberately leaned across the table so that his coat flapped open slightly. The small gun and holster were almost lost against the big man's girth. He sat back and spun the lazy Susan with a fat forefinger, spearing an olive as it slid past. "You guys run true to form," he continued quietly. "Most guys from back east come out to buy—I guess we've got a reputation." He hesitated. "We also try and take all the danger out of it."

He stood up and slapped me on the back as I pushed to my feet. It was the old Jack Ellis again, he of the instant smile and the sparkling teeth.

"That is, we try and take the danger out of it for *us*," he added pleasantly.



It was late afternoon and the rush hour had started. It wasn't as heavy as usual—businesses had been letting out all day—but it was bad enough. I slipped on a mask and started walking toward the warehouse section of town, just outside the business district. The buses were too crowded and it would be impossible to get an electricab that time of day. Besides, traffic was practically standing still in the steamy murk. Headlights were vague yellow dots in the gathering darkness and occasionally I had to shine my pocket flash on a street sign to determine my location.

I had checked in with Monte, who said the hospitals were filling up fast with bronchitis victims; I didn't ask about the city morgue. The venal bastards at Air Shed Number Three were even getting worried; they had promised Monte that if it didn't clear by morning, he could issue his alert and close down the city. I told him I had uncovered what looked like a car ring but he sounded only faintly interested. He had bigger things on his mind; the ball was in my court and what I was going to do with it was strictly up to me.

A few more blocks and the crowds thinned. Then I was alone on the street with the warehouses hulking up in the gloom around me, ancient monsters of discolored brick and concrete layered with years of soot and grime. I found the address I wanted, leaned against the buzzer by the loading dock door, and waited. There was a long pause, then faint steps echoed inside and the door slid open. Ellis stood in the yellow dock light, the smile stretching across his thick face like a rubber band. "Right on time," he whispered. "Come on in, Jim, meet the boys."

I followed him down a short passageway, trying not to brush up against the filthy whitewashed walls. Then we were up against a steel door with a peephole. Ellis knocked three times, the peephole opened, and he said, "Joe sent me." I started to panic. *For God's sake, why the act?* Then the door opened and it was as if somebody had kicked me in the stomach. What lay beyond was a huge garage with at least half a dozen ancient cars on the tool-strewn floor. Three mechanics in coveralls were working under the overhead lights; two more were waiting inside the door. They were bigger than Ellis and I was suddenly very glad I had brought along the Mark II.

"Jeff. Ray, meet Mr. Morrison." I held out my hand. They nodded at me, no smiles. "C'mon," Ellis said, "I'll show you the set-up." I tagged after him and he started pointing out the wonders of his domain. "Completely equipped garage—my old man would've been proud of me. Overhead hoist for pulling motors, complete lathe set-up . . . a lot of parts we have to machine ourselves, can't get the originals anymore and of course the last of the junkers was melted down a long time ago." He stopped by a work-bench with a large rack full of tools gleaming behind it. "One of the great things about being in the antique business—you hit all the country auctions and you'd be surprised at what you can pick up. Complete sets of torque wrenches, metric socket sets, spanner wrenches, feeler gauges, you name it."

I looked over the bench—he was obviously proud of the assortment of tools—then suddenly felt the small of my back grow cold. It was phony, I thought, the whole thing was phony. But I couldn't put my finger on just why.

Ellis walked over to one of the automobiles on the floor and patted a fender affectionately. Then he unbuttoned his coat so that the pistol showed, hooked his thumbs in his vest, leaned against the car behind him and smiled. Someplace he had even found a broomstraw to chew on.

"So what can we do for you, Jim? Limited stock, sky-high prices, but never a dissatisfied customer!" He poked an elbow against the car behind him. "Take a look at this '73 Chevy Biscayne, probably the only one of its kind in this condition in the whole damned country. Ten thou and you can have it—and that's only because I like you." He sauntered over to a monster in blue and silver with grill-work that looked like a set of kitchen knives. "Or maybe you'd like a '76 Caddy convertible, all genuine simulated-leather upholstery, one of the last of the breed." He didn't add why but I already knew—in heavy traffic the high levels of monoxide could be fatal to a driver in an open car.

"Yours," Ellis was saying about another model, "for a flat fifteen"—he paused and shot me a friendly glance—"oh hell, for you, Jim, make it twelve and a half and take it from me, it's a bargain. Comes with the original upholstery and tires and there's less than ten thousand miles on

it—the former owner was a little old lady in Pasadena who only drove it to weddings."

He chuckled at that, looking at me expectantly. I didn't get it. "Maybe you'd just like to look around. Be my guest, go right ahead." His eyes were bright and he looked very pleased with himself; it bothered me.

"Yeah," I said absently, "I think that's what I'd like to do." There was a wall phone by an older model and I drifted over to it.

"That's an early Knudsen two-seater," Ellis said. "Popular make for the psychedelic set, that paint job is the way they really came . . ."

I ran my hand lightly down the windshield, then turned to face the cheerful Ellis. "You're under arrest," I said. "You and everybody else here."

His face suddenly looked like shrimp in molded gelatin. One of the mechanics behind him moved and I had the Mark II out winging a rocket past his shoulder. No noise, no recoil, just a sudden shower of sparks by the barrel and in the far end of the garage a fifty-gallon oil drum went *karrump* and there was a hole in it you could have stuck your head through.

The mechanic went white. "*Jesus Christ, Jack, you brought in some kind of nut!*" Ellis himself was pale and shaking, which surprised me; I thought he'd be tougher than that.

"Against the bench," I said coldly, waving the pistol. "Hands in front of your crotch and don't move them." The mechanics were obviously scared stiff and Ellis was having difficulty keeping control. I took down the phone and called in.

After I hung up, Ellis mumbled, "What's the charge?"

"Charges," I corrected. "Sections three, four, and five of the Air Control laws. Maintenance, sale, and use of internal-combustion engines."

Ellis stared at me blankly. "You don't know?" he asked faintly.

"Know what?"

"I don't handle internal-combustion engines." He licked his lips. "I really don't, it's too risky, it's—it's against the law."

The workbench, I suddenly thought. The goddamned

workbench. I knew something was wrong then, I should have cooled it.

"You can check me," Ellis offered weakly. "Lift a hood, look for yourself."

He talked like his face was made of panes of glass sliding against one another. I waved him forward. "You check it, Ellis, you open one up." Ellis nodded like a dipping duck, waddled over to one of the cars, jiggled something inside, then raised the hood and stepped back.

I took one glance and my stomach slowly started to knot up. I was no motor buff but I damned well knew the difference between a gasoline engine and water boiler. Which explained the workbench—the tools had been window dressing. Most of them were brand new because most of them had obviously never been used. There had been nothing to use them on.

"The engines are steam," Ellis said, almost apologetically. "I've got a license to do restoration work and drop in steam engines. They don't allow them in cities but it's different on farms and country estates and in some small towns." He looked at me. "The license cost me a god-damned fortune."

It was a real handicap being a city boy, I thought. "Then why the act? Why the gun?"

"This?" he asked stupidly. He reached inside his coat and dropped the pistol on the floor; it made a light thudding sound and bounced, a pot-metal toy. "The danger, it's the sense of danger, it's part of the sales pitch." He wanted to be angry now but he had been frightened too badly and couldn't quite make it. "The customers pay a lot of dough, they want a little drama. That's why—you know—the peephole and everything." He took a deep breath and when he exhaled it came out as a giggle, an incongruous sound from the big man. I found myself hoping he didn't have a heart condition. "I'm well known," he said defensively. "I take ads . . ."

"The club," I said. "It's illegal."

Even if it was weak, his smile was genuine and then the score became crystal clear. The club was like a speakeasy during the Depression, with half the judges and politicians in town belonging to it. Why not? Somebody older wouldn't have my bias . . . Pearson's address book had been all last names and initials but I had never connected

any of them to anybody prominent; I hadn't been around enough to know what connection to make.

I waved Ellis back to the workbench and stared glumly at the group. The mechanic I had frightened with the Mark II had a spreading stain across the front of his pants and I felt sorry for him momentarily.

Then I started to feel sorry for myself. Monte should have given me a longer briefing, or maybe assigned another Investigator to go with me, but he had been too sick and too wrapped up with the politics of it all. So I had gone off half-cocked and come up with nothing but a potential lawsuit for Air Central that would probably amount to a million dollars by the time Ellis got through with me.

It was a black day inside as well as out.

I holed up in a bar during the middle part of the evening, which was probably the smartest thing I could have done. Despite their masks, people on the street had started to retch and vomit and I could feel my own nausea grow with every step. I saw one man try and strike a match to read a street sign; it wouldn't stay lit, there simply wasn't enough oxygen in the air. The ambulance sirens were a steady wail now and I knew it was going to be a tough night for heart cases. They'd be going like flies before morning, I thought . . .

Another customer slammed through the door, wheezing and coughing and taking huge gulps of the machine-pure air of the bar. I ordered another drink and tried to shut out the sound; it was too reminiscent of Monte hacking and coughing behind his desk at work.

And come morning, Monte might be out of a job, I thought. I for certain would be; I had loused up in a way that would cost the department money—the unforgivable sin in the eyes of the politicians.

I downed half my drink and started mentally reviewing the events of the day, giving myself a passing score only on figuring out that Pearson had had a stash. I hadn't known about Ellis's operation, which in one sense wasn't surprising. Nobody was going to drive something that looked like an old gasoline-burner around a city—the flatlanders would stone him to death.

But somebody still had a car, I thought. Somebody who was rich and immune from prosecution and a real nut

about cars in the first place . . . But it kept sliding away from me. Really rich men were too much in the public eye, ditto politicians. They'd be washed up politically if anybody ever found out. If nothing else, some poor bastard like the one at the end of the bar trying to flush out his lungs would assassinate him.

Somebody with money, but not too much. Somebody who was a car nut—they'd have to be to take the risks. And somebody for whom those risks were absolutely minimal. . . .

And then the lightbulb flashed on above my head, just like in the old cartoons. I wasn't dead certain I was right but I was willing to stake my life on it—and it was possible I might end up doing just that.

I slipped on a mask and almost ran out of the bar. Once outside, I sympathized with the guy who had just come in and who had given me a horrified look as I plunged out into the darkness.

It was smothering now, though the temperature had dropped a little so my shirt didn't cling to me in dirty, damp folds. Buses were being led through the streets; headlights died out completely within a few feet. The worst thing was that they left tracks in what looked like a damp, grayish ash that covered the street. Most of the people I bumped into—mere shadows in the night—had soaked their masks in water, trying to make them more effective. There were lights still on in the lower floors of most of the office buildings and I figured some people hadn't tried to make it home at all; the air was probably purer among the filing cabinets than in their own apartments. Two floors up, the buildings were completely hidden in the smoky darkness.

It took a good hour of walking before the sidewalks started to slant up and I knew I was getting out toward the foothills . . . I thanked God the business district was closer to the mountains than the ocean. My legs ached and my chest hurt and I was tired and depressed but at least I wasn't coughing anymore.

The buildings started to thin out and the streets finally became completely deserted. Usually the cops would pick you up if they caught you walking on the streets of Forest Hills late at night, but that night I doubted they were even

around. They were probably too busy ferrying cases of cardiac arrest to St. Francis . . .

The Sniffer was located on the top of a small, ancient building off on a side street. When I saw it I suddenly found my breath hard to catch again—a block down, the street abruptly turned into a canyon and wound up and out of sight. I glanced back at the building, just faintly visible through the grayed-down moonlight. The windows were boarded up and there was a For Rent sign on them. I walked over and flashed my light on the sign. It was old and peeling and had obviously been there for years; apparently nobody had ever wanted to rent the first floor. Ever? Maybe somebody had, I thought, but had decided to leave it boarded up. I ran my hand down the boards and suddenly paused at a knothole; I could feel heavy plate glass through it. I knelt and flashed my light at the hole and looked at a dim reflection of myself staring back. The glass had been painted black on the inside so it acted like a black marble mirror.

I stepped back and something about the building struck me. The boarded-up windows, I thought, the huge, oversized windows . . . And the oversized, boarded-up doors. I flashed the light again at the concrete facing just above the doors. The words were there all right, blackened by time but still readable, cut into the concrete itself by order of the proud owner a handful of decades before. But you could still noodle them out: *RICHARD SIEBEN LIN-COLN-MERCURY*.

Jackson, I thought triumphantly. I glanced around—there was nobody else on the street—and listened. Not a sound, except for the faint murmur of traffic still moving in the city far away. A hot muggy night in the core city, I thought, but this night the parks and the fire escapes would be empty and five million people would be tossing and turning in their cramped little bedrooms; it'd be suicide to try and sleep outdoors.

In Forest Hills it was cooler—and quieter. I glued my ear to the boards over the window and thought I could hear the faint shuffle of somebody walking around and, once, the faint clink of metal against metal. I waited a moment, then slipped down to the side door that had "Air Central" on it in neat black lettering. All Investigators had master keys and I went inside. Nobody was upstairs; the

lights were out and the only sound was the soft swish of the Sniffer's scribing pens against the paper roll. There was a stairway in the back and I walked silently down it. The door at the bottom was open and I stepped through it into a short hallway. Something, maybe the smell of the air, told me it had been used recently. I closed the door after me and stood for a second in the darkness. There was no sound from the door beyond. I tried the knob and it moved silently in my grasp.

I cracked the door open and peered through the slit—nothing—then eased it open all the way and stepped out onto the showroom floor. There was a green-shaded light-bulb hanging from the ceiling, swaying slightly in some minor breeze so the shadows chased each other around the far corners of the room. Walled off at the end were two small offices where salesmen had probably wheeled and dealed long ago. There wasn't much else, other than a few tools scattered around the floor in the circle of light.

And directly in the center, of course, the car.

I caught my breath. There was no connection between it and Jack Ellis' renovated family sedans. It crouched there on the floor, a mechanical beast that was almost alive. Sleek curving fenders that blended into a louvered hood with a chromed steel bumper curving flat around the front to give it an oddly sharklike appearance. The head-lamps were set deep into the fenders, the lamp wells outlined with chrome. The hood flowed into a windshield and that into a top which sloped smoothly down in back and tucked in neatly just after the rear wheels. The wheels themselves had wire spokes that gleamed wickedly in the light, and through a side window I could make out a neat array of meters and rocker switches, and finally bucket seats covered with what I instinctively knew was genuine black leather.

Sleek beast, powerful beast, I thought. I was unaware of walking up to it and running my hand lightly over a fender until a voice behind me said, "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

I turned like an actor in a slow-motion film. "Yeah, Dave," I said, "it's beautiful." Dave Ice of Air Central. In charge of all the Sniffers.

He must have been standing in one of the salesman's offices; it was the only way I could have missed him. He walked up and stood on the other side of the car and ran

his left hand over the hood with the same affectionate motion a woman might use in stroking her cat. In his right hand he held a small Mark II pointed directly at my chest.

"How'd you figure it was me?" he asked casually.

"I thought at first it might be Monte," I said. "Then I figured you were the real nut about machinery."

His eyes were bright, too bright. "Tell me," he asked curiously, "would you have turned in Monte?"

"Of course," I said simply. I didn't add that it would have been damned difficult; that I hadn't even been able to think about that part of it.

"So might've I, so might've I," he murmured. "When I was your age."

"For a while the money angle threw me," I said.

He smiled faintly. "It's a family heirloom. My father bought it when he was young, he couldn't bring himself to turn it in." He cocked his head. "Could you?" I looked at him uneasily and didn't answer and he said casually, "Go ahead, Jimmy, you were telling me how you cracked the case."

I flushed. "It had to be somebody who knew—who was absolutely sure—that he wasn't going to get caught. The Sniffers are pretty efficient, it would have been impossible to prevent their detecting the car—the best thing would be to censor the data from them. And Monte and you were the only ones who could have done that."

Another faint smile. "You're right."

"You slipped up a few nights ago," I said.

He shrugged. "Anybody could've. I was sick, I didn't get to the office in time to doctor the record."

"It gave the game away," I said. "Why only once? The Sniffer should have detected it far more often than just once."

He didn't say anything and for a long moment both of us were lost in admiration of the car.

Then finally, proudly: "It's the real McCoy, Jim. Six cylinder in-line engine, 4.2 liters displacement, nine-to-one compression ratio, twin overhead cams and twin Zenith-Stromberg carbs . . ." He broke off. "You don't know what I'm talking about, do you?"

"No," I confessed, "I'm afraid not."

"Want to see the motor?"

I nodded and he stepped forward, waved me back with

the Mark II, and opened the hood. To really appreciate it, of course, you had to have a thing for machinery. It was clean and polished and squatted there under the hood like a beautiful mechanical pet—so huge I wondered how the hood could close at all.

And then I realized with a shock that I hadn't been reacting like I should have, that I hadn't reacted like I should have ever since the movie at the club . . .

"You can sit in it if you want to," Dave said softly. "Just don't touch anything." His voice was soft. "Everything works on it, Jim, everything works just dandy. It's oiled and greased and the tank is full and the battery is charged and if you wanted to, you could drive it right off the showroom floor."

I hesitated. "People in the neighborhood—"

"—mind their own business," he said. "They have a different attitude, and besides, its usually late at night and I'm out in the hills in seconds. Go ahead, get in." Then his voice hardened into command: "Get in!"

I stalled a second longer, then opened the door and slid into the seat. The movie was real now, I was holding the wheel and could sense the gearshift at my right and in my mind's eye I could feel the wind and hear the scream of the motor . . .

There was something hard pressing against the side of my head. I froze. Dave was holding the pistol just behind my ear and in the side mirror I could see his finger tense on the trigger and pull back a millimeter. *Dear God . . .*

He relaxed. "You'll have to get out," he said apologetically. "It would be appropriate, but a mess just the same."

I got out. My legs were shaking and I had to lean against the car. "It's a risky thing to own a car," I chattered. "Feeling runs pretty high against cars . . ."

He nodded. "It's too bad."

"You worked for Air Central for years," I said. "How could you do it, and own this, too?"

"You're thinking about the air," he said carefully. "But Jim"—his voice was patient—"machines don't foul the air, men do. They foul the air, the lakes, and the land itself. And there's no way to stop it." I started to protest and he held up a hand. "Oh sure, there's always a time when you care —like you do now. But time . . . you know, time wears you down, it really does, no matter how eager you are. You

devote your life to a cause and then you find yourself suddenly growing fat and bald and you discover nobody gives a damn about your cause. They're paying you your cushy salary to buy off their own consciences. So long as there's a buck to be made, things won't change much. It's enough to drive you—" He broke off. "You don't *really* think that anybody gives a damn about anybody else, do you?" He stood there looking faintly amused, a pudgy little man whom I should've been able to take with one arm tied behind my back. But he was ten times as dangerous as Ellis had ever imagined himself to be. "Only suckers care, Jim. I . . ."

I dropped to the floor then, rolling fast to hit the shadows beyond the circle of light. His Mark II sprayed sparks and something burned past my shirt collar and squealed along the concrete floor. I sprawled flat and jerked my own pistol out. The first shot went low and there was the sharp sound of scored metal and I cursed briefly to myself—I must have brushed the car. Then there was silence and I scrabbled further back into the darkness. I wanted to pot the light but the bulb was still swaying back and forth and chances were I'd miss and waste the shot. Then there was the sound of running and I jumped to my feet and saw Dave heading for the door I had come in by. He seemed oddly defenseless—he was chubby and slow and knock-kneed and ran like a woman.

"Dave!" I screamed. "Dave! STOP!"

It was an accident, there was no way to help it. I aimed low and to the side, to knock him off his feet, and at the same time he decided to do what I had done and sprawl flat in the shadows. If he had stayed on his feet, the small rocket would have brushed him at knee level. As it was, it smashed his chest.

He crumpled and I ran up and caught him before he could hit the door. He twisted slightly in my arms so he was staring at the car as he died. I broke into tears. I couldn't help that, either. I would remember the things Dave had done for me long after I had forgotten that one night he had tried to kill me. A threat to kill is unreal—actual blood and shredded flesh has its own reality.

I let him down gently and walked slowly over to the phone in the corner. Monte should still be in his office, I thought. I dialed and said, "The Director, please," and

waited for the voice-actuated relay to connect me. "Monte, Jim Morrison here. I'm over at—" I paused. "I'm sorry, I thought it was Monte—" And then I shut up and let the voice at the other end of the line tell me that Monte had died with the window open and the night air filling his lungs with urban vomit. "I'm sorry," I said faintly, "I'm sorry, I'm very sorry," but the voice went on and I suddenly realized that I was listening to a recording and that there was nobody in the office at all. Then, as the voice continued, I knew why.

I let the receiver fall to the floor and the record started in again, as if expecting condolences from the concrete.

I should call the cops, I thought. I should—

But I didn't. Instead, I called Wanda. It would take an hour or more for her to collect the foodstuffs in the apartment and to catch an electricab but we could be out of the city before morning came.

And that was pretty funny because morning was never coming. The recording had said dryly that the tagged radioactive chimney exhausts had arrived, that the dragon's breath had circled the globe and the winds blowing in were as dirty as the air already over the city. Oh, it wouldn't happy right away, but it wouldn't be very long, either. . . .

Nobody had given a damn, I thought; not here nor any other place. Dave had been right, dead right. They had finally turned it all into a sewer and the last of those who cared had coughed his lungs out trying for a breath of fresh air that had never come, too weak to close a window.

I walked back to the car sitting in the circle of light and ran a finger down the scored fender where the small rocket had scraped the paint. Dave would never have forgiven me, I thought. Then I opened the door and got in and settled slowly back into the seat. I fondled the shift and ran my eyes over the instrument panel, the speedometer and the tach and the fuel and the oil gauges and the small clock. . . . The keys dangled from the button at the end of the hand brake. It was a beautiful piece of machinery, I thought again. I had never really loved a piece of machinery . . . until now.

I ran my hands around the wheel, then located the starter switch on the steering column. I jabbed in the key and closed my eyes and listened to the scream of the motor and felt its power shake the car and wash over me and thunder

through the room. The movie at the club had been my only lesson, but in its own way it had been thorough and it would be enough. I switched off the motor and waited.

When Wanda got there we would take off for the high ground. For the mountains and the pines and that last clear lake and that final glimpse of blue sky before it all turned brown and we gave up in final surrender to this climate of which we're so obviously proud . . .

ALONG THE SCENIC ROUTE

By Harlan Ellison

Each year an unknown but apparently substantial number of human beings commit suicide on the highway by driving their cars into something. Often, they take others with them. And each year tens of thousands of men and women find an outlet for their frustrations and aggressions behind the wheel. There used to be an effective travel-safety commercial that showed a "normal" person changing into a dangerous animal in his car, and we all know people whose personalities change for the worse when they turn the key in the ignition.

Here, Harlan Ellison, in the pyrotechnic style for which he is justly famous, carries this tendency to its logical and terrifying conclusion.

The blood-red Mercury with the twin-mounted 7.6 mm Spandaus cut George off as he was shifting lanes. The Merc cut out sharply, three cars behind George, and the driver decked it. The boom of his gas-turbine engine got through George's baffling system without difficulty, like a fist in the ear. The Merc sprayed JP-4 gook and water in a wide fan from its jet nozzle and cut back in, a matter of inches in front of George's Chevy Piranha.

George slapped the selector control on the dash, lighting you STUPID BASTARD, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING and I HOPE YOU CRASH & BURN, YOU SON OF A BITCH. Jessica moaned softly with uncontrolled fear, but George could not hear her; he was screaming obscenities.

George kicked it into Overplunge and depressed the selector button extending the rotating buzzsaws. Dallas razors, they were called, in the repair shoppes. But the crimson Merc pulled away, doing an easy 115.

"I'll get you, you beaver-sucker!" he howled.

The Piranha jumped and surged forward. But the Merc was already two dozen car-lengths down the Freeway. Adrenaline pumped through George's system. Beside him, Jessica put a hand on his arm. "Oh, forget it, George; it's just some young snot," she said. Always conciliatory.

"Machismo," he murmured, and hunched over the wheel. Jessica looked toward heaven, wishing a bolt of lightning had come from that location many months past, striking Dr. Yasimir directly in his Freud, long before George could have picked up psychiatric justifications for his awful temper.

"Get me Collision Control!" George snarled at her.

Jessica shrugged, as if to say *here we go again*, and dialed CC on the peek. The smiling face of the Freeway Sector Control Operator blurred green and yellow, then came into sharp focus. "Your request, sir?"

"Clearance for duel, Highway 101, northbound."

"Your license number, sir?"

"XUPD 88321," George said. He was scanning the Freeway, keeping the blood-red Mercury in sight, obstinately refusing to stud on the tracking sights.

"Your proposed opponent, sir?"

"Red Mercury GT. '88 model."

"License, sir."

"Just a second." George pressed the stud for the instant replay and the past ten miles rolled back on the movieola. He ran it forward again till he caught the instant the Merc had passed him, stopped the film, and got the number. "MFCS 90909."

"One moment, sir."

George fretted behind the wheel. "Now what the hell's holding her up? Whenever you want service, they've got problems. But boy, when it comes tax time—"

The Operator came back and smiled. "I've checked our master Sector grid, sir, and I find authorization may be permitted, but I am required by law to inform you that your proposed opponent is more heavily armed than yourself."

George licked his lips. "What's he running?"

"Our records indicate 7.6 mm Spandau equipment, bulletproof screens and coded optionals."

George sat silently. His speed dropped. The tachometer fluttered, settled.

"Let him go, George," Jessica said. "You know he'd take you."

Two blotches of anger spread on George's cheeks. "Oh, yeah?!?" He howled at the Operator, "Get me a confirm on that Mercury, Operator!"

She blurred off, and George decked the Piranha; it leaped forward. Jessica sighed with resignation and pulled the drawer out from beneath her bucket. She unfolded the g-suit and began stretching into it. She said nothing, but continued to shake her head.

"We'll see!" George said.

"Oh, George, when will you ever grow up?"

He did not answer, but his nostrils flared with barely restrained anger.

The Operator smeared back and said, "Opponent confirms, sir. Freeway Underwriters have already cross-filed you as mutual beneficiaries. Please observe standard traffic regulations, and good luck, sir."

She vanished, and George set the Piranha on sleep-walker as he donned his own g-suit. He overrode the sleeper and was back on manual in moments.

"Now, you stuffer, now let's see!" 100, 110, 120.

He was gaining rapidly on the Merc now. As the Chevy hit 120, the mastercomp flashed red and suggested cross-over. George punched the selector and the telescoping arms of the buzzsaws retracted into the axles, even as the buzzsaws stopped whirling. In a moment they had been drawn back in, now merely fancy decorations in the hubcaps. The wheels retracted into the underbody of the Chevy and the air-cushion took over. Now the Chevy skimmed along, two inches above the roadbed of the Freeway.

Ahead, George could see the Merc also crossing over to air-cushion. 120. 135. 150.

"George, this is crazy!" Jessica said, her face in that characteristic shrike expression. "You're no hotrodder, George. You're a family man, and this is the family car!"

George chuckled nastily. "I've had it with these fuzz-faces. Last year . . . you remember last year? . . . you remember when that punk stuffer ran us into the abutment?

I swore I'd never put up with that kind of thing again. Why'd'you think I had all the optionals installed?"

Jessica opened the tambour doors of the glove compartment and slid out the service tray. She unplugged the jar of anti-flash salve and began spreading it on her face and hands. "I knew I shouldn't have let you put that laser thing in this car!" George chuckled again. Fuzzfaces, punks, rodders!

George felt the Piranha surge forward, the big reliable stirling engine reveling the hot air for more and more efficient thrust. Unlike the Merc's inefficient kerosene system, there was no exhaust emission from the nuclear power plant, the external combustion engine almost noiseless, the big radiator tailfin in the rear dissipating the tremendous heat, stabilizing the car as it swooshed along, two inches off the roadbed.

George knew he would catch the blood-red Mercury. Then one smartass punk was going to learn he couldn't flout law and order by running decent citizens off the freeways!

"Get me my gun," George said.

Jessica shook her head with exasperation, reached under George's bucket, pulled out his drawer and handed him the bulky .45 automatic in its breakaway upside-down shoulder rig. George studded in the sleeper, worked his arms into the rig, tested the oiled leather of the holster, and when he was satisfied, returned the Piranha to manual.

"Oh, God," Jessica said, "John Dillinger rides again."

"Listen!" George shouted, getting more furious with each stupidity she offered. "If you can't be of some help to me, just shut your damned mouth. I'd put you out and come back for you, but I'm in a duel . . . can you understand that? I'm in a duel!" She murmured a yes, George, and fell silent.

There was a transmission queep from the transceiver. George studded it on. No picture. Just vocal. It had to be the driver of the Mercury, up ahead of them. Beaming directly at one another's antennae, using a tight-beam directional, they could keep in touch: it was a standard trick used by rods to rattle their opponents.

"Hey, Boze, you not really gonna custer me, are you? Back'm, Boze. No bad trips, true. The kid'll drop back, hang a couple of biggies on ya, just to teach ya little lesson,

letcha swimaway." The voice of the driver was hard, mirthless, the ugly sound of a driver used to being challenged.

"Listen, you young snot," George said, grating his words, trying to sound more menacing than he felt, "I'm going to teach you the lesson!"

The Merc's driver laughed raucously.

"Boze, you *de-mote* me, true!"

"And stop calling me a bozo, you lousy little degenerate!"

"Ooooo-weeee, got me a thrasher this time out. Okay, Boze, you be custer an' I'll play arrow. Good shells, baby Boze!"

The finalizing queep sounded, and George gripped the wheel with hands that went knuckle-white. The Merc suddenly shot away from him. He had been steadily gaining, but now as though it had been spring-loaded, the Mercury burst forward, spraying gook and water on both sides of the forty-foot lanes they were using. "Cut in his afterburner," George snarled. The driver of the Mercury had injected water into the exhaust for added thrust through the jet nozzle. The boom of the Merc's big, noisy engine hit him, and George studded in the rear-mounted propellers to give him more speed. 175. 185. 195.

He was crawling up the line toward the Merc. Gaining, gaining. Jessica pulled out her drawer and unfolded her crash-suit. It went on over the g-suit, and she let George know what she thought of his turning their Sunday Drive into a kamikaze duel.

He told her to stuff, and did a sleeper, donned his own crash-suit, applied flash salve, and lowered the bangup helmet onto his head.

Back on manual he crawled, crawled, till he was only fifty yards behind the Mercury, the gas-turbine vehicle sharp in his tinted windshield. "Put on your goggles . . . I'm going to show that punk who's a bozo . . ."

He pressed the stud to open the laser louvers. The needle-nosed glass tube peered out from its bay in the Chevy's hood. George read the power drain on his dash. The MHD power generator used to drive the laser was charging. He remembered what the salesman at Chick Williams Chevrolet had told him, proudly, about the laser gun, when George had inquired about the optional.

Dynamite feature, Mr. Jackson. Absolutely sensational.

Works off a magneto hydro dynamic power generator. Latest thing in defense armament. You know, to achieve sufficient potency from a CO₂ laser, you'd need a glass tube a mile long. Well, sir, we both know that's impractical, to say the least, so the project engineers at Chevy's big Bombay plant developed the "stack" method. Glass rods baffled with mirrors—360 feet of stack, the length of a football field . . . plus end zones. Use it three ways. Punch a hole right through their tires at any speed under a hundred and twenty. If they're running a GT, you can put that hole right into the kerosene fuel tank, blow them off the road. Or, if they're running a stirling, just heat the radiator. When the radiator gets hotter than the engine, the whole works shuts down. Dynamite. Also . . . and this is with proper CC authorization, you can go straight for the old jugular. Use the beam on the driver. Make a neat hole. Dynamite!

"I'll take it," George murmured.

"What did you say?" Jessica asked.

"Nothing."

"George, you're a family man, not a rodder!"

"Stuff it!"

Then he was sorry he'd said it. She meant well. It was simply that . . . well, a man had to work hard to keep his balls. He looked sidewise at her. Wearing the Armadillo crash-suit, with its overlapping disks of ceramic material, she looked like a ferryflight pilot. The bangup hat hid her face. He wanted to apologize, but the moment had arrived. He locked the laser on the Merc, depressed the fire stud, and a beam of blinding light flashed from the bonnet of the Piranha. With the Merc on air-cushion, he had gone straight for the fuel tank.

But the Merc suddenly wasn't in front of him. Even as he had fired, the driver had sheered left into the next forty-foot-wide lane, and cut speed drastically. The Merc dropped back past them as the Piranha swooshed ahead.

"He's on my back!" George shouted.

The next moment Spandau slugs tore at the hide of the Chevy. George slapped the studs, and the bulletproof screens went up. But not before pingholes had appeared in the beryllium hide of the Chevy, exposing the boron fiber filaments that gave the car its lightweight maneuver-

ability. "Stuffer!" George breathed, terribly frightened. The driver was on his back, could ride him into the ground.

He swerved, dropping flaps and skimming the Piranha back and forth in wide arcs, across the two lanes. The Merc hung on. The Spandaus chattered heavily. The screens would hold, but what else was the driver running? What were the "coded optionals" the CC Operator had mentioned?

"Now see what you've gotten us into!"

"Jess, shut up, shut up!"

The transceiver queeped. He studded it on, still swerving. This time the driver of the Merc was sending via microwave video. The face blurred in.

He was a young boy. In his teens. Acne.

"Punk! Stinking punk!" George screamed, trying to swerve, drop back, accelerate. Nothing. The blood-red Merc hung on his tailfin, pounding at him. If one of those bullets struck the radiator tailfin, ricocheted, pierced to the engine, got through the lead shielding around the reactor . . . Jessica was crying, huddled inside her Armadillo.

He was silently glad she was in the g-suit. He would try something illegal in a moment.

"Hey, Boze. What's your slit look like? If she's creamy'n'nice I might letcha drop her at the next Getty, and come back for her later. With your insurance, baby, and my pickle, I can keep her creamy'n'nice."

"Fuzzfaced punk! I'll see you dead first!"

"You're a real thrasher, old dad. Wish you well, but it's soon over. Say bye-bye to the nice rodder. You gonna die, old dad!"

George was shrieking inarticulately.

The boy laughed wildly. He was up on something. Fer-ro-coke, perhaps. Or D4. Or merryloo. His eyes glistened blue and young and deadly as a snake.

"Just wanted you to know the name of your piledriver, old dad. You can call me Billy . . ."

And he was gone. The Merc slipped forward, closer, and George had only a moment to realize that this Billy could not possibly have the money to equip his car with a laser, and that was a godsend. But the Spandaus were hacking away at the bulletproof screens. They weren't meant for extended punishment like this. Damn that Detroit iron!

He had to make the illegal move now.

Thank God for the g-suits. A tight turn, across the lanes, in direct contravention of the authorization. And in a tight turn, without the g-suits, doing—he checked the speedometer and tach—250 mph, the blood slams up against one side of the body. The g-suits would squeeze the side of the body where the blood tried to pool up. They would live. If . . .

He spun the wheel hard, slamming down on the accelerator. The Merc slowed sidewise and caught the turn. He never had a chance. He pulled out of the illegal turn, and their positions were the same. But the Merc had dropped back several car-lengths. Then from the transceiver there was a queep and he did not even stud-in as the Police Copter overhead tightbeamed him in an authoritative voice:

"XUPD 88321. Warning! You will be in contravention of your dueling authorization if you try another maneuver of that sort! You are warned to keep to your lanes and the standard rules of road courtesy!"

Then it queeped, and George felt the universe settling like silt over him. He was being killed by the system.

He'd have to eject. The seats would save him and Jessica. He tried to tell her, but she had fainted.

How did I get into this? he pleaded with himself. Dear God, I swear if you get me out of this alive I'll never never never go mad like this again. Please God.

Then the Merc was up on him again, pulling up alongside!

The window went down on the passenger side of the Mercury, and George whipped a glance across to see Billy with his lips skinned back from his teeth under the windblast and acceleration, aiming a .45 at him. Barely thinking, George studded the bumpers.

The super-conducting magnetic bumpers took hold, sucked Billy into his magnetic field, and they collided with a crash that shook the .45 out of the rodger's hand. In the instant of collision, George realized he had made his chance, and dropped back. In a moment he was riding the Merc's tail again.

Naked barbarism took hold. He wanted to kill now. Not crash the other, not wound the other, not stop the other—*kill the other!* Messages to God were forgotten.

He locked-in the laser and aimed for the windshield

bubble. His sights caught the rear of the bubble, fastened to the outline of Billy's head, and George fired.

As the bolt of light struck the bubble, a black spot appeared, and remained for the seconds the laser touched. When the light cut off, the black spot vanished. George cursed, screamed, cried, in fear and helplessness.

The Merc was equipped with a frequency-sensitive laserproof windshield. Chemicals in the windshield would "go black," opaque at certain frequencies, momentarily, anywhere a laser light touched them. He should have known. A duelist like this Billy, trained in weaponry, equipped for whatever might chance down a Freeway. Another coded optional. George found he was crying pitifully, within the cavern of his bangup hat.

Then the Merc was swerving again, executing a roll and dip that George could not understand, could not predict. Then the Merc dropped speed suddenly, and George found himself almost running up the jet nozzle of the blood-red vehicle.

He spun out and around, and Billy was behind him once more, closing in for the kill. He sent the propellers to full spin and reached for eternity. 270. 280. 290.

Then he heard the sizzling, and jerked his head around to see the back wall of the car rippling. *Oh my God*, he thought in terror, *he can't afford a laser, but he's got an inductor beam!*

The beam was setting up strong local eddy currents in the beryllium hide of the Chevy. He'd rip a hole in the skin, the air would whip through, the car would go out of control.

George knew he was dead.

And Jessica.

And all because of this pink, this rodger fuzzface!

The Merc closed in confidently.

George thought wildly. There was no time for anything but the blind plunging panic of random thought. The speedometer and the tach agreed. They were doing 300 mph.

Riding on air-cushions.

The thought slipped through his panic.

It was the only possibility. He ripped off his bangup hat, and fumbled Jessica's loose. He hugged them in his lap with his free hand, and managed to stud down the

window on the driver's side. Instantly, a blast of wind and accelerated air skinned back his lips, plastered his cheeks hollowly, made a death's head of Jessica's features. He fought to keep the Chevy stable, gyro'd.

Then, holding the bangup hats by their straps, he forced them around the edge of the window where the force of his speed jammed them against the side of the Chevy. Then he let go. And studded up the window. And braked sharply.

The bulky bangup hats dropped away, hit the roadbed, rolled directly into the path of the Merc. They disappeared underneath the blood-red car, and instantly the vehicle hit the Freeway. George swerved out of the way, dropping speed quickly.

The Merc hit with a crash, bounced, hit again, bounced and hit, bounced and hit. As it went past the Piranha, George saw Billy caroming off the insides of the car.

He watched the vehicle skid, wheelless, for a quarter of a mile down the Freeway before it caught the inner break-wall of the lane-divider, shot high in the air, and came down turning over. It landed on the bubble, which burst, and exploded in a flash of fire and smoke that rocked the Chevy.

At three hundred miles per hour, two inches above the Freeway, riding on air, anything that broke up the air bubble would be a lethal weapon. He had won the duel. That Billy was dead.

George pulled in at the next Getty, and sat in the lot. Jessica came around finally. He was slumped over the wheel, shaking, unable to speak.

She looked over at him, then reached out a hand to touch his shoulder. He jumped at the infinitesimal pressure, felt through the g- and crash-suits. She started to speak, but the peek queeped, and she studded it on.

"Sector Control, sir." The Operator smiled.

He did not look up.

"Congratulations, sir. Despite one possible infraction, your duel has been logged as legal and binding. You'll be pleased to know that the occupant of the car you challenged was rated number one in the entire Central and Eastern Freeway circuit. Now that Mr. Bonney has been finalized, we are entering your name on the dueling records. Underwriters have asked us to inform you that a

check will be in the mails to you within twenty-four hours.
"Again, sir, congratulations."

The peek went dead, and George tried to focus on the parking lot of the neon and silver Getty. It had been a terrible experience. He never wanted to use a car that way again. It had been some other George, certainly not him.

"I'm a family man," he repeated Jessica's words. "And this is just a family car . . . I . . ."

She was smiling gently at him. Then they were in each other's arms, and he was crying, and she was saying that's all right, George, you had to do it, it's all right.

And the peek queeped.

She studded it on and the face of the Operator smiled back at her. "Congratulations, sir, you'll be pleased to know that Sector Control already has fifteen duel challenges for you.

"Mr. Ronnie Lee Hauptman of Dallas has asked for first challenge, and is, at this moment, speeding toward you with an ETA of 6:15 this evening. In the event Mr. Hauptman does not survive, you have waiting challenges from Mr. Fred Bull of Chatsworth, California . . . Mr. Leo Fowler of Philadelphia . . . Mr. Emil Zalenko of . . ."

George did not hear the list. He was trying desperately, with clubbed fingers, to extricate himself from the strangling folds of the g- and crash-suits. But he knew it was no good. He would have to fight.

In the world of the Freeway, there was no place for a walking man.

The author wishes to thank Mr. Ben Bova, formerly of the Avco Everett Research Laboratory (Everett, Massachusetts), for his assistance in preparing the extrapolative technical background of this story.

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FROM AVON BOOKS

<input type="checkbox"/>	All My Sins Remembered	Joe Haldeman	39321	\$1.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	All Flesh Is Grass	Clifford D. Simak	39933	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Behold the Man	Michael Moorcock	39982	\$1.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cities In Flight	James Blish	41616	\$2.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cryptozoic	Brian Aldiss	33415	\$1.25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forgotten Beasts of Eld	Patricia McKillip	42523	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Investigation	Stanislaw Lem	29314	\$1.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Lathe of Heaven	Ursula K. LeGuin	38299	\$1.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lord of Light	Roger Zelazny	33985	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Macroscope	Piers Anthony	45690	\$2.25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Memoirs Found In A Bathtub			
	Stanislaw Lem		29959	\$1.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mindbridge	Joe Haldeman	33605	\$1.95
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mind of My Mind	Octavia E. Butler	40972	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moon Pool	A. Merritt	39370	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Omniverse	Piers Anthony	40527	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Orn	Piers Anthony	40964	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ox	Piers Anthony	41392	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pilgrimage	Zenna Henderson	36681	\$1.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rogue Moon	Algis Budrys	38950	\$1.50
<input type="checkbox"/>	Song for Lya and Other Stories			
	George R. Martin		27581	\$1.25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Starship	Brian W. Aldiss	22588	\$1.25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sword of the Demon	Richard A. Lupoff	37911	\$1.75
<input type="checkbox"/>	334	Thomas M. Disch	42630	\$2.25

Available at better bookstores everywhere, or order direct from the publisher.

AVON BOOKS, Mail Order Dept., 224 W. 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10019

Please send me the books checked above. I enclose \$_____ (please include 50¢ per copy for postage and handling). Please use check or money order—sorry, no cash or C.O.D.'s. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

Mr/Mrs/Miss _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Zip _____

SSF 6-79

**"ALL THE INGREDIENTS
OF A MAINSTREAM EPIC."**

Galileo Magazine

The Masters of Solitude

A grand epic of the lone wanderer,
the ultimate outcast, the savior of dreams,
kings, and the far future by

Marvin Kaye & Parke Godwin

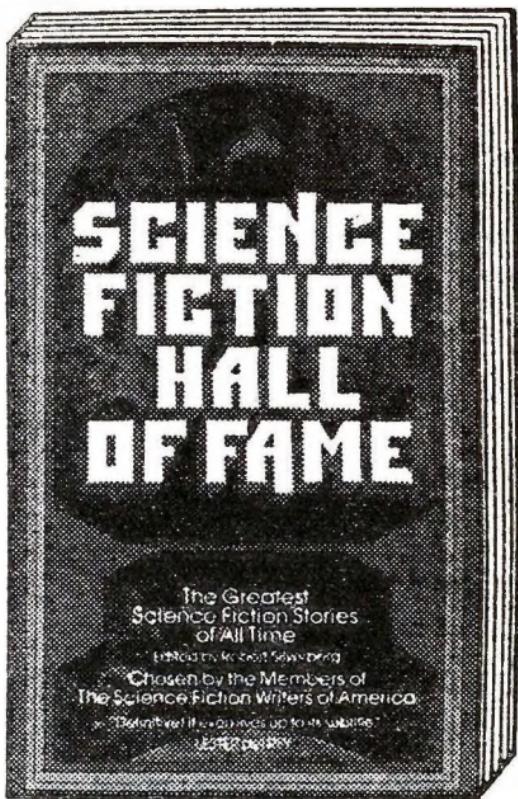
"Borrowing a little from Tolkien and a touch from BRAVE NEW WORLD, the authors have created a first-rate fantasy." *Publishers Weekly*

"Brilliant . . . every page of it holds the reader enthralled. Kaye and Godwin have created a living world." *San Diego Union*



Avon/45112/\$2.50

AVON  NEW LEADER IN SCIENCE FICTION



672 pages 44933 \$2.50

Edited by
Robert Silverberg

The greatest science fiction short stories of all time chosen by the Science Fiction Writers of America.

"DEFINITIVE!"
Lester del Rey

VOLUME I

"A BASIC ONE-VOLUME LIBRARY OF THE SHORT SCIENCE FICTION STORY."

Algis Budrys

HFVI 3-79

MAN AND HIS MACHINE

The car is man's most personalized machine; for teenagers it is a rite of passage and a statement of freedom; for adults it is a reflection of success, taste, and hopes; and for an entire culture it is a great and industrious mode of transportation—driving, perhaps, on the road of destruction.

And the automobile—thrilling, honking, speeding, nerve-shattering—haunts us with the dark possibility that when our age of motoring innocence is over, we may no longer be the masters. . . . **CAR SINISTER**—a splendid, imaginative vision of what lies down the road for all of us.

MACHINE AND HIS MAN

DEVIL CAR Roger Zelazny

VAMPIRE LTD. Josef Nesvadba

A PLAGUE OF CARS Leonard Tushnet

AUTO-DA-FE Roger Zelazny

TRAFFIC PROBLEM William Earls

STATION HR972 Kenneth Bulmer

A DAY ON DEATH HIGHWAY H. Chandler Elliott

THE GREATEST CAR IN THE WORLD Harry Harrison

THE ROADS, THE ROADS, THE BEAUTIFUL ROADS
Avram Davidson

THE EXIT TO SAN BRETA George R. R. Martin

CAR SINISTER Gene Wolfe

INTERURBAN QUEEN R. A. Lafferty

WAVES OF ECOLOGY Leonard Tushnet

THE MARY CELESTE MOVE Frank Herbert

X MARKS THE PEDWALK Fritz Leiber

WHEELS Robert Thurston

SEDAN DEVILLE Barry Malzberg

ROMANCE IN A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY USED-CAR LOT
Robert F. Young

EAST WIND, WEST WIND Frank M. Robinson

ALONG THE SCENIC ROUTE Harlan Ellison